

Simple Printing with Everyday Materials

LEAFLET
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fig 1 - Printed materials - collage

Introduction

Prints and the process of making prints are an accepted and natural part of our everyday lives. We take for granted the books, magazines, daily newspapers, posters, theatre tickets and programmes, the fabrics and materials that are used in the fashion and furnishing industries, (fig. 1), all printed but requiring costly and complex machinery. We often ignore simpler prints; the footprints we leave for example, when we walk across wet earth or along a snow covered footpath, (fig. 2). Many young children are often fascinated by the 'prints' they can leave on walls as they go to the bathroom to wash their hands before a meal.

Printmaking, in all its forms, from the simple to the more complex, is a fascinating activity. The printmaker need not be bound by a multitude of rules and regulations. With some thought, care and imagination, coupled with a desire to experiment, the individual can create a variety of images, ranging from the most intricate and 'fragile' line, to the boldest statement imaginable.

The use of sophisticated and expensive equipment is not necessary and certainly will not guarantee success.



fig 2 - Footprints

Indeed, only the simplest of materials are required in the initial stages. Later when the individual is involved in personal experimental work, perhaps using as many as six or seven colours, and a combination of processes, simple tools and everyday objects may be all that he requires.

This booklet examines a number of printmaking processes, which require little in the way of equipment, and the outlined projects can be undertaken in almost any room. It must be remembered that the ideas which are suggested are not intended to be self-contained lessons, rather an introduction and a beginning to further work. Perhaps the most important 'attribute' for the individual involved in printmaking is ingenuity - for only by 'keeping an open mind' and fully exploring the possibilities of an idea can something original and exciting be created.



Fig 3 - A collection of materials and printmaking equipment

Equipment and Materials

The majority of equipment and materials required for 'relief printing' may already be available in the school, and will almost certainly be found in the specialist art room, (fig. 3). The following items should however form a basic stock;

1. A good selection of **scrap materials and natural objects** - i.e. string, wool, scraps of wood, card, bottle tops, gear wheels, cogs and clockwork toys, shells, leaves, etc. Indeed, the greater variety of interesting and everyday objects the better. A use can always be found for them. It is a good idea to sort them into 'types', keeping them in labelled boxes, (old shoeboxes would do!).
2. **Paper.** Almost any kind of absorbent paper will do - sugar paper, cartridge paper or kitchen paper, which is relatively inexpensive but sufficiently strong to stand up to a lot of hard work. It is desirable to have a range of coloured paper available but remember to keep a good supply of white. Later, as you progress, you may wish to purchase a small selection of papers specially manufactured for the printmaker, but these are usually expensive.
3. **Printing inks.** (Do not confuse printing inks with the type of ink used in fountain pens or waterproof drawing inks). There is quite a wide range of BLOCK PRINTING inks available, but the three main types you may wish to consider are as follows:

OIL BASED INK:

Available in tubes or tins this type of ink gives a good 'strong' image and is ideal for overprinting. It is soluble in Turpentine or White Spirit and NOT water - so everything must be washed in 'turps'.

WATER BASED INK:

Usually available in tubes, this ink has the advantage that everything can be washed in water, thus solving lots of problems when working with relatively large groups of younger children.

EMULSION BASED INK:

Again everything can be washed in water. Prints dry with a similar waterproof finish to oil based ink.

The different types of ink should **NOT** be intermixed, although individual Colours of a particular ink may be mixed together to make other colours; e.g. yellow plus blue = green.

Remember to buy good quality inks. Experience will tell you which is the best ink for the type of work you wish to undertake. It is often false economy to buy cheap inks as they may not 'cover' or give the quality of image that you expect. A basic colour range should be Red-Yellow-Blue-Black and White - other colours can be added later.

4. Printmaking rollers - Available in a variety of sizes and can be either rubber covered or made entirely from gelatine. For general classroom use, rubber covered rollers are quite satisfactory. Depending upon the size of the group six to eight rollers should be sufficient.

5. Additional Equipment/Materials - Palette knives for mixing inks, (old kitchen knives can be used). A smooth non-porous surface for "rolling out" printing ink. A glass or plastic slab is ideal for this purpose but you may simply prefer to reserve a Formica topped table for the process. A plentiful supply of old newspapers and rags for cleaning. Adhesive, preferably not soluble in water, (e.g. Copydex). Large crayons. Plastercine. A sharp craft knife. Scissors. Card.

6. Drying Facilities - A number of specialist print drying racks can be purchased, but they are generally expensive and are not really essential during the initial stages of printmaking. However, some provision for drying large numbers of prints must be made and there are one or two inexpensive alternatives you might try.

a) Plastic 'spring type' clothes pegs threaded onto strong cord strung above head height in the classroom. Prints can be clipped into the clothes pegs to dry at the end of each practical session, (fig. 4)

b) Building a wooden frame, over which wire or strong cord can be stretched, can make a slightly more substantial drying rack. 'Spring type' clothes pegs can be threaded onto the wires. The completed frame can be secured to the wall - on the edge of a display board, for example - by hinges. It can then be raised and lowered by a cord running through a hook or pulley in the ceiling.

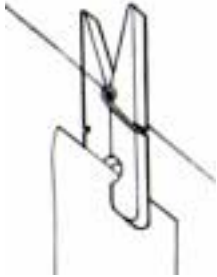


Fig 4: drying prints using clothes peg

Organisation of the Print Making Area

Some consideration must be given to the organisation of printmaking as an activity in the classroom, whether a general purpose room or busy 'one room' art department. Processes such as the production of a printing block from scrap materials, and inking up of the block should, as far as possible be done away from the inking area.

As soon as prints have been 'taken' they should be hung up to dry.

The organisation of the area should be both practical and straightforward. Routines should be carefully explained to pupils. During the early lessons, it is often a good idea to label each clearly defined activity area. Printing equipment, inks, paper, cleaning materials and waste paper baskets should be readily available.

If, due to the limitations of space, the activity is to be under-taken on one table only, then:

- a) The production of the block should be completed first and any scrap remaining carefully collected and either stored or disposed of.
- b) Rollers, inks, knife, inking block and printing paper should be collected and arranged in an orderly fashion on the table. Inking at one side - printing at the other.
- c) As soon as a print has been 'taken' it should be hung up to dry.

As a general guideline - keep everything clean and well ordered. (Fig. 2).

Simple Beginnings - Texture



When a fingerprint is made, it is something quite unique and individual. It is of course immediately recognisable and it is produced simply by pressing the pads of the finger into ink, and then pressing onto paper. But why the pattern - why not just a blotchy mess? Because of the skin **TEXTURE**. (fig 6)

Everything we can touch has a **SURFACE** and a **TEXTURE**, which is usually unique to that material. If we could print everything as easily as a fingerprint, an amazing range of patterns could be produced.

Relief printing depends on surface texture. One of the easiest methods by which textures can be examined, is to make a series of **RUBBINGS**.

Materials: Kitchen paper. Large wax crayons in a variety of colours.

Method: Simply lay a sheet of kitchen paper over a surface. E.g. tree bark, a manhole cover, keyholes, car tyres, stone walls etc, and carefully 'rub' the paper with a wax crayon, (fig. 7), so that the pattern of the textured surface begins to show. By using several different coloured crayons, a greater range of rubbings can be taken, (fig. 8). These sheets of rubbings can later be used to produce a COLLAGE.

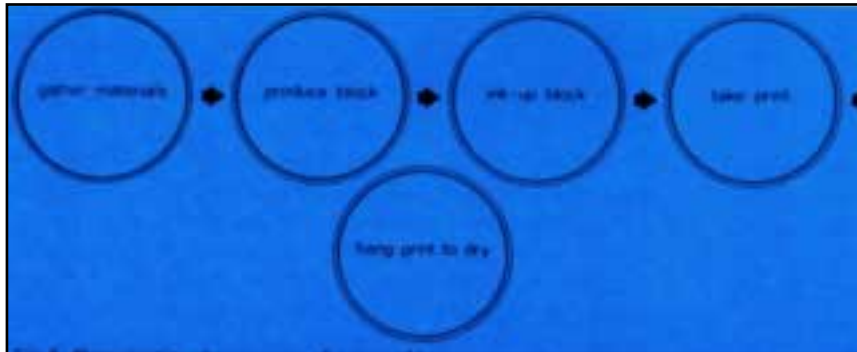


Fig 5 - Organisational sequence of printmaking

Collage

Collage is a picture, design or pattern made entirely, or in part, from paper or other materials arranged and stuck down on some form of base or ground i.e. a sheet of paper, card or board, (fig. 9).

Materials: Sheets of collected rubbings. Scissors, adhesive, brush, and background paper i.e. sugar paper, cartridge paper or card.

Method: Examine several sheets of rubbings, selecting and cutting out unusual and interesting patterns. Do not begin by drawing a picture - let the rubbings suggest ideas. Arrange the cut out pieces on the background paper. Before sticking down, re-arrange them several times so that a number of alternative COMPOSITIONS can be examined. When satisfied, carefully glue down each piece in turn - working from the large background areas to the smaller foreground details.



Fig 7 - Rubbing techniques

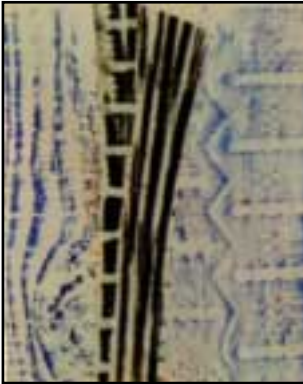


Fig 8 Examples of rubbings



Fig 9 Collage from collected rubbings



Fig 10 Experimental work using scrap materials

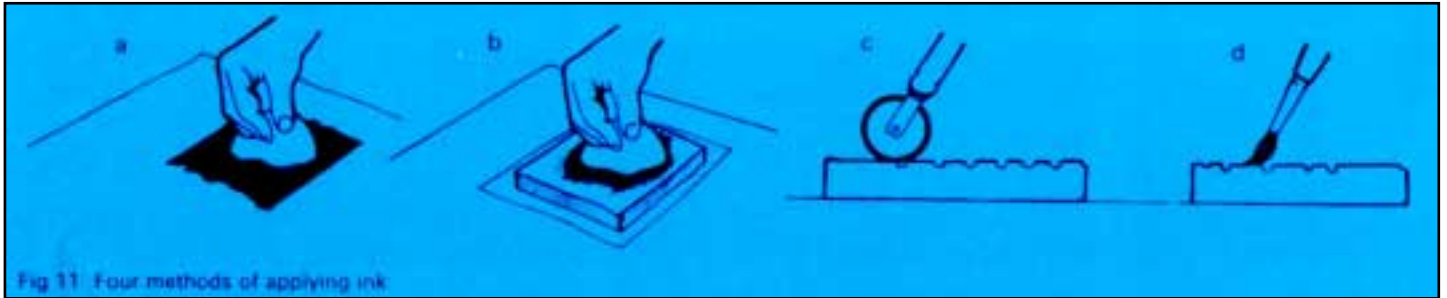
FIRST PRINTS - Scrap Materials and Natural Forms.

After exploring some of the possibilities of taking rubbings and producing a number of collages, which may have included other materials, the investigation of pattern and texture can be continued by printing with everyday scrap materials and natural forms. (Fig.10).

Materials: Paper, printing ink or paint, (although printing inks can be used, they are not really necessary at this stage), rollers, brushes or ink pad*, newspaper, collection of scrap materials and natural objects.

Method: Do not begin with the intention of making a picture or a carefully considered pattern. Take each object in turn and carefully apply either ink or paint* - not too thickly. When the colour has been applied, CAREFULLY press the object onto the paper. Remove and the print will be seen. Take several prints from each object - varying the pressure each time and the amount of colour that is used, so as to explore fully the range of prints that can be achieved. After the initial experiments, begin to COMPOSE the prints, thinking carefully before placing the next object onto the paper. Using this simple method, a picture or design can be quickly produced.

Notes: 'Potato printing' is a well known method, but the technique can be extended to include a wide variety of vegetables, including carrots, swedes, turnips, onions and cabbages, all of which have a natural texture and pattern.



*Application of Ink/Paint to Objects for Printing

(Fig.'s 11a, 11b, 11c, 11d).

There are several methods by which ink can be applied to the object being used for printing:

a. Roll out an area of ink on the 'slab' or on a Formica table - then simply press the object into the ink.

b. Use an inkpad, i.e. an area of felt, sponge or similar material. Apply diluted ink or paint to the pad and press objects onto the pad so as to pick up sufficient ink for printing.

c. Apply ink to the object with a roller.

d. Apply paint with a brush.

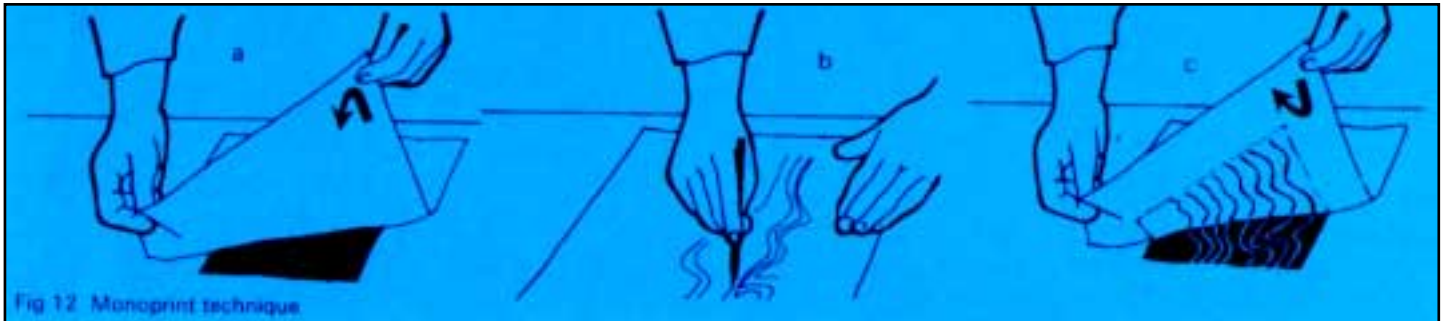




Fig 13 A simple monoprint

MONOPRINTS

Another method of taking a print, although strictly speaking not part of the relief printing method, is that of the Monoprint. (Fig.'s 12a, 12b, 12c).

Materials: Ink, rollers, paper, pencil or pointed instrument such as a knitting needle.

Method 1: Roll out an area of ink onto a smooth surface. Make sure that the ink is rolled out evenly and not too thick. Carefully lay a sheet of paper over the inked areas. **DO NOT** press down. Using a pencil draw onto the paper. When the drawing has been completed carefully remove the paper from the surface to reveal the print. Notice that only where pressure had been applied to the back of the paper has the ink been picked up. (Fig. 13).

Method 2: Roll out an area of ink on a smooth surface. Using a variety of instruments draw directly into the ink. Lay a sheet of paper over the inked area and carefully smooth the back of the paper by hand. Remove the paper to reveal an image with a different quality.

Notes: Combine these methods with printing from scrap materials. Collage may also be introduced.

Printing with 'Sensitive' Materials

The printing methods explored so far, have largely been confined to materials and objects that have not really been 'influenced' in any way, i.e. the shape and texture of the object has not been changed. Further prints can be created using 'sensitive' or soft materials such as clay. Balsa, Polystyrene or 'Plastercine', which for the purpose of this booklet will be dealt with in two parts: 1 Clay and 'Plastercine' 2. Balsa and polystyrene. The natural texture of these materials can be changed by pressing or carving into them with penknives, keys, pencils, ballpoint pens etc. The reason for dealing with these materials separately is:

1. When using clay or 'Plastercine' the objects are generally applied to the paper, and the objects are usually only parts of the overall print.
2. When using 'Balsa' or polystyrene, the paper is placed over the inked 'block', (which could be a complete work). Pressure is then applied to the 'back' of the paper so as to pick up the ink from the block.

1. CLAY AND 'PLASTERCINE" (Fig. 14)

Materials: Ink, rollers, inking slab, paper, knife, scrap materials, i.e. keys, bottle tops, lolly sticks etc, small quantity of clay or 'Plastercine'.

Method: a) (For initial exploratory prints) Roll some clay or 'Plastercine' into a ball which can then be slightly flattened by pressing onto a tabletop. Using a selection of scrap objects, press them into the surface of the material, so as to create a pattern or textured surface. Apply an even coating of ink, (see page 8). Carefully place onto the sheet of printing paper - press gently - then remove to reveal print.

b) Roll out an area of clay/'Plastercine' - not too thinly. Using a knife, trim the material so as to produce an interesting shape. Using scrap materials as in (a) above, create a texture or pattern. Apply an even coating of ink with a roller. Lift and carefully place onto the printing paper. Press gently - then remove to reveal the print.

Notes: It is possible to combine a number of processes in one print i.e. Monoprint - printing with scrap - even some use of collage. As always, explore every conceivable possibility.

OVERPRINTING

At this stage, it is worth considering the technique of OVERPRINTING, i.e. printing one colour over the top of another. It is a simple and straightforward process, but it is advisable to begin by printing with the lightest colour of the range to be used - possibly a yellow or very light blue or pink - gradually working, in



Fig14a Print produced from scrap material and Plastercine

stages, to the darkest colour which should be applied last of all.

Allow the first colour to dry slightly. With carefully mixed, good quality ink, subtle changes of colour can be achieved in the overprinted area, i.e. an original yellow area, overprinted with blue will result in green. When this method is employed - a considerable range of colours can be achieved in one print.

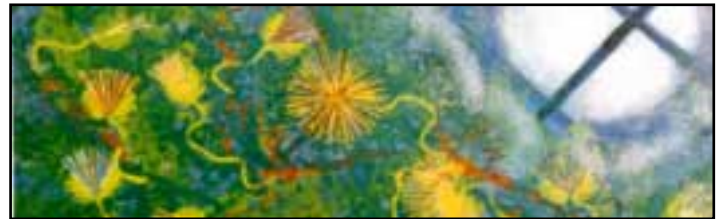


Fig 14b plastercine print: fine lines produced with strips of card

2. 'BALSA' AND 'POLYSTYRENE'

Sensitive materials which require a slightly different approach.
(Fig. 15)

Materials: Sheet Balsa wood or finely grained expanded polystyrene, knife or pointed instrument such as a knitting needle or old ball point pen, paper, ink, rollers, card, adhesive, lino cutting tool.

Method 1: (Using polystyrene). With pointed instrument, draw into the polystyrene leaving an indentation. When the design is complete, apply an even layer of ink with a roller. (It is advisable to 'ink up' the block on a pile of newspaper. When the inking is complete, remove the sheet of newspaper from under the block so that it is continually on a clean surface).

Carefully place a sheet of paper over the inked block and smooth with the edge or palm of the hand. This may produce sufficient pressure to 'take' a print, but it is advisable to roll the paper with a clean printing roller just to make sure. Remove paper carefully from the block to reveal image.

Notes: The shape of the polystyrene sheet can be changed by cutting with an electrically operated 'hot wire'. Care must be taken NOT to breathe any fumes that may result. Under no circumstances should polystyrene be cut with a knife or saw and it should never be rubbed with sandpaper or a file.

Method 2: (Using Balsa). Two methods can be employed when using Balsa wood, the first is exactly the same as for polystyrene, the second is slightly different.

Produce a design drawing and simplify into basic shapes.

Transfer these shapes onto sheet Balsa and cut out using a sharp knife. Arrange the Balsa shapes on a sheet of stiff card and stick down. If desired a textured surface can be created by using a needle, ballpoint pen or lino cutter. Roll up with ink. Place paper over the block and roll with a clean roller. Carefully remove paper to reveal image.



Fig 15 Polystyrene print

Printing Blocks 1

At this stage having printed with individual materials and objects, we can now group together and stick onto a sheet of card a variety of textured surfaces so as to produce a printing block. (Fig. 16).

Materials: Sheets of strong card or hardboard cut to a convenient size and shape. Scrap materials i.e. textured wallpaper, string, sandpaper, polystyrene, matchboxes, balsa, paper clips, etc. Strong adhesive, glue brushes, knife, scissors, printing ink, rollers, paper.

Method: Using a sheet of card or board as the base, arrange scrap materials so as to form an interesting composition. Contrast not only different shapes, but also the textures of the various items which are being used. Glue them onto the surface of the card. It is important that the surface of the block should be relatively uniform, i.e. if a matchbox is being used then it must be flattened. Printing from a block where materials are high relief would be virtually impossible. When the block is complete and the adhesive is fully dry, roll up with ink. Position a sheet of printing paper over the block and take a print in the usual way. The surface of the block can be changed by either adding or subtracting materials. Several separate blocks could be used to complete a print.

Notes: Continue exploring the properties of materials used. For example, certain impact adhesives if spread or 'dribbled'

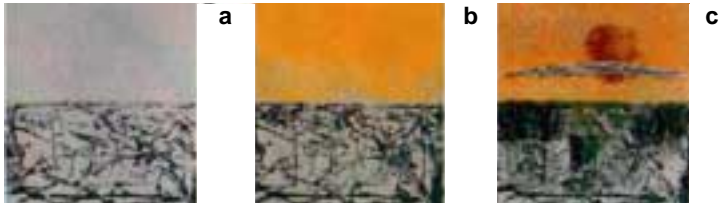
onto the surface of a sheet of card or board and allowed to dry, will form an interesting textured surface suitable for printing. (Fig. 17).

Three main stages in the production of a print:

- i) An initial print from a block with a relief surface made from adhesive.
- ii) A mono print 'sun' is added from a card block is added.
- iii) A paper print 'sun' is added with a strip taken from a sheet of rubbings. The linear texture in the foreground has been printed with card. (Fig.'s 18a, 18b, 18c).



Fig 17 Simple adhesive print



Printing Blocks 2

Very precise prints, with clean sharp lines and areas can be produced by using blocks where the relief-printing surface is made entirely from card. (Fig.'s 19a, 19b, 19c).

Materials: Sheets of strong card or hardboard cut to a convenient size and shape. Card for the relief surface, (thickness is immaterial), knife, ruler or steel straight edge, scissors, adhesive, glue brush, rollers, printing inks, printing paper.

Method 1: Produce a design and transfer the drawing to sheets of card. Carefully cut out the shapes, arranging them on the baseboard and glue down. Lines of various thicknesses are achieved by leaving spaces between areas of card. Ink up and print in the usual way.

Method 2: Card or paper can also be used to produce interesting prints, without necessarily producing a block. Working from an initial design, cut out the desired shapes from paper or card. Taking each shape in turn, place on a sheet of newspaper and roll up with ink. Transfer the card, inked surface down and carefully place on the sheet of printing paper. (Cartridge paper is best for this project). Place a paper towel or sheet of kitchen paper over the shape and apply pressure with a clean roller.



Fig 16 Prints from formalised scrap blocks



Remove scrap paper and with a clean palette knife, lift an edge of the inked shape and remove from the picture surface.

Continue adding shapes and areas until the desired print is completed. By using this method a wide variety of shapes, colours and textures can be achieved. (Fig. 20).

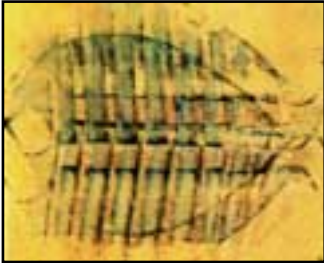


Fig 19 Card prints based on fish shapes

Further Work

The ideas suggested in this book are simply a beginning. Thought, coupled with a desire to explore and experiment, will inevitably lead to a range of work which can be taken to a high standard.

During the early stages of printmaking, it is important and necessary to play with materials, investigating their properties as fully as possible. Later it is important to be selective - in the type of materials, in the colours that should be used, in the size and shape of the completed print.

Reliance upon the imagination as a starting point for work may no longer be sufficient. Design based on careful observation of the environment or on the properties of materials will have to play an increasingly important role. It is advisable to keep a note book/sketch book in which new and interesting results can be recorded alongside the drawings that should be done continually.



Fig 19c Card print - fish skeleton



Fig 20 Card print of cockerel

Specialist Terms and Language Development

A number of specialist terms have been used in this book. It is important, especially when working with younger children, to discuss new words and to insist on their use when involved in a specialist activity such as printmaking.

Some of the words that have been used are as follows:

Print, printmaking, relief, rolling out, ink, inking slab, texture, surface, rubbings, collage, compose, composition, background, foreground, block, Monoprint, sensitive, overprinting, design, image, 'taking a print'.

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