

Shibori Sensation

Use the Japanese method of fabric dyeing to create a sensational wall piece using an all-natural Indigo dye

(art + social studies)

The word Shibori refers to one way textiles are embellished in Japan when they are dyed. The cloth is folded into various shapes and secured with string or rubber bands before being lowered into the dye. The word actually comes from the verb “shiboru,” which means to wring or press.

The dye most frequently used in the Shibori technique is called Indigo. Indigo is a very ancient dye which has been traced back to the third millennium BCE. One ancient example of Indigo use is seen in the blue stripes found on the borders of Egyptian mummy cloths. Indigo is also the dye used to make blue jeans blue!

The intense indigo blue dye comes from the Indigofera plant. This shrubby plant is found in tropical and subtropical parts of the world. In fact, there are at least 50 different species of Indigofera growing in India. In the Northwest region, indigo has been processed into small cakes by peasant producers for many centuries, and was exported to Europe via trade routes. Small amounts of blue pigments in hard blocks were found in the remnants of Greek and Roman civilizations (300 BC-400 AD). It was used for medicines, cosmetics, and paints and was considered a luxury. When various sites were excavated, archaeologists found seeds from at least four different species of the genus Indigofera as well as pieces of blue dyed cloth dating from 1750 BC.

Experiment with indigo dyeing and then share all the various patterns with class members to make a wall piece that’s visually striking and full of history!

GRADES 3-12 Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.



Materials (required)

Unbleached Muslin, 45" x 1 yd (63987-1001); share six yards across class (1/4 yard per student)

Plastibands, Box of 200 Assorted Colors, Small (61411-1002); share across class

Creativity Street Wooden Spring Clothespins, package of 250, Natural (62144-1250); share across class

Jacquard Indigo Dye Kit (01301-1109)

Aleene's Quick Dry Tacky Glue, 4 oz (23884-1104); share five bottles across class

Blick Deluxe White Posterboard, 28" x 44" (13104-1006); share four pieces across class cut into 6" squares. (Additional needed for mounting the final project based on size.)

4 recycled CDs per student, or cut circles from cardboard

5-gallon bucket with lid

Optional Materials

Nylon Jewelry Cord, White (60616-1025) Note: will become very dark indigo color if dyed

Hygloss Wooden Blocks, 48 pieces, Assorted (60452-1048); share across class

First Quality 50/50 T-Shirts, Youth Sizes (44959-)

Natural Cotton Bandana (63982-)

Gloves Disposable Gloves for Kids (03480-1001)

String

Tubes such as a snack chip container, a mailing tube, or other cylinders (large jar or container)

Needle and thread



Preparation

1. Mix the Indigo dye the night before using the included instructions — remove the “flower” right before dyeing.
2. View various shibori patterns and methods for folding.
3. Provide each student with 1/4 yard of slightly dampened muslin.
4. Provide plastibands and wooden blocks, clips, clothes pins, etc.
5. Pre-cut posterboard into 6” squares.

Process

1. Fold, bunch, or roll the muslin, securing it with bands, blocks, or clips where desired. Be sure to make a tight bundle to dye. If too loosely secured, the fabric will be mostly blue. If desired, cut the fabric into two pieces to try two different methods of folding.
2. Gently lower the muslin bundle into the dye bucket, being careful not to add air to the solution. Squeeze the bundle and slowly manipulate it for one to several minutes. Squeeze as much dye as possible out of the bundle and remove it from the bucket. As the fabric is exposed to oxygen in the air, it will begin to turn blue. Expose it to the air for about 20 minutes. Tip: Use gloves to keep dye off of hands. The dye is non-toxic and will last briefly if hands are exposed.
3. Remove all bands and clips, rinse the fabric thoroughly in water, and allow it to dry by either hanging or laying it flat on covered table(s).
4. Share various patterns of fabrics to create each individual wall piece. Cover four 6” x 6” posterboard squares with varying patterns by gluing the sides to the back. Glue opposite sides first. Next, cover four circles with fabric. Either cut or use an old CD. Hint: A running stitch made with needle and thread along the outer edge of the circle enables it to be pulled tight around the form.
5. Assemble the four squares and four circles on the table and arrange them in a way that’s pleasing and shows contrast of color and design. Glue them to a white background board for display.

Options

- Make a Shibori T-shirt or bandana using the process above.
- Add decorative stitched details using cords or yarns that will take the dye differently and add surface variation. Or add stitched details before or after dyeing.
- Glue or sew sequins or other embellishments onto the finished product.



Step 1: Bundle muslin tightly using bands, blocks, and clips. Dye.



Step 2: Embellish with stitching, if desired, then cover square and round shapes with fabric and arrange in a pleasing composition



Step 3: Glue all to a white backing board.

National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

Creating (Investigate, Plan, Make)

Anchor Standard 3: Refine and complete artistic work.

Connecting (Synthesize)

Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

