

# Printing with Nature

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**Grade:** 5th

**Medium:** Printer's ink on paper

**Learning Objective:** Students use printmaking tools and objects from nature to create an interesting composition.

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## Elements of Art/ Principles of Design

**Balance/Symmetry:** the arrangement of elements that makes individual parts of a composition appear equally important; an arrangement of the elements to create an equal distribution of visual weight throughout the format or composition.

**Contrast:** the difference between elements of art (geometric lines vs. organic shapes in this case) such that each element is stronger in relation to the other.

**Line:** the flat path of a dot through space used by artists to control the viewer's eye movement; a long narrow mark or stroke made on or in a surface; a thin mark made by a pencil, pen, or brush.

**Movement:** using the element to move the viewer's eye around and within the image.

**Pattern:** the repetition of an element throughout the work of art.

**Rhythm:** created by repetition of elements in a non-uniform but an organized way. Unlike pattern, which demands consistency, rhythm relies on variety.

**Texture:** the surface quality that can be seen and/or felt. Texture can also be implied, i.e. it looks bumpy but feels smooth.

**Unity:** a successful combination of the elements of visual arts to create a sense of wholeness and visual completion in an artwork.

## Vocabulary Words

**Asymmetrical Balance (informal balance):** the type of balance that results when two sides of an artwork are equally important, but one side looks different from the other.

**Brayer:** a handled roller for applying ink to a surface.

**Composition:** the way the elements (shapes, lines, colors) are arranged, using principles of design, on the paper to create unity/variety.

**Master, print:** prints are copies of a master image. The intensive work on one master means many prints can be made quickly.

**Relief Printing:** ink is applied to a surface which is then pressed on paper. The recessed areas which aren't inked (space between and around the leaf, in this case) don't print.

### **Materials & Supplies**

- 12"x12" White (or another color) Paper (class set or more)
- ½ Class Set or More of Brayers, 4"-6" Wide
- Single Color of Water-based Printer's Ink (in large tubes)
- ½ Class Set of Plexiglas sheets 4"x6" or larger
- Paper Towels
- Class Set Pencils
- Large Selection of Leaves, or halved apples (maple leaves, fern fronds, items need to be flat with good detail, prominent veins)

### **Context (History and/or Artists)**

Botanical drawings, natural science, printing press type. Hokusai carved woodblocks to create areas of relief.

### **Advanced Preparation**

Set out Plexiglas, brayers, pencils and paper towels at desks (OK for 2 students to share). Stack white paper either in the center of a group table or on another table to keep it clean. Keep leaves or other natural objects in a clean place.

### **Tips & Tricks**

- Don't allow students to administer the ink. Keep the squirts (slugs) to about 2" in length so as to avoid blobs that result from too much ink.
- If using halved apples or other veggies or fruits, be sure they are cut as flat as possible. Students will use the brayer to apply ink directly to the flat surface of these items, a different process than with the leaves.
- Printer's ink dries slowly so is perfect for any printmaking project. The downside is that the dried print will smear if it gets wet. Even liquid glue applied to the back may be absorbed and cause the ink to smear.
- Prints will never be perfect but they are affected by amount of ink and even pressure, so remind students to ascertain a mistake based on the outcome of the print. Did they use too much/not enough ink? Did they spread ink evenly on the Plexiglas? Did they apply pressure evenly to all parts of the leaf when inking and/or printing?
- If sharing a Plexiglas, one student can smooth out the ink layer after the other has inked the leaf and is printing with it.

### **Discussion Points**

Students will talk about what a print is: a copy of an original master, either a document or picture. Before electronic reproduction, artists used a variety of methods. Today you will be using raised relief printing, and a natural object will be the master. Ask them to think about fingerprints, footprints, handprints, and stamps etc. Remind them there is a raised section that the ink is applied to. The space around the raised sections where the color is applied remains clean so it doesn't transfer color to the printed surface.

### **Reflection Point (Assessment of Learning Objectives)**

Students will use the brayers to apply ink to a leaf and print it clearly, arranging the printed shapes in a visually interesting composition that contains unity and variety. Students will use good craftsmanship: avoiding sloppy application of ink, smeared prints, empty space.

### **Instructions for Lesson**

Ask students to try rolling the brayers across the clean plexiglass sheets and then onto the table top. Then demonstrate the following:

1. Squirt out a 'slug' (approx. 2" long) of blue (or red) ink on the Plexiglas. Spread it almost to the edges. The intention is to cover the Plexiglas with a flat even layer. Roll the brayer back/forth, side to side. Flip the brayer upside down to and set aside so that the roller doesn't touch anything. This keeps the table clean and preserves the ink.
2. On the Plexiglas, lay a leaf down flat, bumpy side down, and carefully place a paper towel over it. Without moving the leaf, press down so the leaf absorbs the ink, moving fingers from the inside of the leaf out to its edges. Discard the paper towel.
3. Grasping it by the stem, lift the leaf and place on the white paper. This is when you talk about composition: the identical shapes will be placed one at a time and will create a pattern: you can go for symmetry, radial placement (like a wreath), randomly equidistant, or asymmetrical. If the leaves are different they create a rhythm. Once the leaf is on the paper, lay another clean paper towel over it (to keep fingers clean) and carefully press, moving from the center of the leaf outward to its edges. Lift the leaf off. Discard the towel.
4. Use the brayer to re-roll the ink evenly on the Plexiglas. Repeat with a new leaf. Use the brayer to roll a thick geometric line to separate the organic shapes, either as a border, or as a contrast.
5. Let students begin. They may work until they feel satisfied with their composition.
6. When students are finished they can deposit the brayers and Plexiglas in a sink or water bucket. The ink will come off easily with water.



### **References and Attributions**

The J. Paul Getty Museum Elements of Art reference page

[https://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/building\\_lessons/elements\\_art.pdf](https://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/building_lessons/elements_art.pdf)

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## Notes for Educators

### 21<sup>st</sup> Century Thinking Skills

Observing, making connections, visualizing (when placing), sequencing (steps to make the print), comparing/contrasting (how their efforts affect each print), finding evidence, problem solving, cause and effect.

### WA State Learning Standards

(VA:Cr1.2.4) a. Collaboratively set goals and create artwork that is meaningful and has purpose to the makers. When students create their composition and choose the objects to print it creates meaning.

(VA:Cr2.1.4) a. Explore and invent art-making techniques and approaches.

(VA:Cr2.2.4) a. When making works of art, utilize and care for materials, tools, and equipment in a manner that prevents danger to oneself and others.

(VA:Cr3.1.4) a. Revise artwork in progress on the basis of insights gained through peer discussion. This happens if you talk about what is happening/why during the printing process.

(VA:Pr4.1.4) a. Analyze how past, present, and emerging technologies have impacted the preservation and presentation of artwork. This happens if you discuss past and present ways to make a print.

(VA:Re9.1.4) a. Apply one set of criteria to evaluate more than one work of art. This happens if you are looking for unity/variety in each student's work.

### Arts Integration Opportunities

Any natural science topic can be enriched. Eg. Johnny Appleseed, vascular systems of leaves. Using a second color of ink (primary, metallic, black or white) can introduce tints, shades, secondary colors. Gyotaku is the Japanese art of fish printing. If studying fish, you could try this.