

### Episode: "Box Town"

Albie is frustrated that her box town can't stay in the elevator forever. She visits a mandala artist, Vidya Shyamsundar, who helps her understand that some things, like Albie's box town, last for just a little while. This makes them extra special because we only enjoy them for a short time.

### Activity

#### Materials:

- A bin or basket to gather small items
- Any small items or loose parts like dry pasta, rice, beans, leaves, twigs, rocks, flower petals, buttons...

#### Steps:

1. Watch "Box Town," and pay attention to how Vidya and her daughter Nandita create a mandala. What do they use to make it?
2. Notice that the mandala is in the shape of a circle and forms a symmetrical pattern.
3. Vidya and Nandita use rice flour to create their mandala. Mandalas can also be made from flowers and leaves, lentils and beans, or colored powders. Try making your own mandala from found materials. Gather small items in your home or from nature. Use the mandalas Vidya created, seen in these photos, for inspiration.
4. Sort your items by type and arrange them into circular, symmetrical patterns.
5. Encourage your child to take an imaginary, mental picture before sweeping up the design and starting again. Can you use the same objects to create a new and different mandala?
6. Remind your child throughout that their mandala will not last forever, making the process of creating the artwork the most important part.



Flower Mandala



Fruit Mandala



Lentil Mandala



Craft Paper Mandala

## Tips

- Very young children might simply enjoy collecting, sorting, lining up and arranging the different materials they've collected. That's okay! Encourage them to experiment with making patterns as they rearrange their objects again and again.
- Some children might find it helpful to have a circle to use as a guide for their design. Consider creating the mandala on a round plate or drawing a large circle for them to place objects on, or even using a hula hoop as a guide for a large mandala.
- Demonstrate the concept of symmetry by matching objects with your child. Place one item down first and invite them to find its match to place on the opposite side of your design.

## What's a Mandala?

A **mandala** is a circular, symmetrical pattern that radiates from its center. In India, a mandala is a symbol of harmony, togetherness and good luck. Its shape and patterns represent the universe and our connections to one another.

### Different regions use different types of natural materials to create mandalas:

- **Kōlam** is mandala-making that is practiced in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. It is made on the floor using ground rice flour, rice paste or white-stone powder.
- **Rangoli** drawings are famous in the states of Karnataka, Gujarat and Maharashtra, using colored sand and natural dyes during special occasions such as Diwali, the festival of lights.
- In the state of Kerala, **Pookalam** are mandalas made of fresh flowers, petals and leaves.
- All of these mandalas are **temporary** and are either swept up, blown away by the breeze, nibbled on by insects or washed away in the rain.



Kōlam



Rangoli



Pookalam

# Albie's Elevator

## In this activity, your child:

- Collected, sorted and arranged small objects
- Made patterns and explored symmetry
- Identified and learned about mandalas
- Explored that some things are just for now, or temporary

## Talk to your child! Conversation Starters:

- How does Albie feel when she finally says goodbye to her box town? Think of a time when you experienced something that didn't last. How did you feel when you realized it was temporary? Examples could be eating yummy food, building a snowman, having a party...what else?
- How did it feel to make an artwork that was temporary? Would you make your mandala differently if you were going to glue the materials down?



### Vocabulary

**Pattern:** A repeated order of shapes, colors, things or even sounds

**Symmetrical:** Two sides that are the same

**Collect:** To gather a group of similar things together

**Temporary:** Something that lasts for a period of time instead of forever

**Mandala:** A symmetrical pattern in the form of a circle





## **Keep Going!**

### **Search for Circles**

Mandalas are a great way to introduce shapes, circles and geometry to young children. After making your mandala, count how many circular things you can find in your environment.

### **Look for Mandalas in Nature**

Mandala patterns occur throughout nature—tree rings, snowflakes, flowers, spider webs, fruits and more. Take a nature walk and see if you can find some.

### **Color a Mandala**

Print a mandala pattern to color in. Vidya even created some for this episode that you can download on PBS Learning Media.

### **Make a Box Town**

In this episode, before learning about mandalas, Albie builds a box town. Turn the boxes you have lying around into a town or fort by adding windows and doors with markers or stickers. Remind your child that any fort they make is temporary!



## Related Resources

### More At-Home Activities

Visit PBS LearningMedia for more activities like this inspired by *Albie's Elevator*.

### Children's Books with Related Themes

Check out these children's books online or at your local library to continue exploring the concepts in this episode.

**Round** by Jennifer Ward

Find circles and rounded shapes in nature, including some mandalas.

**Lilu's Rangoli** by Devika Joglekar

Lilu and her brother make rangoli to celebrate Diwali.

**Bear Hug** by Katherine McEwan

A young bear cub gathers items from nature as the seasons change.