

One of A KIND

You don't need to be an artistic genius to create a unique piece of art. With monoprints, no two pieces are ever the same, says **Robert Watts**

Today you will...

- > Extend your understanding of the principles of printmaking
- > Explore techniques for blending colours and tones
- > Experiment with drawing and mark making

Repetition is almost always at the heart of printmaking. Whether children are printing with string, potatoes or polystyrene tiles, they love creating repeat patterns and identical images. Monoprinting, however, is different. 'Mono', of course, is 'one' – meaning no two monoprints are the same, each one is distinctive.

Monoprinting began in the 19th century with artists such as Paul Gauguin. Pablo Picasso and Paul Klee produced wonderful 'monotypes' in the mid-20th century and contemporary artists such as Tracey Emin continue to explore the process today. But what makes it one of the most engaging and enjoyable art processes?

This lesson plan is designed to encourage children in Key Stage 2 to experiment with monoprinting through creating a colourful collection of images inspired by the sculptures of Ancient Greece.

YOU WILL NEED:

- > Printmaking inks – red, yellow, blue and black
- > Rollers and palettes
- > Perspex sheets (or desktops you can easily wipe down)
- > A selection of printed or photocopied images (that children can draw directly on to)
- > Drawing pencils (2B, 4B, etc)
- > Sheets of cartridge paper (various sizes)

Starter activity

Begin by asking children what they already know about making prints. Look for diverse responses – some, for example, might talk about handprints on paper or footprints in snow. Whatever their experiences, encourage them to reflect on what they have learned so far, such as how we can use textured surfaces to create prints, and how, when we print the image, it is reversed on the page.

Introduce the principles of monoprinting with a demonstration. There are essentially three ways of making monoprints. It will only take a few minutes to introduce the first two before you move on to the main part of the lesson, where we'll take the idea a stage further. It's worth practising this demonstration before the lesson, but you'll find you can get immediate results.



First, roll a very thin, almost dry layer of ink onto a smooth surface such as a sheet of Perspex; quickly draw a simple design into it with the 'wrong' end of a

brush, place a sheet of paper over it, press firmly all over and peel away to reveal the print.

Second, paint a design directly on to the Perspex,



FIG. 1

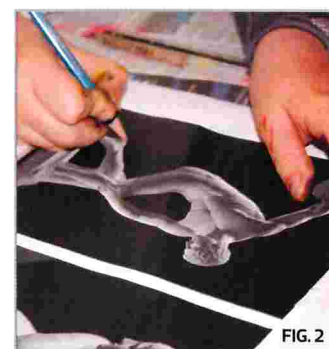


FIG. 2



FIG. 3



FIG. 4

place paper over it, then press and peel away to create the print. Encourage children to try these techniques out before beginning the main part of the lesson.

If these instructions sound simple – well, that's because they are! Two of the great things about monoprinting are its speed and its versatility – the third is its unpredictability. We can't control precisely how the image will appear, meaning we can let the ink make decisions for us, which often creates surprising results. Yes, sometimes things don't turn out quite the way we hoped they might, but sometimes they turn out even better.

Main activities

Artist's palette

Many artists make monochrome monoprints, using the process to explore line, tone and texture. But for the main part of our lesson we're going to introduce a splash of colour to brighten up our prints, and explore techniques for blending colours and tones through drawing and mark making.

Begin by choosing two primary colours, squeezing a small blob of each into the top corners of your palette. Move your roller through the ink and down the palette towards you, aiming to create a blend of the two colours, then transfer the ink to your paper (See fig 1). If you have too much ink on the roller then either use it to push the ink to the top of the palette or roll off the excess on to some newspaper.

You now have a colourful background layer for your

monoprint. Ideally, allow time for this layer to dry, but if you want to complete your prints in one lesson, use a second piece of paper to blot off the excess (you can then use this second piece for another print).

Paint it black

Roll a very thin layer of black ink on to a perspex sheet, tabletop or any smooth surface that can be wiped down later. It needs to be so thin that it looks dry unless you hold it up to see the light reflecting on the surface. Gently place your 'background' layer face down on the ink, then select an image to use as a guide for your drawing and place it face up on top of the paper.

Now we're going to trace over the image in order to transfer it to our background layer. This may sound straightforward – but it's a great opportunity to think about and experiment with mark making. You'll find that either using harder or softer drawing pencils or applying different amounts of pressure to the drawing will create different kinds of marks. Some you'll be able to control, others will offer surprises (fig 2).

Sculpted to perfection

Children will quickly find they can create some stunning effects with their monoprints. For the examples on these pages, we've taken inspiration from images of Greek sculptures from the British Museum, as their graceful lines and dynamic poses create a dramatic contrast with the gentle blended colours in the backgrounds (fig 3).

Take the lesson further by encouraging children to collaborate on a large-scale monoprint. Create a huge, colourful background and provide each child in the

class with a space to add their own printed figure – there could even be space to add architectural images.

Extending the lesson

> Challenge children to develop their ideas by choosing newspaper or magazine images to use as starting points for further experiments with monoprints. The sports pages of newspapers feature a great range of photographs of athletes in dramatic poses that often recall the heroes and heroines of antiquity. Draw children's attention to the similarities between the ancient and modern action poses, and how contemporary photographers can be inspired by classical imagery (fig 4).



Q USEFUL QUESTIONS

- > How would you describe your monoprint to someone who couldn't see it? What descriptive language could you use?
- > Would you rather have one single artwork that you loved – or hundreds of copies of it?
- > The sculptures of Aphrodite and the 'Discus-Thrower' (Discobulos) were made in Rome in the 2nd Century AD, both copies of Greek sculptures from the 2nd or 3rd Centuries BC. Can you pick three things that you think will still be here in 500 years' time?

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