



Beast to Blanket

Kool Aid Dyeing

Learning how to dye wool using food-safe acid dyes



by Kiersten Harrod (and Mr. Darcy the Sheep)

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Section: Wool

Activity: Kool Aid Dyeing

Big Picture Goals

-  Dye the yarn the students will use to knit their squares for the final class blanket project.
-  Learn that wool is a protein fiber.
-  Learn that we can use simple chemistry to make things beautiful.



*What happens if you dip a blue skein of yarn and a gray hook into the Red Sea?
They get wet!*

Notes and Thoughts



Materials

-  2-3 packets of Kool Aid per student
-  White vinegar, 1/2 cup per student (approximately)
-  1 quart size canning jar with lid (or equivalent) per student
-  Water
-  1 skein of undyed 100% merino wool yarn per student, about 50-100 yards, wound into a loose skein



"Why do two colors, put one next to the other, sing? Can one really explain this? No."
— Pablo Picasso



"I cannot pretend to feel impartial about colours. I rejoice with the brilliant ones and am genuinely sorry for the poor browns."
— Winston Churchill

Notes and Thoughts



Pre-lesson Prep

- 🐑 Measure and wind up skeins of student yarn
- 🐑 Dye a sample skein to show the students
- 🐑 Check the fit of jar lids and that the jars are crack-free
- 🐑 Collect water if your class is not meeting near a sink



*"Life is a sea of vibrant color. Jump in."
– A.D. Posey*



*"Let me, O let me bathe my soul in
colours; let me swallow the sunset and
drink the rainbow."
– Khalil Gibran*

Notes and Thoughts



Lesson Plan



Wool 101

Introduce wool as an **animal fiber**, sourced from certain breeds of sheep. Briefly discuss other animal and plant sources of fiber. You will cover this more in the next lesson. For now, draw out what the students already know about the different types of natural fibers used in textiles.

Show what **raw wool** looks like if available, and briefly explain dirt, **lanolin**, **vegetable matter**, and the need for processing and cleaning. A brief description of **carding** (separating and straightening wool in preparation for spinning, often by combing) and **spinning** (turning wool into yarn by twisting) is appropriate to help students understand the transition from filthy wool to clean yarn. If you will be doing a Spinning Lesson, you can save detailed explanations for that time if you wish.



Basic Dyeing Science

Introduce the basic chemistry of **acid dyeing**. Wool is made from **proteins**. If those proteins are put into an acidic environment (where there are a lot of hydrogen ions), then they can create a chemical bond with the types of dye particles that are found in Kool Aid mixes. Similar reactions can occur with the proteins in human hair and with the proteins in eggshells. Much of the wool yarn used by knitters today is colored with commercial acid dyeing techniques. The dyes we will use are special in that they are food safe. Most dyes are not!



Activity: Kool Aid Dyeing

Guide the students through the Kool Aid Dyeing Activity

1. Fill jars about halfway with warm water.
2. Untwist the skein of yarn and gently push one skein into a jar, getting as much of the yarn as possible under water.
3. Pour approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of vinegar into each jar to make the liquid an acidic environment.
4. Put more water in the jar if needed to make the liquid come within a couple of inches from the top of the jar.
5. Carefully add Kool Aid mix to the jar.
6. Put the lid on the jar and tighten securely.
7. Watch what happens in the jars!
8. Clean up.



Homework

Once the water is mostly clear, the yarn can be carefully removed from the jar, rinsed in cool water, and hung to dry. Handle the yarn carefully to prevent tangling (and if it is not a superwash yarn, to prevent felting). Allow the yarn to dry completely before twisting it back into a skein or rolling it into a ball. **Make sure to wind these into a ball before the Casting On lesson so they are ready for your students to use.**

The yarn can be left in the jars for several days if desired. To speed the dyeing process, add low heat by putting the jars in a sunny location or by putting them carefully into a hot water bath for a short period of time. Heat will speed up the chemical reaction.

Notes



For the Young Students

You will want to closely supervise adding the Kool Aid powder. It can stain, and I find that even older kids want to put it in their mouths. You may want to use clear plastic containers rather than glass jars and making this an outdoor activity is also a good idea.



For the Older Students

Older students enjoy talking about the variables involved in the dyeing process. What would happen if you mixed the powder in with the vinegar (before adding the yarn)? What occurs when you simply drop the dye in the top of the jar versus shaking the jar after the dye is added? What if you pulled a little of the yarn out of the jar so that not all of it was sitting in the



dye bath? What if you added two very different colors of Kool Aid? What would happen if you added more or less vinegar?

Experiment and be creative!

Even within the limitations of a glass jar and the colors of Kool Aid flavors, there is a lot of room for experimentation and creativity! This lesson can easily be expanded to allow for exploration of some of the questions asked above. You may also wish to give students an opportunity to use tie-dyeing methods to restrict the dye particles' access to the yarn.

Another option is to spread the skein of yarn into a circle before dipping it into a jar, roughly dividing (without cutting) it into 3 sections, and dipping each section into a different jar. Then add different colors of Kool Aid to each jar. This is the method most often used by hand dyers to create yarn that makes stripes when knitted.

Notes and Thoughts



More Resources to Help You Teach and Learn

These resources and more can be found [here](https://kierstenj.com/beasttoblanket/legacy-resources) (<https://kierstenj.com/beasttoblanket/legacy-resources>).

Just scan this QR code to go there now!

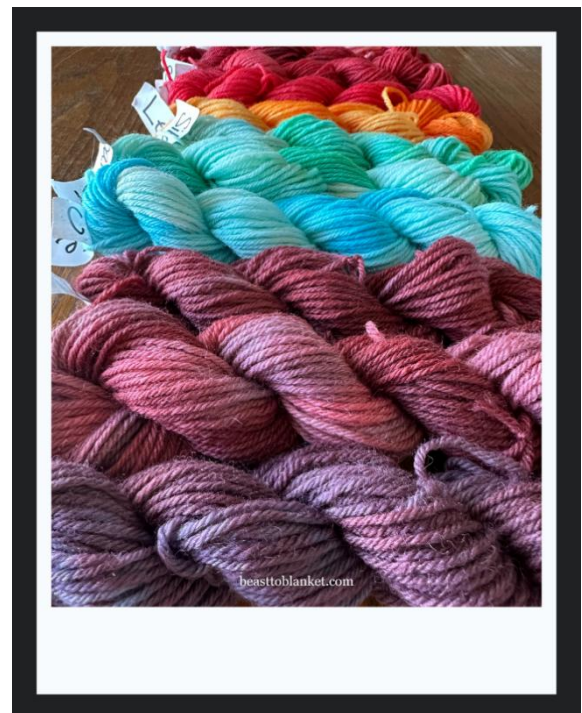
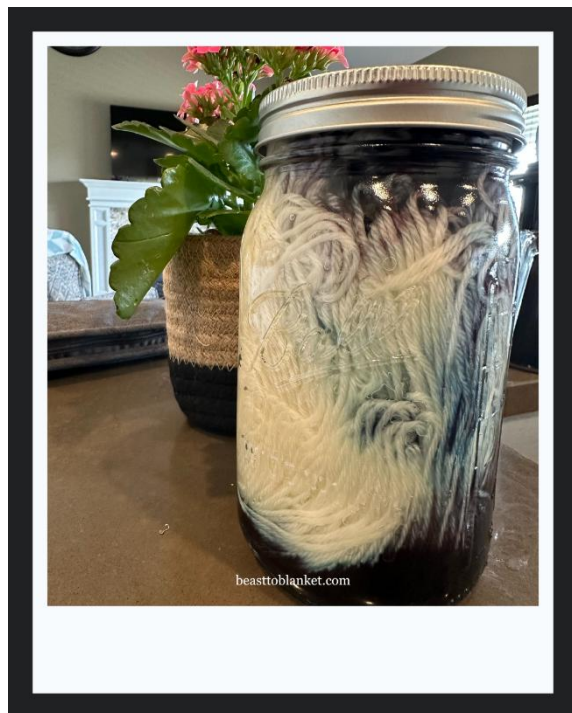
Note: You can access these additional resources by [purchasing the Beast to Blanket Curriculum Guide at www.BeastToBlanket.com](https://www.BeastToBlanket.com).



Photos and videos

You'll find a video of the first five minutes after dropping dye into the jar. You can watch the dye travel through the solution and strike the fiber. It's mesmerizing!

You'll also find photos of different steps of the dyeing process as described in the activity, like these below:





Other resources you may find helpful

Kool Aid is just one of many materials you can use to dye natural fibers, and making use of the protein/acid chemistry is only one method of dyeing. Many dyers use other added chemicals, called mordants, to create environments that facilitate dye particle strikes. Cotton dyeing, in particular, requires specific mordants to make the dye stay bonded to the fibers.

You can experiment with the same wool yarn you used in this lesson with some common (and slightly less common) plants as suggested in [this article](#).

You can also delve more deeply into the world of organic dyeing by finding a professional dyer near you who will share their processes and perhaps give you a tour of their studio. Alternatively, you could make use of a ready-made kit like [this one](#) from Jenny Brown of 316 Dye Studio, intended to share the basics of this different method of dyeing.

If you'd like to continue exploring the kind of dyeing you did with the Kool Aid but would like to expand your color options, Knit Picks carries several options [here](#). They are not food-safe, however, so any tools or containers that come in contact with those dyes should be separated from those used for food preparation.

Finally, this lesson may be an opportunity to start a conversation about color theory. [This article](#) has an excellent overview and would be an outstanding starting point.

Links referenced above:

<https://plantisima.com/how-to-use-plants-for-natural-fabric-dyeing/>

<https://www.316dystudio.com/knit-and-bloom>

<https://www.knitpicks.com/jacquard-acid-yarn-dyes/g/JacquardDyes>

<https://www.geeksforgeeks.org/color-theory/>

I Hope You Enjoyed This Free Beast to Blanket Lesson!

THANK YOU for your interest in this Beast to Blanket Kool Aid Dyeing Lesson. This is one of the ten lessons included in the Beast to Blanket class designed and taught by me, Kiersten J. It's now published and available to everyone.

Please feel free to share this sample from the complete curriculum guide with anyone who might find it helpful in their own educational pursuits.



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Your Fiber Arts friend,

Kiersten J

