

Teach Someone to Spin

SHARE YOUR LOVE OF HANDSPINNING WITH CHILDREN OF ALL AGES

by Amy Clarke Moore

As a handspinner, you have likely been thrust unexpectedly into the role of a teacher (whether or not you're comfortable with teaching) simply because we're a bit of a rare breed. Teaching is something that many of us take up naturally, and as a lifelong learner, I'm always happy to improve and refine my skills. And teaching what you know (even if you feel that you still have a lot to learn) is a great way to become a better spinner.

With that in mind, I have some tips to make your foray into teaching children how to spin easier.

Prepare your materials ahead of time.

- **Tools:** Most people teach beginners how to spin on handspindles because it is less expensive than a spinning wheel, more portable, and the mechanics are more easily explained. I teach using top whorl CD spindles. With a modest budget, you can prepare CD spindles and give them to aspiring spinners. Some teachers also like to make drop spindles with toy wheels and pre-cut dowels. (Find directions for making spindles at www.interweave.com/article/spinning/how-to-make-a-drop-spindle.) The directions below assume that you will be teaching on a top-whorl spindle, but the principles apply to both top and bottom whorls.
- **Fiber:** Provide a small amount of easy-to-spin, clean, and carded wool. Even though combed fine wools are so tempting because of their softness, they can be more challenging for beginners. Provide examples of different kinds of fibers for beginners to feel, but teach using a medium wool such as a Bluefaced Leicester (BFL), Corriedale, Romney, or Jacob.

Know your learners.

Everyone learns differently, so if you approach teaching spinning with as many learning styles as you can manage, you'll have more success.

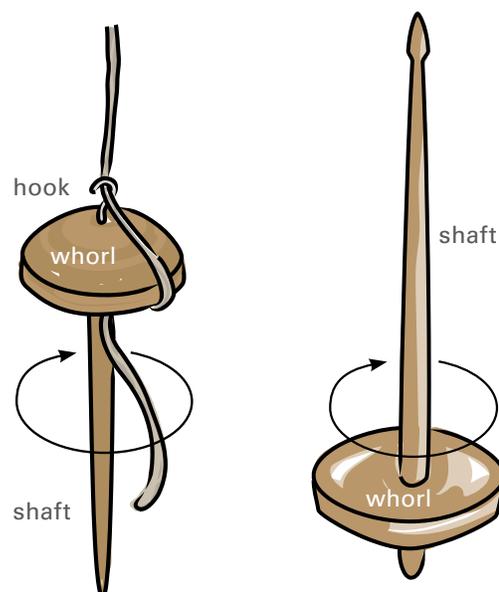
- Linguistic learners need to hear you describe the process or read about it (such as in a poster, book, or handout).
- Visual learners need to see the process and steps.
- Kinesthetic learners need to try it with their own hands before they fully understand the process.

Most people learn with a variety of styles, and some people are strongly one type of learner. With children, you may need to gently remind them to look carefully at your hands while you demonstrate, as they may be mesmerized by the turning spindle (who isn't!).

Keep it simple and informative.

1. Break down the process of spinning into easy steps.

- Identify what you're doing. Many people have never heard of making yarn by hand before.
- Name the parts of the spindle: shaft, hook, and whorl. Mention the difference between a top whorl and a bottom whorl spindle. Talk about how the whorl adds weight so that the spindle will spin faster and that it spins best when it is well-balanced (like a top or fidget spinner).



TWISTING



- Mention that the spinning motion adds twist to the yarn and the twist is what turns (ha!) loose fibers into yarn.
- Explain the importance of spinning to the right for singles yarn so that later you don't have to figure out what direction you spun when you are ready to ply your yarns. If you're teaching with CD spindles, you can draw an arrow pointing to the right on the CD with a marker.
- Tell them about the wool: where it comes from, that the sheep are sheared, and then the wool is cleaned, combed (carded), and sometimes dyed in preparation for spinning.

2. While you're talking, demonstrate how to spin:

- Grab the fiber with the spindle's hook and start to add twist to the fibers as you slowly draw individual fibers from the fiber supply.
- Spin a length of yarn, take it off the hook, and wrap it around the shaft. Make sure to point out that this is just how you start.
- Slow down and show the drafting triangle. Also demonstrate how to keep the twist out of the fiber supply so that you can draft more easily.
- Mention the staple length of the fiber and distance of your hands. Explain that if your hands are too close together, then you are pulling on both tip and the butt of the staple length, and the fiber isn't going to draft easily.
- Demonstrate how to spin the spindle, either twirling the shaft with your fingertips to the right near the top or by rolling the shaft of the spindle from your knee to your hip on your right side (or from your hip to your knee on your left side), to make the spindle spin quickly to the right.

- Once you've spun a length of yarn, show them how it is stored on the shaft of the spindle, by unhooking it and winding the length onto the shaft underneath the whorl.

3. Hand the spindle over to the student:

- Show them how to keep the fiber supply out of the way of the twisting yarn (wrapped around their wrist or tucked up a sleeve).
- I usually manage the spinning of the spindle at first so that the learner can work on drafting. If you're seated, the spinner can hold the spindle between their knees to keep it still while they manage the drafting, breaking up the steps between drafting and adding twist into manageable chunks.
- If you have more time and the attention of the student, you can go into the process of plying, skeining, washing, and winding up the yarn for use in knitting, weaving, crocheting projects—but that's a topic for another day.



Wind a cop below the whorl.

In classroom settings where there is an emphasis on linguistic learning and fewer opportunities for children who are kinesthetic learners, learning how to spin (or do other handwork) can provide an outlet for untapped potential and help them develop confidence in their abilities. You know how spinning has enriched your life, and when you pass this gift onto another, you're making the world a happier, healthier place!

Amy Clarke Moore is a former editor of *Spin Off* magazine who is now a Montessori Art Guide in the middle school at St. Vrain Community Montessori, a public charter school in Longmont, Colorado. In addition to sharing her love of spinning, knitting, weaving, felting, beading, sewing, and other arts with her adolescent students, she has created a Fiberarts timeline for their research and writing development that brings the scope and sequence of the history of textiles to their fingertips.



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