

Tie Dye T-shirts Made Easy

Created by Laura Candler
www.lauracandler.com



Having students create tie-dyed T-shirts is a great way to build class spirit. If you choose a class color or color-scheme, it's also a wonderful way to keep your students together on a field trip or locate them during school activities. No more searching in vain for your students among hundreds of kids at an event—just look for the tie-dyed shirts that belong to you!

There are several ways to do this project, but many of them are messy and time-consuming. Fortunately, I've learned one way that's quite easy while still being fun for kids. In this method, the students will tie their shirts themselves, but they won't actually put the dye on the shirts. Instead, you will dye the entire batch of shirts in a washing machine. Don't worry—you can get the stains out of your washer by filling it with water, adding detergent and a cup of bleach, and running it through a wash cycle. I've done it many times without a problem.

Materials Needed:

- A clean white t-shirt for each student and for yourself
- Several boxes or bottles of dye (usually 4 to 6 boxes or 2 to 3 bottles per class)
- Large strong rubber bands (at least 10 per student)
- Old long-handled wooden or sturdy plastic spoon for stirring dye bath
- 1 cup salt

How to Use Do This Project

Here are the steps I've used to do this project from start to finish. Feel free to modify them. You can find lots of information and directions for tie-dye projects on the Internet. The directions below assume you will be dyeing all the shirts for your class the same color. If you want to use multiple colors on one shirt, you'll need to squirt the dye on each shirt individually and it becomes quite messy. I don't recommend it unless you've done it yourself many times at home!



Before You Begin

1. **Choose Your Color**—Research the colors that are available to you locally. I find that boxes of Rit Dye work fine, but you'll need 4 to 6 boxes or 2 to 3 bottles to get a deep color. When you introduce the project to your class, present the color choices available and let them vote on the one they want. If your entire grade level will be dyeing shirts, you'll need to coordinate the project so that each class ends up with a different color. Putting all desired colors into a random drawing works well if several classes want a popular color.

2. **Request Shirts or Money** - I've found that the easiest way to do the project is to collect money and buy packs of boys' or men's white cotton t-shirts at a discount store. When I've asked students to bring them from home, the shirts are have holes, are dingy gray, too large, baggy, or not appropriate. They don't improve in the dye bath either. Where I live, you can get a pack of 5 shirts for around \$10 which works out to \$2 each, but I charge \$2.50 to cover the cost of the dye. Be sure to check your own local prices before deciding what to charge students. At least a week before we are planning to dye the shirts, I send home a letter like the one on page 5. You can download a customizable Word version from my website, Teaching Resources, at www.lauracandler.com/filecabinet/misc.php. I strongly encourage kids to bring in money rather than shirts. It's very important from the class spirit standpoint that you make sure ALL students end up with a shirt. If you think some students won't be able to bring in the money, you can bump up the price to \$3 each to cover the total cost.

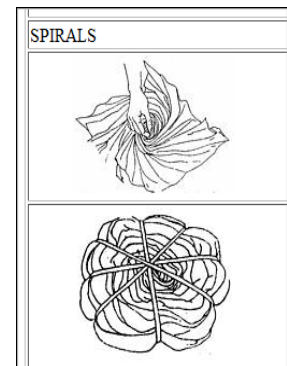


3. **Label Shirts**—I usually buy several packs of different sized shirts right away, and as the kids bring in their money, I label an appropriate-sized shirt with that student's name or initials. Sometimes the last few kids who bring in their money will end up with a size that's not perfect, but that's a life-lesson right there! If you do this project early in the year, you may want to make a few extra shirts for new students.

Quick Tip
Girls may prefer to bring in higher quality shirts that are not as sheer as a man's undershirt. You may want to consider this option yourself.

Preparing the Shirts

1. **Demonstrate Tying and Folding Methods**—Most kids need instruction in how to fold a shirt for tie-dyeing. The main concept to convey is that the shirt will be placed in a hot dye "bath" and anything that is exposed to the water will turn that color. Anything the water can't touch will stay white. It's a simple but critical point in designing a shirt. If they want a white area on the shirt, they have to twist, fold, or tie that spot and secure the area with rubber bands. You'll be amazed at the number of ways you can fold a t-shirt for this project, from knots or spirals to stripes or pleats. The Prochemical website has great illustrations that show you how to tie the shirt for each method: <http://www.prochemical.com/directions/Folding.htm> Use your own shirt to demonstrate a few ways to twist or tie a shirt and secure it with rubber bands. This step is so important, because if you demonstrate a variety of methods every shirt will come out completely unique.
2. **Students Tie or Fold Shirts**—Now pass out the shirts and a pile of large rubber bands for each group. Let them each tie up their own shirt, and ask them to be sure to leave the area visible that shows their name or initials so they can identify their shirt later. Check their rubber bands carefully to make sure they are tight. It takes strong fingers to make sure that the rubber bands are in place. If they fall off in the wash, the shirt will be one solid color. Count the shirts carefully to be sure you have one for each student and one for yourself.



Dying the Shirts

Dye the shirts just before you first need them for a trip or an event. I usually dye them one day, bring them to the students the next day, and have them wear the shirts the day after that. I've found that if I give the shirts back too early, they wear them around home and then they can't find them on the day they need to wear them!



1. Fill up a washer with very hot water. You may even want to boil water and add it to the machine to get it really hot.
2. Add 1 cup of salt to the water and stir well.
3. Carefully tear open the dye packets or bottles of dye and pour the dye into the washer. Make sure the powder doesn't drift and the liquid doesn't splash because it will stain anything it touches.
4. Stir gently with the long-handled spoon to mix the dye.
5. Quickly but gently add the shirts to the hot dye bath and stir them to make sure they are submerged in the dye.
6. Set the washer on a very gentle cycle for about 1 minute and then turn it off to let the shirts soak for 5 to 10 minutes. (Note: Even though the directions on the box say to leave it 30 minutes, don't leave it more than 10 minutes or the white areas will become muddy-looking. The box directions are for solid colors. With tie-dye, you don't want the dye to soak into the entire shirt.)
7. Drain the dye from the washer and run it through several cold rinse cycles. Be aware that colors will appear darker when wet and will dry to a lighter shade later.
8. Remove the shirts from the washer and put them in the dryer for an hour or so. Leave the rubber bands on the shirts. The shirts won't be dry all the way through, so put them in a large plastic bag to bring back to school.

Untying and Revealing Shirts

The day after you dye the shirts, make sure you let the kids untie them to reveal their creations. Even if you don't let them take their shirts home that day, the shirts need to be untied to air out and dry. I like to have the students sit in a circle and have just a few students at a time open their shirts to show the class. Send home a note such as the one on page 6 explaining how to wash them. You don't want the shirts to get tossed into the regular wash where they will ruin light colors. You can download a customizable version of the note from www.lauracandler.com/filecabinet/misc.php. The first time the shirts are worn they don't need to be washed, but they will need ironing to remove the wrinkles. You can also create a class logo using a Word processing program and print it on iron-on paper from a craft store to transfer to the shirts. Parent volunteers can help with this step. But with or without a logo, your students are sure to enjoy their custom-design shirts!



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Dear Parents,

In preparation for special events such as our field trip and field day, each class will be tie-dying T-shirts in a class color. Each student will need one NEW white T-shirt for this activity. We feel that it's important for students to wear color-coded shirts for safety reasons. When we are on a field trip, we can easily locate our students in a crowd by looking for the color of their shirt. The simplest way to do this project is for us to buy packages of T-shirts and let students reimburse us for their shirt. We figure that \$2.50 per student will be enough money to pay for the shirts and boxes of dye needed. If you don't want to send money, please send in a NEW white T-shirt and 50 cents to help pay for the dye. Students must bring their T-shirts or money to school no later than _____ to give me time to shop for the right sizes. If you have volunteered to chaperone on this field trip, feel free to send in a white shirt for yourself. Thank you for your support!

Sincerely,



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Dear Parents,

Please use care when washing your child's tie-dyed shirt. The color will run, so you'll want to either hand wash it or wash it with like colors in cold water. The shirt is clean right now and doesn't need to be washed today, but you may want to iron out the wrinkles caused by the tie-dye process. This shirt should be worn on all field trips and field day, so please have your child keep it in good condition. They should not write on the shirt or wear it excessively until the school year is over. Thank you!



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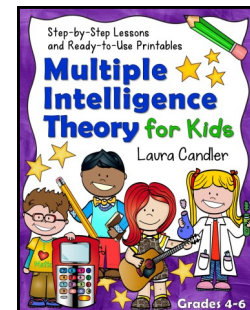
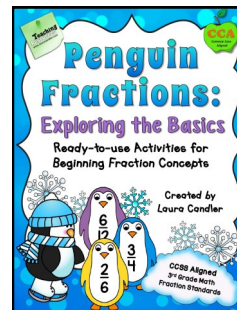
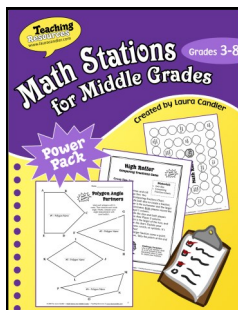
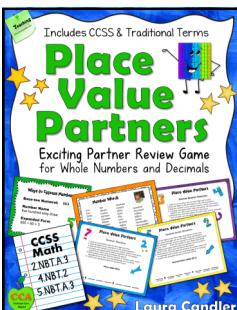
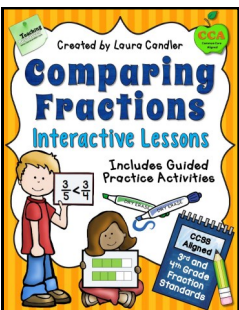
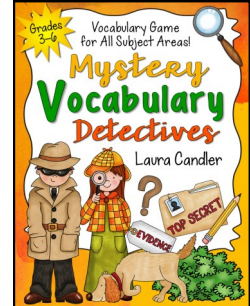
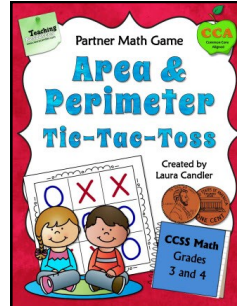
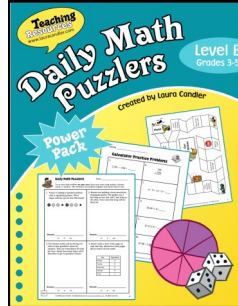
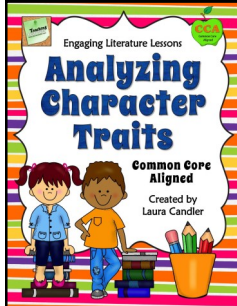
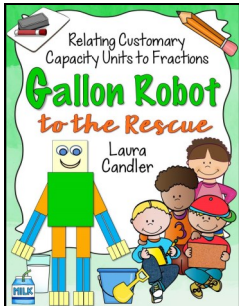
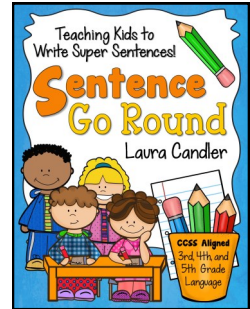
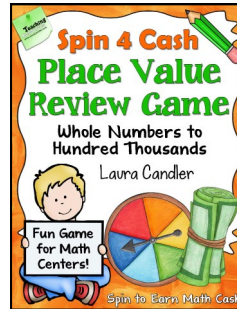
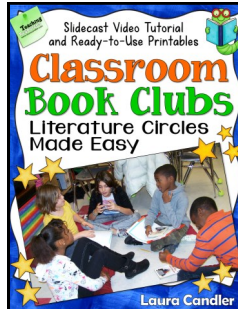
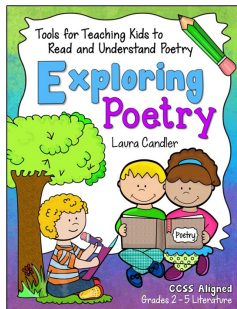
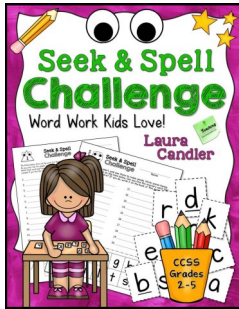


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