Parachute Play

For ages 6 and older.

If something falls or is dropped, it heads toward Earth. But why? Isaac Newton (1642–1727) thought about why objects on Earth drop down when they fall. Gravity is a force that causes objects to fall toward the ground. Newton studied and learned a lot about gravity. In this activity, you will investigate whether your parachute will overcome gravity.

You will need

- 5-by-5-inch plastic sheet (cut from a small plastic bag)
- 4 pieces of thin string, each 6 inches long
- small paper cup (not wax coated)
- masking tape
- pencil or crayon

What to do

1. Write your initials on the bottom of your cup. Place the plastic sheet flat on a table. Tape a piece of string to each corner of the sheet.
2. Tape the string ends to the rim of the cup. Make sure the string pieces are an equal distance apart from each other.
3. You made a parachute! Pick it up by pinching the top center of the plastic. Hold your parachute as high above your head as you can, and drop your parachute in front of you. Watch it. Does it go up or down?
4. Now it is time to experiment. What happens if the parachute is dropped from a greater height? Ask a grown-up to drop the parachute for you. Does it go up or down? Why do you think you got the results you did?

Learning More

Features 20 simple experiments and projects that allow children to explore the concept of gravity.

Includes a song on gravity.

Aviation and Space Education Outreach Program
www.faa.gov/education/curric/prekite.cfm
Describes an activity that demonstrates how a kite flies.

Newton and Gravity

Many years ago, people didn’t understand why things fell downward and why the planets orbited the sun. Newton helped people understand that gravity is the force that holds us on Earth, causes objects to fall toward Earth, holds the moon in its orbit around Earth, and holds the planets in their orbits around the sun. Though it is a weak force (otherwise we would be sucked into Earth), it has played a big role in shaping the universe.