Levitation tricks for kids: the ones that float

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The ten floating tricks in Peabody's Magic Shop, all Apprentice level and five minutes to learn, what really holds each one up, and which only work from the front.

There are ten levitation tricks in the Peabody Magic Shop, and every one of them is an Apprentice trick that takes five minutes to learn. A pencil sticks to an open hand, a cup hangs between two palms, a card climbs out of the deck, a paperclip rests on water. What holds each one up is a hidden finger, a hidden piece, a balance point or a bit of kitchen science, and none of them needs days of practice.

I expected floating to be the hard kind of magic. It is the kind people picture when they think of a stage magician, after all. Then I counted. The Magic Shop has eighty tricks done with things already in the house, and the ten whose kind is levitation sit at the easiest level, every one. The floating page lists them, and so does the table below.

The ten

- Trick: The Floating Pencil · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 5 to 9 · Learn it in: 5 minutes · What holds it up: A hidden finger · Only from the front?: Yes
- Trick: The Ghost Pencil · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 5 to 10 · Learn it in: 5 minutes · What holds it up: A hidden piece · Only from the front?: Yes
- Trick: The Salt Shaker Balance · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 5 to 10 · Learn it in: 5 minutes · What holds it up: A balance point · Only from the front?: No
- Trick: The Spooky Floating Cup · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 5 to 10 · Learn it in: 5 minutes · What holds it up: A hidden thumb · Only from the front?: Yes
- Trick: The Balloon Static Wand · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 5 to 10 · Learn it in: 5 minutes · What holds it up: Static · Only from the front?: Yes
- Trick: The Rising Card · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 6 to 11 · Learn it in: 5 minutes · What holds it up: A hidden finger · Only from the front?: Yes
- Trick: The Levitating Card · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 6 to 11 · Learn it in: 5 minutes · What holds it up: A hidden finger · Only from the front?: Yes
- Trick: The Upside-Down Water Card · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 6 to 11 · Learn it in: 5 minutes · What holds it up: Air pushing up · Only from the front?: No
- Trick: The Obedient Egg · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 6 to 11 · Learn it in: 5 minutes · What holds it up: Salty water · Only from the front?: No
- Trick: The Floating Paperclip · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 6 to 11 · Learn it in: 5 minutes · What holds it up: The skin on water · Only from the front?: No

The ages come from the grades each trick is written for: the youngest grade plus five, to the oldest grade plus six. Four come from the Everyday Shelf, four from the Potion Lab and two

from the Card Cabinet.

The hand tricks: a finger nobody sees

Four of the ten are the same idea in different clothes. Something is held against a hand by a finger the audience cannot see.

The Floating Pencil is the one to start with. You hold a pencil upright in your fist, open your fingers one at a time, and it stays stuck there. Your other hand is steadying your wrist, and the page shows what its pointer finger is doing. The out is my favourite in the shop: if somebody spots the finger, wiggle all five on the other hand and announce that you had a helper.

The Rising Card and the Levitating Card do the same thing with cards. In the first, the chosen card climbs up out of the middle of the deck. In the second, a single card stays flat on your palm as you tip your hand, then hangs in the air. Both pages say to practise in a mirror, because there is one angle where the finger disappears, and once you have found it you never think about it again.

The Spooky Floating Cup is the biggest of the four. A cup hangs between your two hands, turns, and settles back. It needs a thumb-sized hole in the back of the cup, and cutting that hole is a grown-up's step.

The Ghost Pencil is the odd one out. No finger is involved: a short piece is hidden at the wrist, and the page asks for an unsharpened pencil or a craft stick for it. It is the shop's choice for Halloween, with the lights low.

The front-only rule

Six of the ten carry the shop's "only from the front" note: the two pencils, the cup, both card tricks and the balloon. That matters more for floating than for any other kind of trick, because the secret is usually behind the hand. Stand with everybody in front of you, never round a table, and never turn sideways. A child who learns that rule for one of these has learned it for all of them.

The kitchen ones: science that looks like floating

The other four are real science, and they are the ones that survive an audience walking round the back.

The Upside-Down Water Card has no secret move at all. Fill a glass to the brim, lay a card over it, turn it upside down and let go: the air pushing up on the card holds it in place. Do it over a tray.

The Obedient Egg sinks to the bottom of a glass until you stir in a secret ingredient, and then it rises and hangs. Salt makes the water heavy enough to hold it up. The page suggests talking to the egg rather than the audience, and it is right.

The Floating Paperclip rests on the skin of the water, and one soapy finger sinks it. It is the one trick of the ten with the choking note for brothers and sisters under four, because paperclips are small.

The Balloon Static Wand makes paper strips stand up and follow a balloon round the table. A grown-up blows the balloon up and ties it, and picks up any popped bits straight away.

The Salt Shaker Balance sits between the two groups: a salt shaker left leaning on its edge, held by a few grains of salt too small to see. Leave it standing there for the rest of dinner, as the page says. People keep coming back to look at it.

Where to start

For a five-year-old, the Floating Pencil: one pencil, five minutes, and a joke ready if it goes wrong. For a six-year-old who likes cards, the Rising Card. For a room full of people who will not stay in front of you, the Upside-Down Water Card, because there is nothing to see from any side.

If you would rather not choose, Pick me a trick will. Flick, the rabbit who runs the shop, asks four questions with three boxes each and hands over one trick that fits your age, what is on the table and how long you have.

Questions grown-ups ask

Are any of these hard?

No. All ten are Apprentice tricks, which in the shop is a promise checked in code: an Apprentice trick works the first try and takes ten minutes or less to learn. These ten all take five. The skill is in the performing, mostly in standing the right way.

Which ones need a grown-up?

Two have a grown-up step: cutting the hole in the cup for the Spooky Floating Cup, and blowing up the balloon for the Balloon Static Wand. The Floating Paperclip carries the choking note for little ones under four. Nothing else in the ten needs anything from you but an audience.

Should my child explain how it works afterwards?

For the four science ones, yes, once the gasp has happened: the explanation is a second surprise, and each page has it in a child's words. For the hand tricks, no. The Magician's Code asks a child to keep the secret, and a floating pencil only floats while nobody knows about the finger.

Peabody (peabody.kids) is free through the end of 2026, and the Magic Shop needs no sign-up. What a child learns stays on their own device; the only thing sent is an anonymous

count when a trick is marked as shown to somebody. When the magic is put away, the library has stories to read aloud.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/levitation-tricks-for-kids