

SUNSCREEN PAINTING: STEAM FOR KIDS

APRIL 1, 2020 By [Kim](https://team-cartwright.com/sunscreen-painting-steam/) <https://team-cartwright.com/sunscreen-painting-steam/>

Do your kids get annoyed when you put sunscreen on them? Or just flat out say no? I know mine sometimes get frustrated and just want to get out and play already!

I get it. They don't see how the sunscreen is working for them. But there is an easy and fun way to show them just why sunscreen is so important.

Paint with it. This simple art project will wow your kids and show them just how important proper sun protection can be. And we'll talk a little bit about how sunscreen works.



Painting with Sunscreen

This is a great art project to try if you are low on paint because, well, because you don't need paint for it. Most of us have sunscreen lying around somewhere.

Most importantly, this project made it very easy for my kids to see what sunscreen does for us. That made it very worthwhile.

Materials for Sunscreen Painting

As I said, you don't need much for this project - a few items and the sun.

- Sunscreen
- Paint Brush
- Black Construction Paper (or other dark colored paper)

How To Paint with Sunscreen

Set this up just like a regular painting activity, only instead of paint put sunscreen out. You can squeeze a bit onto a paper plate, into a cup, or on your paint palette.

This activity does need a dark-colored piece of paper to be most effective. If you have black construction paper, use that. But blue, purple, brown, etc all work too.

Once your child has completed their painting take it outside. Place it in the sun, using rocks at the corners to make sure it doesn't blow away. (Even if it isn't windy out, put a rock or something on a corner, it will come into play later.)

Leave your picture in the sun for a bit. This is best in direct sunlight for a couple of hours. We left ours out for 2 hours. However, it works to put it out and leave it until our child remembers it is out there a few hours later.

After you have left your painting out to dry in the sun for a few hours, go and check it.

You will see that the paper that was covered in the sunscreen 'paint' is the same color it used to be, while the rest of the page has faded! You can pick up the rocks you put in the corners to double-check. They physically blocked the sun and kept the color intact.

Now ask your child, if sunscreen can protect the paper that well, do you think it can protect their skin?

STEM IN ACTION

SUNSCREEN PAINTING



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The Science of Sunscreen

So how exactly does this art project work?

Sunshine will fade the paper. This is because the ultraviolet waves from the sun break down the chemical bonds in the dyes that produce the colors we see. This breakdown makes the color look faded.

Sunscreen creates a barrier so those ultraviolet waves can't reach the chemical bonds of the dyes. Yep, it's just that simple. When you put on sunscreen you are creating a barrier between your skin and the UV rays from the sun. This is how you avoid sunburns.

There are 2 main ways sunscreens create a barrier.

Physical Barrier: Some sunscreens create a physical barrier so the UV rays can't get through. This is your zinc oxide or titanium dioxide usually. These inorganic compounds physically reflect the UV rays.

This sort of barrier used to be white. (Think old movies with where lifeguards had what looked like white paint on their noses.) Now technology is better and you can have the same protection with sunscreen that is clear when applied.

Chemical Barrier: There are also organic compounds that stop UV rays from getting to your skin. These compounds absorb the UV rays and release that energy as heat.

Most sunscreens contain a combination of these two barriers. But you can find some that contain just physical barriers.

(You can learn more about how SPF works and what sort of sunscreen is best for kids here: [SPF for Kids](#))

Sunscreen Painting

My kids were really wowed by this activity. It's almost as if you are painting secret messages that will appear later. And yes, they were all a lot more willing to slather on the sunscreen after. Happy painting!