

The Art of Woodblock Printing in India

NOTE: A stamp, inkpad, marker, and large sheet of paper are needed for this lesson.

TEACHER: *Look closely at the photo. What do you see in the picture?*

STUDENTS: *A design, hand, chisel, etc.*

This is a photo of a man making something with a chisel. He is using the chisel to carve a beautiful design. What material do you think he is carving?

Wood

The object he is holding is made from a small woodblock. How is it different than the wooden blocks you use for building in the classroom?

It has a decoration on the front. It is a different shape.

This wooden block is not used for building. It has a decoration on the front, because it is used for something special. Do you know what it is used for?

Printing/stamping, decorating, etc.

It is used for something called "woodblock printing." For over a thousand years, people have been using blocks like this to stamp pictures, patterns, and words onto cloth and paper. The first people to use these blocks came from China, but long ago, people in India and Egypt starting making their own blocks with their own decorations. The woodblocks from India are famous for their beautiful and intricate designs. What pictures and designs do you see on this woodblock?

Leaves, feathers, hearts, etc.

Each one of these designs was carefully carved into the block of wood using a sharp cutting tool, like the small chisel in the photo. The artist starts by painting the top of the block white, and then drawing his design on the painted surface. Next, he uses a chisel to make deep cuts into the wood where he drew his lines. The art of cutting woodblocks is known as "xylography" (wood writing). Do you think the top of the woodblock is rough or smooth?

Smooth

The top of the block needs to be smooth for making an even print. However, wherever you see brown, the wood has been cut away, leaving a deep groove in the surface. Only the white part of the design will show up when you use the block for printing. How do you think people use woodblocks to make prints on cloth or paper?

They dip them in ink, and press them down onto the cloth or paper (like a rubber stamp).

There are three ways that woodblocks are used for printing on cloth and paper. The white part of the block is dipped into ink. Then the design is transferred to the paper or cloth by stamping,

rubbing or using a press. In India, people usually stamp the designs. They place the cloth or paper on a hard surface, put the woodblock on top, and press down firmly. If someone wants more than one color on the design, the artist will stamp different blocks and inks over the same image. India is famous for its beautifully hand stamped cloths. It takes a lot of practice to stamp a whole cloth without making a mistake!

Once it was invented, woodblock printing quickly spread all over the world. Why do you think it was so popular to make prints this way?

You do not have to draw the same design over and over again. It is faster and more exact.

It is much easier and faster to make a copy of a design using a woodblock or stamp. Let's find out why.

(Have a child come up to the board to assist you.)

Draw three smiley faces across the board. Make sure they all look exactly the same.

(Have the class watch as the student tries to make them all line up and look the same.)

Great job! Was it easy to make them all exactly the same? Why not?

It was hard. I had to keep looking at the first one to make the others look alike. (Have the child sit back down.)

It is hard to make something exactly the same size and shape when drawing by hand. Now watch as I use a stamp to make the same design over and over again.

(Stamp the paper several times.)

Do you think it was easier for me to make them all look the same? Why?

Yes, because you just had to push down the stamp each time. You did not have to draw each one by hand.

It was a lot easier and faster for me, because I just had to press the stamp into the ink, and then press it onto the paper. The stamp did all the hard work!

Now you understand why people long ago invented stamping. In fact, before woodblock prints were invented, people would have to hand write and draw every page in the books they wrote and illustrated. Every time someone wanted another copy of the book, they had to rewrite all of the words and redraw all of the pictures. Can you imagine how long that would take? Some people would spend their whole lives copying the pages of one book! Today, we use computers, printers and scanners to copy our words and pictures into books. They are even faster than stamps! Humans are always coming up with new and faster ways to do things that use to take a very long time. New technology is great, but woodblock prints are still a fun, cheap and easy way to make beautiful designs the old fashioned way.

Kindergarten Standards:

NYS Common Core Kindergarten Social Studies Standards

- K.2.b Cultures include traditions, beliefs, and shared values and ideas generally accepted by a particular group of people.
- K.2.c Children, families, and communities from different cultures all share some common characteristics, but also have specific differences which make them unique.
- K.9.a Children, families, and communities of today can be compared with those in the past.

Kindergarten ELA Power NYSCCLS (ICSD Power Standards in Bold)

Reading Standards for Informational Text: Kindergarten

- **Integration and Knowledge of Ideas**
 - 7. With prompting and support, describe the relationship between illustrations and the text in which they appear (e.g., what person, place, thing, or idea in the text an illustration depicts).**

Speaking and Listening Standards: Kindergarten

- **Comprehension and Collaboration**
 - 1. Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about *kindergarten topics and texts* with peers and adults in small and larger groups.**
 - a. Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., listening to others and taking turns speaking about the topics and texts under discussion).**
 - b. Continue a conversation through multiple exchanges.**
 - c. Seek to understand and communicate with individuals from different cultural backgrounds.**
 - 2. Confirm understanding of a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media by asking and answering questions about key details and requesting clarification if something is not understood.**
 - 3. Ask and answer questions in order to seek help, get information, or clarify something that is not understood.**
- **Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas**
 - 6. Speak audibly and express thoughts, feelings, and ideas clearly.**

Language Standards: Kindergarten

- **Vocabulary Acquisition and Use**
 - 6. Use words and phrases acquired through conversations, reading and being read to, and responding to texts.**

Next Generation Science Standards

K-2-ETS1 Engineering Design

- ET S1.A: Defining and Delimiting Engineering Problems
 1. A situation that people want to change or create can be approached as a problem to be solved through engineering. (K-2-ETS1-1)
 2. Asking questions, making observations, and gathering information are helpful in thinking about problems. (K-2-ETS1-1)
 3. Before beginning to design a solution, it is important to clearly understand the problem. (K-2-ETS1-1)