



Action! Repeating Stencils

Used by a number of street artists, stencils rapidly create multiple prints that suggest movement.

(art + social studies)

In the genre of Street Art, "Stencil Graffiti" has a particular visual quality and value. Creating stencils allows an artist to pre-design a piece and then produce it quickly and repeatedly in multiple locations. This is particularly attractive to urban artists who choose to place their work illegally. Stencil graffiti also has a unique "look." Unlike freestyle spray graffiti, stencils produce hard edges. They can be very complex and realistic.

In 1981, Paris seemed to be invaded by hundreds of realistically stenciled rats. Their unexpected appearance startled many people and inspired street artists.

Blek le Rat has been called the "Father of Stencil Graffiti," and his style quickly spread and became a worldwide subculture, influencing artists including Banksy. He kept a very low profile and was only known by his alias until his name was revealed as Xavier Prou during a 1991 arrest. With the notoriety of Blek le Rat, and the availability of being known, he has since had an international career creating street art and taking part in exhibitions.

One of the things that made Blek le Rat's artwork so appealing was the sense of motion or action that a stenciled figure conveyed. The rats seemed to actually crawl because of their repeated poses and how they were positioned in multiples. Rhythm and repetition are principles of art that suggest movement or action.

This project can provide an opening for a discussion about an artist's responsibility when creating "public art" versus vandalism.

Learning to create and use a stencil can be an important skill for an artist in any field, from craft to design and fine art. In this lesson, students can easily reproduce a form by tracing it onto a translucent plastic sheet and cut it out with student scissors. Repeating that form and changing it a little creates a progressive rhythm that moves the viewer's eyes through the composition.

Where Blek le Rat used a can of spray paint to develop his stencils into artwork, students can use washable, felt-tip "daubers" to quickly create multiple repeating forms.

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

Materials (required)

[Pacon Plastic Posterboard](#), Clear, 22" x 28", 12 pt (13155-1602); share one among 16 students

Dauber-style markers, recommend:

[Do-a-Dot Art Markers](#), assorted sets (67104-)

[Crafty Dab Kids Paint](#), assorted sets (22882-)

[Handy Art Empty Marker Bottles](#), pkg of 12 (03324-1012), fill with [Blick Liquid Watercolors](#) (00369-) or [Blick Essentials Tempera](#) (00057-)

Paper, recommend:

[Blick All-Media Paper](#), 22" x 30" (10210-1003); share one between four students

[Blick White Sulphite Drawing Paper](#), pkg of 100 sheets, 80 lb, 18" x 24" (10209-1049); share one sheet among three students

[Blick Studio Drawing Pencils](#), medium-hard, (HB to 2H range) (22220-); one per student

[3M Scotch Magic Transparent Tape](#), in dispenser, 1/2" x 22 yd (23081-1005); share 4-5 across class

Paper towels, two per student

Optional Materials

[Roylco Child's First Stencil Set](#), pkg of 15 (61719-1003)



Preparation

1. Cut posterboard into 5-1/2" x 7" pieces — one per student.
2. Cut All-Media Paper into 7" x 22" strips — one per student. All-Media Paper provides less bleed, but, for a more economical option, use 80 lb drawing paper cut into 8" x 18" pieces.
3. If using empty marker bottles, fill them with tempera paint or liquid watercolor.
4. Gather magazines, particularly sports, fashion, and nature magazines that portray human or animal figures in motion.

Process

1. Students select an action pose. Depending on the age and skill level, students can:

- Find a figure in a magazine and trace the pose.
- Draw the figure from viewing the magazine.
- Use a figure template.
- Very young ages use a pre-cut stencil or cut simple shapes, rather than figures.

2. Plastic posterboard is translucent, so it's easy to place over an image and trace. It cuts easily with student-quality scissors and folds for easy access to internal parts of the sheet. No knives or special cutters are needed. When cutting, consider the following:

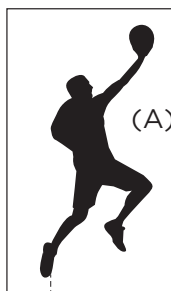
- To begin, cut in from the side to the point closest to the edge of the stencil, see (A). Once the inside shape of the stencil is cut out, use tape to close that initial point of entry.
- For simplicity and easy cutting, especially with younger ages, stencils should be continuous (one piece without any enclosed spaces or "islands"). An example of a continuous shape would be (B).
- If enclosed spaces or "islands" are necessary, they can be cut into from an outer edge, as in (C).

Keep both parts of the stencil.

3. Position either the positive (inner shape) or negative part (outer shape) of the stencil on one end of the paper. For best results, work from edges to the center of the page to avoid wet areas and allow them time to dry. If desired, use a small piece or two of tape to hold the stencil in place while working.
4. Begin with light colors first: yellow, orange, or pink. With a felt-tip marker bottle, apply ink along the edge of the stencil. Press gently against the paper to activate the color flow and repeat, applying multiple dots. The stencil will need to receive some of the ink in order to reach the edges — that's ok!
5. Apply a second color of ink, if desired. Dots can overlap or overprint one another. When the edge of the stencil is covered, it may be removed. Clean the stencil by placing it between two paper towels and running your hand over it.
6. Move to another side of the paper to allow the first figure to dry. For the next figure, the stencil may be flipped or rotated. Or, use the second part of the stencil alone or in combination with the first part.
7. Fill the paper with figures, and be sure to clean the stencil with paper towels between each application. Figures can overlap and overprint each other. Save black ink for the final stencils; then clean the stencil with water.



Step 1: Start by tracing the outline figure or shape onto plastic posterboard.



Step 2: Cut the stencil with scissors and fill it with color from a dauber-style marker bottle.



Step 3: Repeat designs, rotating and turning the stencil to create a sense of movement.



Options

- Create an action "mural" with roll paper, rather than individual sheets for each student.
- Apply stencils to sidewalks for an outdoor graffiti-style installation.



National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

Creating

Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Connecting

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