

Can you stop a sound?

Ages 4–7 with a grown-up · 5–10 minutes · Listen and compare

<https://kiddos.ai/explorations/learning-with-gina-and-ollie/can-you-stop-a-sound>

Wonder together

What will a touch do? Ollie is ready to tap the bowl. Will touching it change the ring?

Materials

An empty smooth-edged metal mixing bowl and a wooden spoon.

Adult setup – read before trying

Set the bowl on a stable hard surface away from ears. An adult supervises one gentle tap at a time, never repeated banging. Stop if the sound is uncomfortable. Listening from farther away or watching an adult is welcome.

Try together

1. With an adult, place an empty metal mixing bowl on a stable hard surface away from ears.
2. Gently tap the outside with a wooden spoon and listen until the ring fades.
3. Tap the same spot just as gently, then touch the outside soon after the tap. Compare.

Keep the comparison clear

Keep fixed: Bowl, support, tap spot and gentle tap strength.

What changes: Whether a hand touches the outside soon after the tap.

Look for: Listen to which ring lasts longer, without needing a stopwatch.

Explain with care

The bowl vibrates, moving quickly back and forth. Touching it damps that motion so its ringing fades faster.

Touch does not slow sound travelling through air. If a bowl barely rings, choose another and repeat both trials.

Talk about it

What will a touch do? Ollie is ready to tap the bowl. Will touching it change the ring?

Answer cue: Welcome a guess before reading the result. No correct prediction is required.

Which ring faded sooner?

Answer cue: In the story, the touched bowl quieted sooner.

Did touching change the bowl's vibration or stop sound already far away?

Answer cue: It reduced the bowl's vibration and the sound it continued to make.

A parent move: Leave a quiet pause after each tap so everyone can notice the fading sound.

Start simply: The adult taps and touches while the child chooses when to compare.

Explore further: Repeat both trials on a second suitable metal bowl and describe any difference.

Return to it: Remember the tiny wobble when an everyday object makes a gentle sound.

In the classroom

Flexible 20-minute small-group session; pause or shorten as needed.

3 min • Wonder

Read pages 1–2. Invite a prediction with words, pointing or a sketch; keep the result hidden.

4 min • Notice the story

Read pages 3–5. Which ring faded sooner? Separate the observation from the explanation.

9 min • Try together

Use the materials and adult setup on this guide, then follow the activity steps in this guide. Listen to which ring lasts longer, without needing a stopwatch.

4 min • Make meaning

Did touching change the bowl's vibration or stop sound already far away? Invite a drawing, a description or an adult-written note. Leave a quiet pause after each tap so everyone can notice the fading sound.

Understanding check

Did touching change the bowl's vibration or stop sound already far away?

Answer guidance: It reduced the bowl's vibration and the sound it continued to make.

Participation choices: The adult taps and touches while the child chooses when to compare. Accept pointing, words, a drawing or adult-directed action. Use the story alone if the activity is unsuitable.

Words to explore

vibrate — Move quickly back and forth.

Full adult notes and honest limits

Use an empty, smooth-edged metal mixing bowl and a wooden spoon on a stable hard surface within comfortable reach. An adult supervises and can do both taps. Keep the bowl away from ears; use one gentle tap, never repeated banging. First tap the outside lightly and listen without touching. Wait for the ring to fade. Repeat the same gentle tap on the same spot, then gently rest a hand against the outside of the bowl soon after the tap. Keep the bowl and surface the same. Ask which ring lasted longer and what changed. If the bowl barely rings, choose another metal bowl and repeat BOTH trials with it; support, material, contact and tap strength affect the result. Stop if anyone finds the sound uncomfortable. A child may point, predict, listen from farther away or direct an adult. This is a qualitative listening comparison, not an exact timed measurement or guaranteed result. Touch damps the bowl's vibration (reduces its motion); it does not slow sound travelling through the air or necessarily lower its pitch. Sound comes from vibration; not every moving object makes an audible sound. Arrows and ring marks in these static illustrations are explanatory conventions, not visible sound waves, and the motion is exaggerated. In a small group, welcome different predictions and let children describe the change in their own words. Related reading: Gina and the Quiet Sounds explores listening to everyday sounds, not this exact bowl experiment. This is an editorially reviewed activity, not evidence of a performed home trial or measured family learning.

Related reading

Gina and the Quiet Sounds invites listening to everyday sounds. The bowl test is an additional activity.

Scientific sources

science-world-sound — <https://www.scienceworld.ca/resource/sound/>

supercharged-school-seeing-sound-waves — <https://www.superchargedschool.com/seeing-sound-waves/>

asnt-tuning-fork — <https://foundation.asnt.org/resources/education/ndt-classroom-experiments/tuning-fork>

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