

Aboriginal “Bark” Painting

A tree-friendly adaptation of ancient storytelling from Down Under.

(art + social studies)

Bark painting is a revered Australian Aboriginal art form dating back thousands of years. An interior strip of bark from a Eucalyptus tree was the most common “canvas” on which stories were painted. The artists would then “sign” their work using clan symbols. Earth pigments — or ochres — in a color palette of red, yellow, white, and black from the local region were most frequently used.

Kraft paper is used as a classroom-friendly and eco-friendly substitute for stripped and dried bark in this project that uses block printing techniques. Today’s storytellers are challenged to adopt these legendary aboriginal artistic elements as they emulate an ancient art form: division lines, borders, figurative shapes, cross-hatching, clan symbols, and geometric designs.

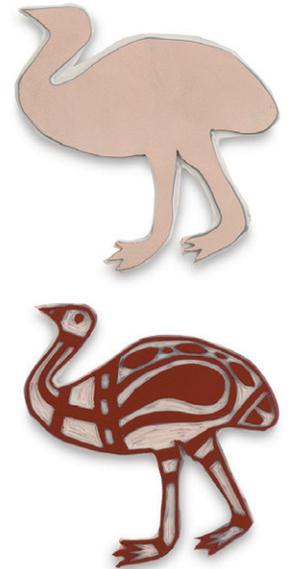
GRADES 5-8 Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

1. Generate discussion about indigenous animals and plants of Australia as well as the natural environment, dwellings, and life activities of aboriginal peoples.
2. Consider a story to depict about aboriginal life — in years past or perhaps from the present.
3. Make sketches of objects to be featured in the painted “story.”

Process

1. Use a pencil to draw objects onto a 3” x 4” Blick Readycut Printing Block. Include positive and negative elements in the design. Designate areas of the block to be carved away by marking them with a Sharpie marker.
2. Use a linoleum cutter to carve around the drawing until only the basic outline shape of the object remains. Retain detail areas for a second printing. This will be the first layer printed.
3. Use painters tape to anchor palette paper on all sides. Select two colors of block printing ink for printing, and begin with the lightest color. Apply a small amount onto the palette paper and roll the brayer across the ink until it is coated evenly. Roll the brayer across the carved block in an even layer.



Materials (required)

Borden & Riley #840 Kraft Paper Pad, 50 sheets, 9” x 12” (11519-1023); need one sheet per student

Blick Water-Soluble Block Printing Ink, 5 oz, (40305-); share Dark Yellow, Red, Black, and White across class

Blick Readycut Printing Blocks, 3” x 4” (40422-0034); one per student

Sharpie Fine Point Marker, Black (21316-2001); one per student

Blick Studio Disposable Palette Paper Pad, 50 sheets, 9” x 12” (03063-2023)

Blickrylic Student Acrylics, pint Red, Yellow, Black, White (00711-); share one bottle of each color across class

Blick Lino Cutter Set, (40216-1001); one per student

Educational Hard Rubber Brayer, 4” (40100-1004); share six across class

Blick Economy Baren (42910-1004); share one between two students

Blick Painters Tape 1” x 60 yds (24146-1060); share two rolls across class

Jute Twine, 2-ply, 338 ft (62984-8542); share two rolls across class

Officemate One-Hole Punch, (57349-1001); share one between two students

Blick Studio Drawing Pencils (22220-); one per student

Optional Materials

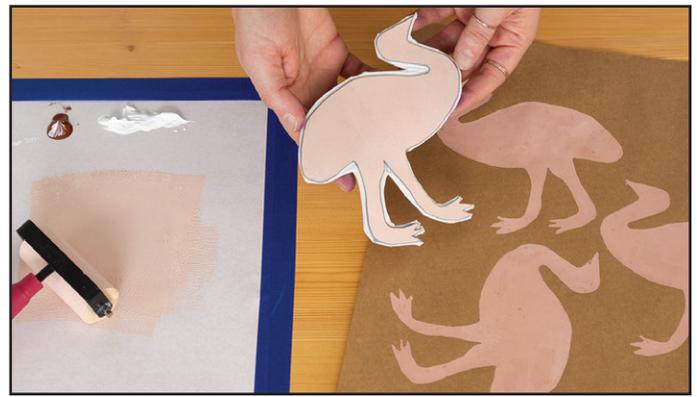
Inking Plate Bench Hook, (42904-0000)

Black Ink Egyptian Papyrus Paper, assorted colors (11239-)





Step 1: Draw onto Readycut block. Carve around the design until only the desired shape remains.



Step 2: Roll ink onto the brayer and create a first print with a lighter color.



Step 3: Carve away details and create a second print with a darker color.



Step 4: Paint background pattern.

Process, continued

4. Select an area of brown Kraft paper to receive the first print. Place the block ink-side-down and apply even, all-over pressure with hands. Before removing the block, use a pencil to lightly mark around the corners of the block on the Kraft paper. These marks can be used to register the next print and can be easily erased or painted over later. Pick the block up carefully by the edges. Re-ink as in step 3 and repeat the print. As a collaborative project, have the students share their blocks so that each paper contains multiple story objects.
5. Clean the block with soap and water and pat dry. Carve away the remaining detail areas to reveal the final image to be printed.
6. On a second piece of paper, roll out the darker ink color and repeat steps 3 and 4. Print the second ink color directly over the first print by aligning the block with the pencil marks created in step 4.
7. Allow to dry, then use Blickrylic paint and a paintbrush to design a background pattern around the prints.
7. Create a hanger for the "bark" print by punching holes 1" to 2" apart on top/bottom or side/side of the Kraft paper. String jute through the holes and attach the print to a branch or dowel.

Options

- Use Black Ink Egyptian Papyrus paper to more closely replicate tree bark.

National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

Creating

Anchor Standard 1:

Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Connecting

Anchor Standard 10:

Synthesize and relate knowledge and person experiences to make art.

