

# Scrimshaw-Style Yupo Engraving (art + history)

As early as 1750, New England whalers passed the long days on ships by engraving nautical artwork on materials readily available to them: bones, tusks and teeth. Using a knife or needle, the sailor would scratch the polished surface, then rub a pigment into the lines. Soot or ground gunpowder mixed with whale oil were the pigments at hand.

With the demise of whaling, scrimshaw nearly became a lost art form. Many modern scrimshanders use eco-friendly, repurposed or man-made surfaces or natural materials from other sources.

As a means of experiencing this traditional American craft, students can etch into Yupo (a polypropylene paper) using scratch tools, then fill the lines with oil pastel. It's a great exercise in line work. Oil pastel can be used to softly shade the surface of the Yupo as well. Watching the color reveal the etching is a delightful experience.

## Grade Levels 5-12

*Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 25 students. Adjust them as needed.*

## Preparation

1. Cut the Yupo Paper into 6" x 8" pieces. Save the scraps for practice.



## Materials

**Yupo® Paper**, 74-lb Bright White, 26" x 20" sheets (10067-1021); share one sheet among nine students

**Scratch-Art® Knife**, straight (14901-0010); one per student

**Blick® Standard Pen Holder** (22930-0000); one per student

**Sakura® Cray-Pas Junior Artist Oil Pastels**, set of 16 assorted colors (20013-1609); share three to five sets among the class

**Blick® Studio Drawing Pencils**, 4B (22220-2041); one per student



**Prismacolor® Kneaded Rubber Eraser**, small (21502-2620); one per student

## OPTIONAL MATERIALS

**Hygloss™ Bucket O' Shells** (61451-1046)

**Blick® Art Tissue**  
Light Blue (11308-5017)  
Turquoise (11308-5117)

**All-Purpose Chipboard** (13115-2232)

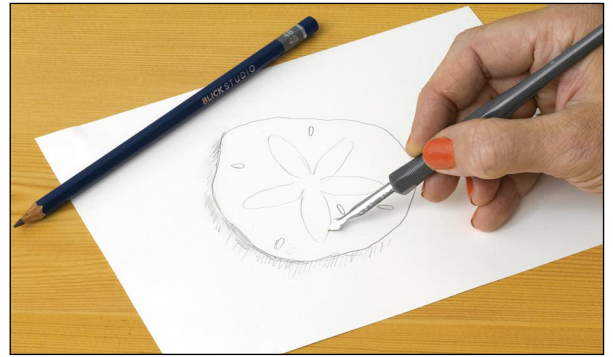
**Papier Maché Trunk** (61756-1001)

## Process

1. Plan the artwork with preliminary drawings or photos, keeping the nautical theme of traditional scrimshaw or choosing a different subject. With a pencil, lightly draw the design on the Yupo Paper.
2. Insert the scratch tool into its handle securely. Use a scrap of Yupo to practice your scratch strokes: parallel and contour lines, cross-hatching, stippling and so on. Rub an oil pastel over the practice strokes, blend the pigment with a soft cloth or paper towel and view the results.
3. After practicing, begin to engrave your final design. The strokes may be difficult to view, so begin with contours and a few hatch lines to define the subject. More lines may be added later.
4. With a kneaded eraser, remove as many pencil lines as possible. Choose a pastel color that will be predominant in the artwork and apply it directly over the linework. Use a soft cloth or paper towel to work the color into the lines and remove any excess pigment.
5. Continue to develop the drawing by adding shading and more oil pastel colors. Here are a few tips:
  - Use the kneaded eraser to remove excess color and bring back the bright white of the Yupo Paper.
  - Scratch into the pastel using the tip or the side of the scratch tool to remove areas of pastel.
  - If an error occurs, the pastel can be removed from the line with the eraser or a paper towel to diminish its appearance.
  - Use no more than three colors. Test them beforehand on a scrap of paper to make sure they work well together.
6. Prepare the engravings for display by gluing them to a piece of matboard.

## Options

1. Create a nautical-themed frame for the finished engraving. Glue it to a 9" x 12" piece of heavy chipboard and create a collage to surround it using tissue paper, sand, pebbles, shells, seaglass and images.
2. Mount the engraving to a box or [Papier Maché Trunk](#) (61756-1001) and decorate it to make a "Ditty Box," as sailors historically would have called a personal trunk.



**Step 1:** Create a drawing on Yupo Paper in pencil. Etch over the pencil drawing with a Scratch-Art® Knife.



**Step 2:** Erase the pencil lines and fill in the engraved lines with oil pastel. Use a soft cloth or paper towel to work the color into the lines; remove any excess.



**Step 3:** Use an eraser to pull back white highlights.



## National Standards for Visual Arts Education

Content Standard #4 – Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures.

**5-8** Students identify specific works of art as belonging to particular cultures, times and places.

**9-12** Students describe the function and explore the meaning of specific art objects within varied cultures, times and places.

Content Standard #5 Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others.

**5-8** Students analyze contemporary and historic meanings in specific artworks through cultural and aesthetic inquiry.

**9-12** Students describe meanings of artworks by analyzing how specific works are created and how they relate to historical and cultural contexts.