Which shape will hold?

Ages 6–8 · 25 minutes · Predict and describe

Before you begin

Use two equal, stable books as supports on one table, a ruler, two identical A4 sheets and five equal counters. Set the inside edges 10 cm apart. For small hands, offer large counters and adult folding support.

0–5 min

Give the bridge a job

Bram and Nell need a way across. Point to the deck and the two supports on the diagram. Ask what could happen to the paper when you add a counter.

5–12 min

Make two shapes

Leave one sheet flat. Fold a long edge upwards by about 2 cm on each side of the other, like a shallow tray. Lay each in turn with its long edges running across the gap.

12–20 min

Predict, then try

Use the pupil sheet to choose a shape before you test. For each shape, add equal counters one at a time near the centre. Stop at five, or when the deck touches the table or a counter falls. Count only counters held before the stop.

20–25 min

Compare what happened

Point to the shape that held more. If they tied, say so. Ask what looked different in the middle. Accept a point, gesture, spoken word or a mark on the pupil sheet.

Side view



My bridge prediction

Point, circle, draw or ask someone to write your words.

1. Which of these two shapes will hold more counters?

Flat sheet

Folded sides



2. What makes you think that?

3. How many counters did each hold?

Flat sheet	0	1	2	3	4	5
Folded sides	0	1	2	3	4	5

4. I noticed…