

Art, a Capital Idea

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES: Harry G. Taylor

Printmaking

Objective: Students will demonstrate an understanding of "collagraphic" (rubbing) relief printing and the development of personal symbolism by creating a cardboard template relief print of an original design that carries some personal meaning.

Materials:

The template can be made of cardboard, oak tag, poster board or matte board. Younger students can use card stock and cut with scissors while older students can use poster board and exacto knives. White glue or glue sticks work well for gluing the template pieces to the backing. For printing paper, many materials work well including brown paper bags and brown wrapping paper. A thinner paper like news print will pick up the rubbing well but is not very sturdy and is easily damaged.

Experiment with a variety of papers until one is found that satisfies the aesthetic need. Fabric seems like an interesting alternative especially if "fabric crayons" are used. For the rubbing, try experimenting with crayon, chalk, conte' crayon or oil pastel. For direct printing, tempera paint, watercolor or thinned-out acrylics and of course water based relief printing ink are all excellent.

Process:

After looking at Henry Taylor's relief print *Dancing Bear*, guide children in a discussion of the strengths (*high contrast, strong definition, multiple prints*) and limitations (*no gradation of color or value, primarily only two colors or values available unless using multiple templates, hard edge borders of shapes*) of relief printing. Some discussion of "primitive" looking art work should be addressed. What does primitive mean. If a work of art is simplified and stylized is it less important than something that is photo realistic? How does an artist put meaning into a work of art?

Students should be given a chance to thumbnail sketch several variations of designs and pictographs that could be used as a personal symbol. To get students thinking, ask, "What symbols could represent your family, your school, your community, your religion, your country, your favorite sport, your hobby, or yourself?" Help students understand that symbols may or may not have pictorial references. Sometimes the raw element, (*line, shape, color, texture*) can have great symbolic impact.

One way to get students thinking beyond the first obvious solution is to categorize personal symbols into a variety of genre and have students try to develop a symbol in each area and then choose the best.

If you only have one idea to choose from, it not only is your best idea ,it is also you worst idea!

Here are some categories to use:

MONOGRAM, a design made out of your initials or the letters of your name.

PICTOGRAPH, a design based on a simple stylized rendering of something that especially represents you. GEOMETRIC SHAPES, a design based on simple geometric shapes that in some abstract way conveys meaning about you.

CLICHE, a design based on a traditional over-used symbol like a heart, yin and yang, or smiley face. This last one is dangerous because it is difficult to use a cliché to say something that is novel and personal and imbued with significance.

After choosing one design pattern as a personal symbol, each student will make a cardboard template to be used as a relief printed motif.

To make the template, have students cut the poster board to the desired size of the finished print. A five inch square is good. Students should then draw the design of their personal symbol lightly on the face of the poster board square. Depending on the age of the students, scissors and card stock or exacto knife and poster board can be used to cut out shapes to approximate the design. Remember that a shape as fine as a pencil line is very difficult to cut out of cardboard, so the design must fit into the limitations of the medium and the process. The cut pieces should be assembled and glued onto the template face.

When the template is dry, it should be lightly taped face down on a piece of newsprint, turned face up and the paper rubbed with the flat side of a black crayon until the image appears. This will be the proof. The proof helps determine if it is the print one wants to make or not or what to do to improve it. An excessive amount of masking tape will print up and become part of the print, so tape lightly and sparingly. While the paper is still taped to the template, color can be added to the design if desired with crayon or colored pencil. After the print is removed, tempera paint or watercolor can be used to darken and highlight the design. If crayon is used excessively, it will resist water-based paint.

It will take more than one printing before the subtlety of the process is mastered. If students find their first proof unfulfilling, don't hesitate to have them make a new design that meets the technical limitations of the process. Not all ideas can be successfully expressed in this medium. Nothing will teach the students about the process like doing it. Warn the students to keep their designs simple. Remember that this is called print making and it is the printing skill that brings the design idea to light.

After some proficiency is developed in template making and printing (*try a variety of papers*) each student can create his or her own personal pattern project by repeating the personal symbol design in novel and personal ways over and over on one large piece of paper. A class process should be developed to use several or all of the template designs to create a class group project. The group project can be made on one large roll of paper or on smaller more manageable sheets that are glued together. Issues of variations and repetition, rhythm and balance, and composition should be addressed.

Evaluation and Exhibition:

For exhibition and evaluation, titles, haikus and short statements about the personal symbols can be written by students and displayed as exhibition didactics. Have young students fill in this sentence: "This is my personal symbol because..."

Related Projects:

Try other forms of relief printing, linocuts, wood block prints, glue prints, tape prints, cardboard prints, found object prints, clay template prints, stencil printing, silk screen, dry point etching (metal plate, poster board, styrofoam). Tombstone texture rubbing.

Vocabulary:

collagraph, template, relief print, symbol and symbolism, monogram, pictograph.

Here are some examples of second grade collagraphic print personal symbols:

"The Rat" by Kalani, age 8

"This is my personal symbol because I love Rats."

"Dizzy" by Justin, age 7

"This is my personal symbol because when I get mad I get dizzy."

Glue Prints

Objective:

Students will demonstrate an understanding of relief printing by designing and creating an original collagraphic glue print.

Materials:

White glue, card stock or matte board, crayons, paper to print on (newsprint, drawing paper, vellum etc.).

Process:

The actual technical skill necessary to produce a "glue print" is very minimal even for the very young. This lesson is a great window to learn how to develop an interesting visual idea. Before an artist can create a work of art he or she must first have the idea<the vision. Frequently we think that the difficult part of art is the technical skill necessary to render accurately. This is probably not true at all. The difficult part of any art project is developing the idea that is worth the effort. If the artist starts with a worthy idea it may be sufficient motivation to develop the skill necessary to do justice to it. As we start this print making project, let us look at **one** approach to generating the idea<the vision.

Here are six steps that can be used to generate a complete art project (or any problem solving adventure):

- 1. Think:** research. If searching means "looking for something," then re-search means to look again. A thought is not necessarily an idea. It may take many thoughts to find the best idea. Avoid the obvious and look again.
- 2. Idea:** it is not an idea until you can see (visualize) it in your mind.
- 3. Plan:** make a thumbnail sketch and walk through the process in your mind.
- 4. Production:** just do it!
- 5. Evaluation:** use a consistent model to find value in the work and learn the process.
- 6. Exhibition:** art is a social phenomena; it's not art if you do in a closet. The last step in any successful art project is exhibition.

To help students engage in the thinking, problem solving process, have them first fold a piece of drawing paper or newsprint into four equal windows. Call the four spaces "thinking spaces." There are many subjects that can be addressed, but to help students focus their thinking, limit the process to a specific issue. In this lesson we will use the idea of MONOGRAMS to focus our thinking.

Have students label each of the four thinking spaces with initials only, whole name, one letter and pattern. There are many other ways to make monograms but we are more concerned with discussion making than complete depth in a subject. A simple, working definition for monogram is, "a design using the letters of your name."

A design can be defined as lines, shapes, values, textures, and colors that don't make a picture of something else. In the *initials* space have students create a quick thumbnail sketch of a design which uses only the initials of their name. In the next space, *whole name*, have students sketch a design using all of the letters of their first or last name or both. In the third square, *one letter*, have students make a design which uses only the first letter of their first or last name. In the fourth space, have students design a *pattern* which uses the letters of their name or their initials to create a repetitive motif. Pattern can be defined for the young as an idea which repeats itself over and over with some changes if you want them (variation and repetition).

After students have developed their ideas, they should chose the best of the four. Next, have students very, very, very lightly (learning to draw lightly with a pencil is both difficult and important for young students) draw their chosen monogram on a piece of oak tag, cardboard, or matte board. If students draw too aggressively, the pencil mark will become part of the print. Now, have them carefully trace the pencil line with a white glue bottle which has a small opening, using the glue bottle as a drawing device. Remember that while the glue bottle is most effective as a line drawer, it can also be used to make dots and slashes and textured areas of the design. Do not try to fill in spaces with solid glue, it tends to run and make an unusable mess. Set the template aside to dry. It must dry completely.

When the template is finished, it is time to print. Remember that the technical trick in print making is the printing. Care should be taken to use the best printing skills the student can generate. The printing process is to simply tape the dry glue template to a piece of paper and then rub the side of a crayon on the paper to reveal the textures on the glue template underneath. Some hints for printing with crayon are:

1. Use the side of the crayon.
2. Keep the crayon strokes going the same direction to avoid the look of scribbling.
3. Start light to find the edges and then use more pressure to make darker impressions.
4. Don't forget to use both light and dark values to create a sense of dynamics.
5. After the basic design has been printed, it is a good idea to go back over the work with colored pencil or crayon to highlight some areas with color and leave some empty. The tip of the crayon can be used at this time, but leave the template taped to the paper to avoid losing the basic design.

Here are some student examples of Monograms:

Initial Monogram by Easton age 7

Whole name, by Easton age 7

One letter monogram by Kara age 7

Pattern monogram by Danielle, age 7

By having students use their name and initials as the impetus for an original design, we are allowing for ownership by the student and a work of art which is about the student's favorite subject < himself!

Evaluation and Exhibition:

Leo Tolstoy defined art roughly as lines and shapes and colors and textures and values organized in a novel and personal way within a predetermined format. This is of course a loose abbreviation of what Tolstoy actually wrote. He was a Russian novelist and his actual definition is about 15 pages long. Some of our school colleagues may not see these monograms as art because they are not pictures of something. When you hang this exhibition, please point out that in a very real way these are actually abstracted self-portraits. These are pictures of what is in the student's mind < an important thing to know.

If these prints are printed on small sheets of paper, you may want to exhibit them in frameless "clip glass" frames. These are available very inexpensively from virtually all school art supply catalogs. They are frequently on sale at craft stores and import warehouses for under \$3 each for an 11"X 14" frame. It take about two minutes to mount the work in a clip frame.

Be sure to title and label all of the work with the artist's name. It is always interesting to see what the students want to say about their work. Mount a brief write up by the student along with the prints.

Related Projects:

Monoprints, Photo copy machine prints, silk screen.

Vocabulary:

Relief printing, printmaking, monogram, collagraph, design, pattern.

Here is an example of a finished glue print:

"Still life and window" by Jason age 7

Aboriginal Art

Objective: Students will learn about aboriginal art and make a crayon resist drawing of an animal totem.

Harry Taylor's art was influenced by his exposure to the art of cultures in the South Pacific. One of these cultures is the aborigines of Australia. Aborigine means the people who first lived in an area. In Australia, the Aborigines have been making art for at least 50,000 years. Some Aborigine artists of today make artworks that are very similar to the ancient artworks discovered on rocks and some make artworks that use traditional symbols and design patterns in modern ways.

Dancing Bear features a bear, with patterns within the bear and an intricate series of dots that create lines around the bears. Although Australian Aborigine Art features animals from Australia, not bears, the feeling of this work is very reminiscent of Aboriginal work that features an animal.

Many cultures use some kind of "totem" or animal symbol that has meaning for individuals and families. The animal may be believed to protect the person or to share

some of its qualities with that person, or give some kind of power to the one who has the totem.

Show the class the slide of *Dancing Bear* as well as some other animal artworks from aboriginal cultures such as Australian, Inuit, African, etc.

Ask the students to compare how those peoples feel about animals and how the students feel about animals. Ask students what difference it might make to them if they depended on animals they hunted for food, or if they had to learn to live with the animals, avoiding those that are dangerous and using those that are helpful. See how many examples your students can come up with of how we could be helped by animals.

Some possible examples are, using dog sleds for transportation, making clothing from animal skins, eating animals, birds, and fish, trading skins or fish for other supplies.

(Today, many children may have the "Walt Disney Syndrome" and believe this kind of life is exciting, but ultimately safe. You may want to read from one of the variety of children's books that gives a more realistic view of a subsistence life style.)

Have students choose an animal for their personal totem. Have students make several quick sketches of a simple animal shape. After choosing one sketch, students should make a light pencil drawing on good-quality paper. Then have students draw the animal in with crayon. Next, students should choose a pattern made up of dots, lines, or a combination of the two, and that matches their animal design. Students should use crayons to add patterns to the animal drawing. The patterns should be either mostly on the animal or mostly on the background. Too much pattern won't provide enough contrast to make the overall design interesting. (You may want to go back to the examples and have students identify how the artists have created contrast by using solid colors in some areas and pattern in others.)

Students should understand that the patterns create the look of texture<implied texture. Discuss as needed.

When the pattern has been drawn in with crayon, students can put color washes over the drawing with water color. The crayon will resist the watercolor, leaving the crayon lines visible.

Variation: Show the class examples of stone carving by Native American tribes. Have students make very small animal shapes out of clay. When the shapes have stiffened somewhat, students can press or carve patterns in the clay to create actual texture or can burnish<polish<the surface of the clay to create a very smooth texture like Navajo pots have.

Fire the animals and have students rub them with paste shoe polish and then car wax.

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