

# EZ Encaustics

The Greek word, encaustic, means “to burn,” and the ancient Greek process, developed in the 5th century BCE, involved heating pigmented beeswax over burning charcoal. This lesson plan, however, uses hand-softened wax and candlemaking materials, which are far more classroom friendly!

This lesson plan uses only small amounts of wax that may be softened by hand or by using low-temperature heat. Advanced students can experiment with a more traditional encaustic painting process involving higher heat and a painterly use of materials to create very transparent or translucent artworks. In this process, pigment is kept hot and in liquid form. Then brushes are dipped into the hot wax and the wax is quickly applied to a surface. The wax starts to cool as soon as it leaves the heat source.

**Grade Levels** 5-12

*Note: Instructions and materials based on a class of 25 students. Adjust as needed.*



## Materials: EZ Process

Soft Decorating Wax (61522-1009); share two 6-color sets across class

Creativity Street® Wax Works® Deluxe Set (61742-1040); share one 20-stick set across class

Activa® Honeycomb Beeswax, assorted colors (61145-); share 10-12 sheets across class

Blick® Economy Canvas Panel, 24-panel classpack, 5" x 7" (07015-1000); need one panel per student

## Optional:

Blick® Fine Point Permanent Marker, Black (22164-2020); share 12 across class

## Materials: Painterly Process (in addition to above items)

Premium Wax (61101-0000); share one 4-lb block across class

Candle Dye, assorted colors (60987-); share 6 across class

Wax Melter Kit (64902-1009); need one or two sets to share across class

Round 10-Well Tray, aluminum (03006-0010); share 12 across class

Dynasty® Ruby Synthetic Brushes, rounds and flats (05198-0729); share one canister across class

Richeson® Plastic Painting Knives, 2-3/8" trowel offset (03105-0000) and 3-3/4" straight (03105-0010); share three each style across class

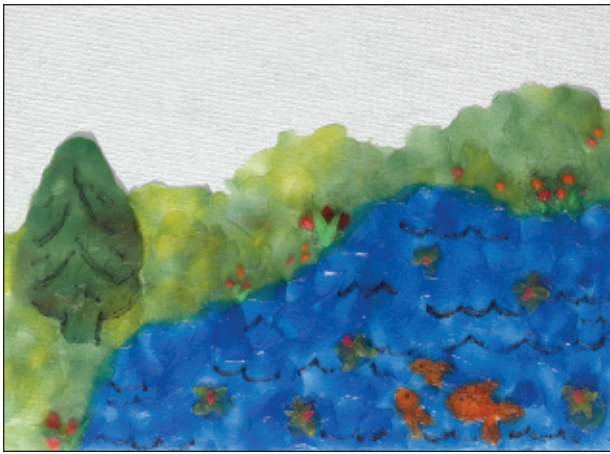
Single hot plate (use with round aluminum tray)

Buffet glass plate or tiny muffin tin

Large cookie sheet to put under hot wax containers

## Optional: for older students

R&F™ Encaustic Paints (01101-3180); share one 7-color set across class



### EZ Process (pictured above)

1. Students sketch their design lightly on any firm surface or canvas panel.
2. Choose one or more soft waxes such as Soft Decorating Wax, Creativity Street Wax Works or Activa Honeycomb Beeswax. Soften by rolling and kneading between fingers and palms.
3. Pull apart and size the pieces of wax to fill in areas of the sketched design. Colors may be blended during the hand-softening step or overlapped for effect.
4. Use a hair dryer on low heat and blow gently to soften and rework the surface. This allows for new wax to adhere to the previous layer.
5. Optional: lightly add contrast lines with a permanent black marker.

### Painterly Process (pictured at right)

1. Encaustic can be painted on any firm surface or treated canvas, but a canvas panel is an economical and practical option. Sketch design first.
2. Select a heat source most practical for the art room and the appropriate grade level. Set up a wax station that will accommodate four students and perhaps two heating elements:



- a. The Wax Melter palette holds a large quantity of wax. This is a good system when many students are going to be using it continuously. Place a cookie sheet under the unit to catch drips and as a brush rest. Follow manufacturer's directions.

b. A second heating source choice is a single burner hotplate with a base that remains cool. A small, round 10-well tray fits perfectly on a burner, heats quickly and holds a small amount of wax. Small pieces of wax can be safely added, with no need to clean between colors.

c. A third choice is a serving buffet tray, which will hold more than one round palette or a tiny muffin tin on its glass surface. Again, this keeps the temperature warm enough to melt wax without overheating.

2. This project uses a small amount of wax. Place small chips of wax in each well. Wax will appear to expand as it melts. Wax Work strips can be snapped into 1/2" to 1-1/2" pieces and added to create new shades and colors. Keep the heat source on the medium setting to prevent overheating. The wax should be clear. If it starts to get cloudy, it is cooling off and the temperature should be adjusted slightly. This wax is commonly used to make candles, so there are no fumes.
3. Apply the wax with brushes to the canvas panel in small strokes. After working with brushes, try painting knives to add texture.
4. Continue to apply the wax in layers. The paintings are very translucent. Small

objects can be added and painted over. Colors blend when they overlap - like stained glass - but will not mix because the wax starts to cool immediately when removed from heat.

5. An encaustic painting does not need to be finished in one application. Use a hair dryer on low heat to soften the surface to prepare for reworking and adhering new wax to the previous layer.

6. Optional: contrast lines may be added with a permanent black marker.

7. To clean up, remove soft wax with a cloth or paper towel. Brushes may be left with wax on them to be used again when the wax is reheated.

## National Standards for Visual Arts Education

Content Standard #1 – Understanding and applying media, techniques and processes

**5-8** Students intentionally take advantage of the qualities and characteristics of art media, techniques, and processes to enhance communication of their experiences and ideas

**9-12** Students conceive and create works of visual art that demonstrate an understanding of how the communication of their ideas relates to the media, techniques, and processes they use

Content Standard #2 – Using knowledge of structures and functions

**5-8** Students select and use the qualities of structures and functions of art to improve communication of their ideas

**9-12** Students demonstrate the ability to form and defend judgments about the characteristics and structures to accomplish commercial, personal, communal, or other purposes of art

Content Standard #3 – Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols and ideas

**5-8** Students integrate visual, spatial, and temporal concepts with content to communicate intended meaning in their artworks

**9-12** Students reflect on how artworks differ visually, spatially, temporally, and functionally, and describe how these are related to history and culture

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

**5-8** Students know and compare the characteristics of artworks in various eras and cultures

**9-12** Students differentiate among a variety of historical and cultural contexts in terms of characteristics and purposes of works of art