

Paper Collagraph Printing

Linked to *Twelfth Night*

A project suitable for KS2 children



Introduction

This creative project develops children's confidence and technical skills in printmaking as they learn how to design and make paper collagraph plates for printing. Children then incorporate their resulting prints into a collaged poster for the play.



Image: The Curious Printmaker

Collagraphy and The Collagraph Printing Process

Collagraphy is a printmaking process developed and popularised by American artist and educator Glen Alps in the 1950s. The word *collagraph* is derived from the Greek word *koll/kolla* (to glue) and *graph*, meaning to draw.

To make a collagraph print, textured materials are collaged onto a substrate (background) such as thin wood or board. This creates the printing plate (also called a 'block'). Although our project uses paper only, there is no limit to the range of materials that can be used in collagraphy; for example, card, bubble wrap, lace, sandpaper, string, plastic...



Image: Medway Fine Printmakers

Once the collaged plate is securely glued and the glue has dried, ink can be applied to the surface, using brushes or rollers. The plate is then ready for printing on to another paper surface, using a printing press or hand roller to exert pressure.

Varying the way in which the original plate is created and ink applied can create different tonal and colour effects.



Image: Estella Scholes

Structure of the Project

This project is designed to take place over **4-6 sessions**. The first session offers a short art historical overview of collagraph printing, with a focus on the work of collagraphy pioneer, **Glen Alps**, alongside contemporary artists who use the process. The remaining sessions are all practical.

National Curriculum aims

During this project, children will:

- Produce creative work, exploring ideas and recording experiences
- Become proficient in... print-making and collage techniques
- Evaluate and analyse creative works using the language of art and design
- Know about great artists, craft makers and designers, and understand the historical and cultural developments of their art forms

Key Skills

During this project, children will:

- Use drawing as a starting point for their work
- Build confidence with known printmaking techniques
- Create a relief plate/block and use it to make a print
- Select and use appropriate materials/tools with confidence
- Develop skills in design, layout and composition



Materials

To make your collagraph plate/poster, you will need:

- Heavyweight sugar paper (140gsm)
- Scissors
- High quality glue sticks OR quick-drying PVA glue
- Block printing ink
- Hand rollers and trays
- Photocopy paper
- Poster paint/masking tape/marbling ink (optional, for creating a background)

SESSION 1: ART HISTORY CONTEXT

This session involves looking at images and discussing them as a class.

At the beginning of the project, it's helpful to recap with children on their prior knowledge of printmaking, as well as their understanding of what constitutes a print. Their experience may be limited, or it may include activities such as polyblock printing, which introduces the idea of making a plate and producing multiple prints.

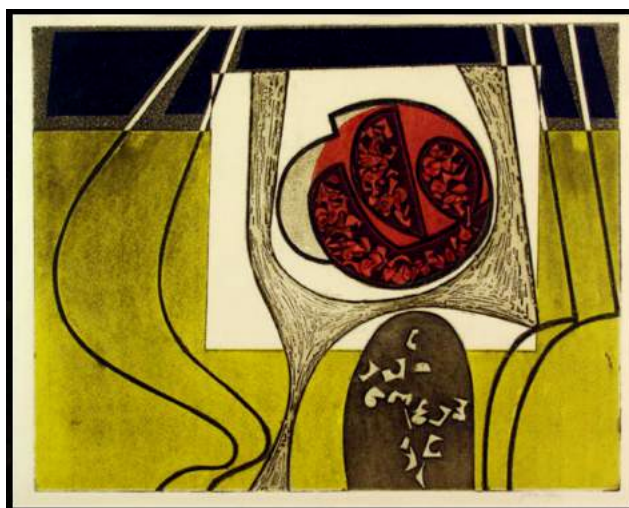
Collagraph printing is characterised by making a 'relief' collage on a background. Children can understand the concept of relief by thinking of the printing plate as a layered landscape. It can be useful to show images of collagraph blocks or let children touch some examples made in advance of the session.



Images of collagraph plates, illustrating the idea of relief

FOCUS ARTIST: GLEN ALPS

While Glen Alps' work with collagraphy is primarily abstract, it clearly illustrates the effects of using different textured materials to make the printing plate.

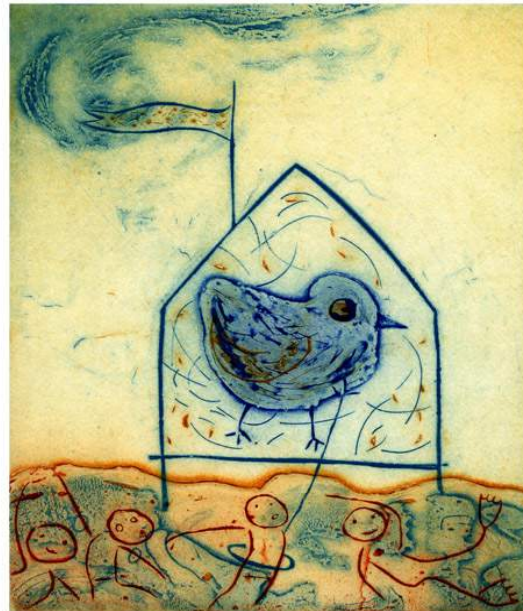


You can find links to the work and life of Glen Alps in the RESOURCES section at the end of these plans.



Images above and left: Glen Alps

Many contemporary printmakers use collagraphy as part of their process. Work by Estella Scholes, Jo Brody, Talleen Hacikyan and Ianthe Hope may be of interest to your pupils, and shows a variety of different approaches.



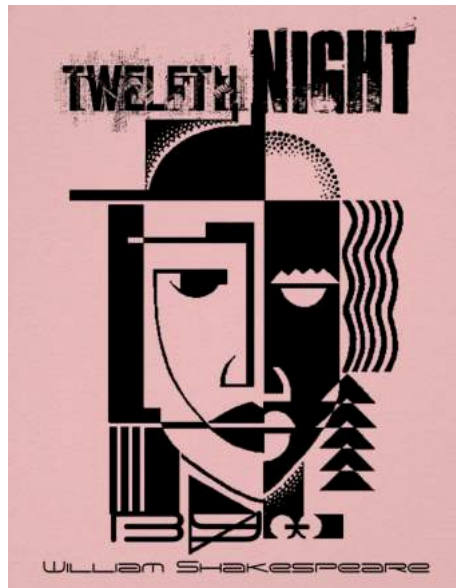
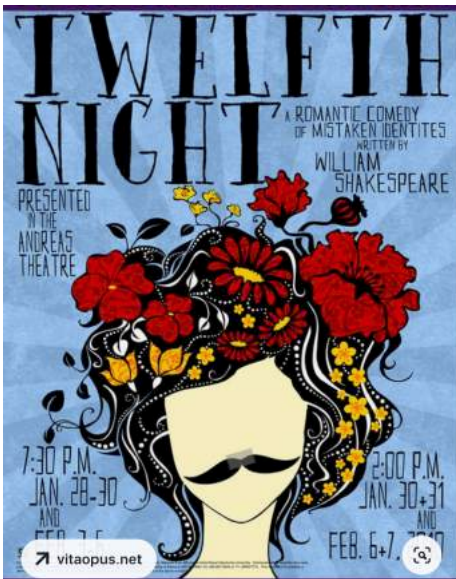
Images clockwise from top left: Jo Brody, Talleen Hacikyan, Ianthe Hope

If time allows, it's a good idea to end the first session with a demonstration of the printing process, using a pre-made paper collagraph plate. This will give children a good idea of the effect they will be able to achieve themselves, as well as an idea of how complex/simple to make their own design in the following session.

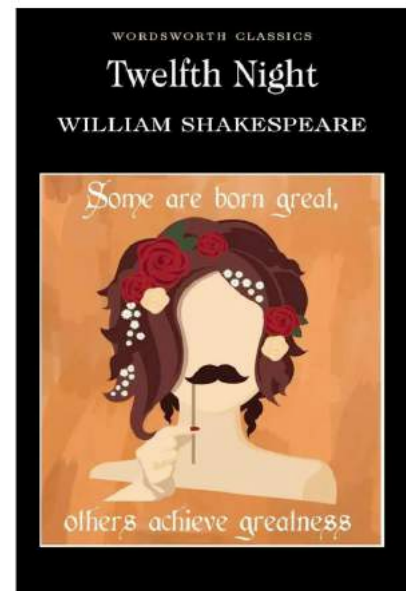
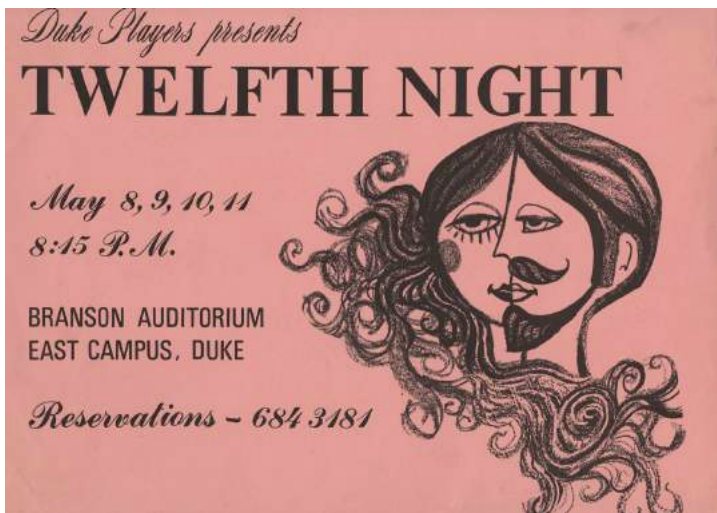
SESSION 2: DESIGNING A COLLAGRAPH BLOCK

This session introduces the project, in which children design and make a paper collagraph plate and use it to print an image for a poster.

In the following examples, two quotes from *Twelfth Night* were taken as starting inspiration; Orsino's declaration in Act 1, Scene 1: *'If music be the food of love, play on...'* and Viola's admission to Olivia in Act 3, Scene 1: *'I am not what I am.'* Of course, other quotations or thematic starting points can be used!



It may be helpful to show the children some of the posters and book covers that graphic designers have created for *Twelfth Night*, and get the children to identify common symbols and motifs (such as Viola's disguise).



Images clockwise from top left: MSU Theatre, Zazzle, Wordsworth Classics, Duke Players

Children should spend some time sketching a few different designs in order to explore their ideas. Emphasise the importance of making **SIMPLE** designs that aren't too small. (Designs that are too detailed will be difficult to cut out of paper and will not print as effectively).

HELPFUL HINT:

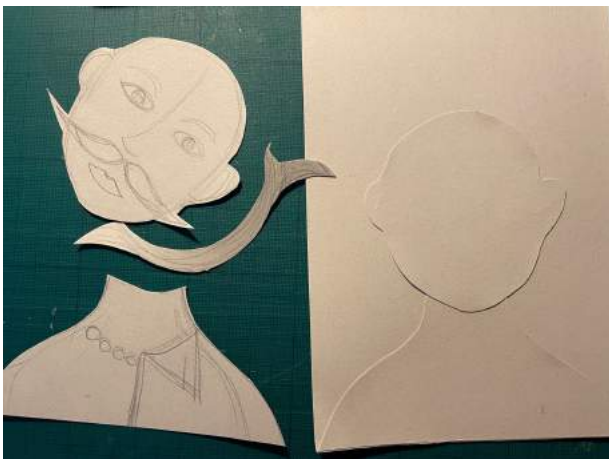
Going over a drawing in fine liner can help children to simplify designs that are too complicated.



SESSION 3: BUILDING A COLLAGRAPH PLATE

In this session, children build their paper collagraph plate, working from their preferred sketch design (adapting as they wish).

Make sure to use heavyweight sugar paper – preferably at least 140gsm – for this, and work on a background approximately A5 in size.



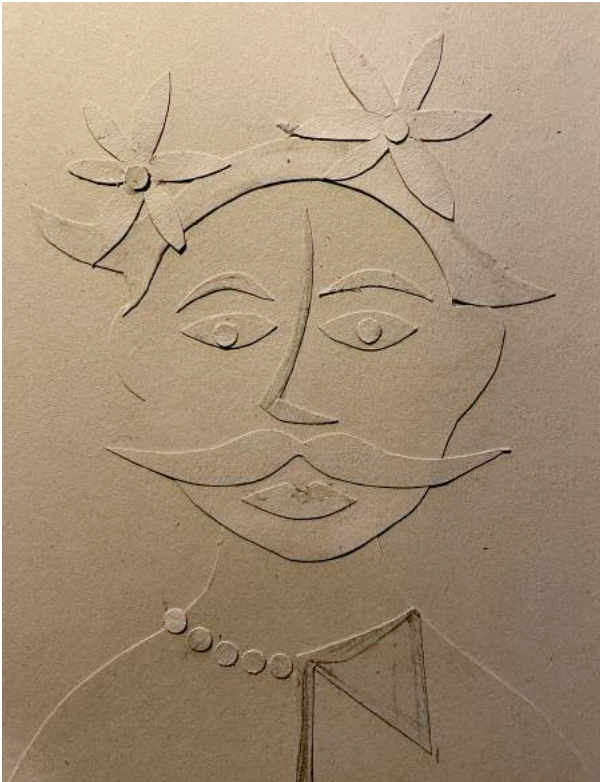
WORKING BACK-TO-FRONT

When making their collagraph plates, children should work from back to front – or more accurately, from background to foreground.

In other words, they should redraw their design on sugar paper, cutting out and gluing down the LARGE elements first (e.g. a character's head) before adding SMALL features.



A very useful trick is to fold paper in half to cut doubles of shapes (as in these images).

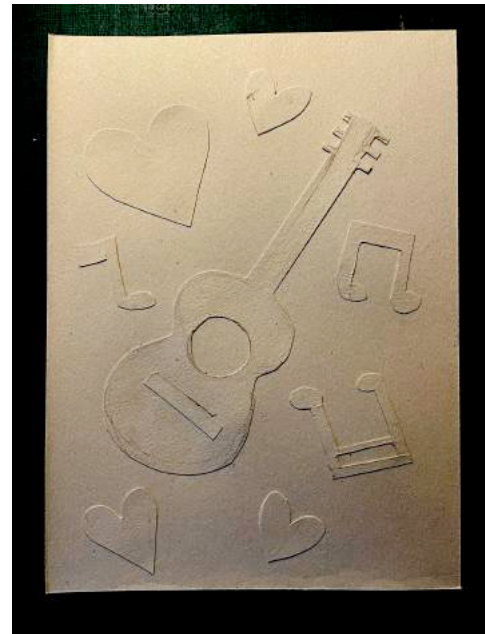
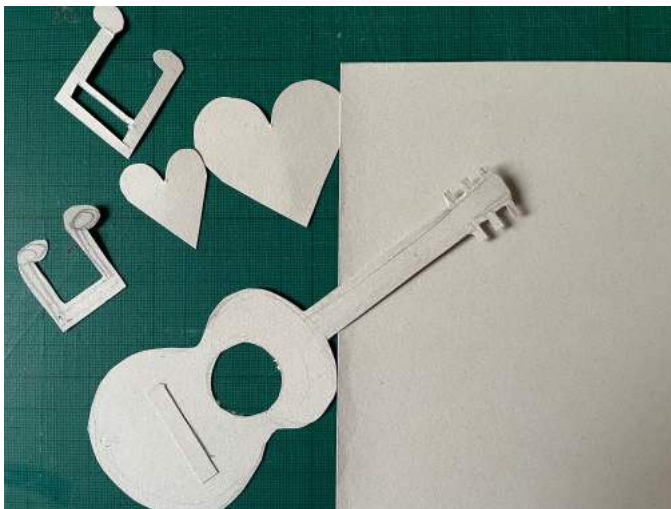


GLUEING SECURELY

It is ESSENTIAL that all details are glued down well. If using glue sticks, make sure they are good quality. Quick-drying PVA, applied with a spatula works even better.

ENSURING AN EVEN RELIEF

Remind children not to create a block that is too 'tall' as these won't print well. The relief elements should be fairly even across the block.



Finished paper collagraph plates (top and right). Allow the glue to dry thoroughly, ideally overnight.

SESSION 4: CREATING A BACKGROUND (OPTIONAL)

If there is time, children could spend some time creating a colourful background for their posters. There are multiple ways to do this of course, the simplest of which might be to create a painted wash. If you want to stay true to the printmaking theme, you could create marbled paper, or sponge print with poster paint, using masking tape to create a design, as in the example here. Whatever you decide, the background should be simple, so as not to detract from the finished print.



Colourful sponge printed backgrounds for posters.

SESSION 5: PRINTING THE COLLAGRAPH PLATE

In this session, children finally print from their collagraph plate. The plate **MUST** be completely dry, and the glue set, before you begin.



APPLYING INK

Always use block printing ink for this. Paint is too runny. Block printing ink has a thick, sticky quality that produces brighter, sharper prints. (For where to buy, see the [RESOURCES](#) section.)

Squeeze out some ink and spread it evenly over a tray, using a roller.

Using the same roller, apply ink to the collagraph plate, again making sure that it's even, and that you reach all edges/corners. It is possible to use more than one colour, but for a first attempt, it's better to limit children to one colour only.

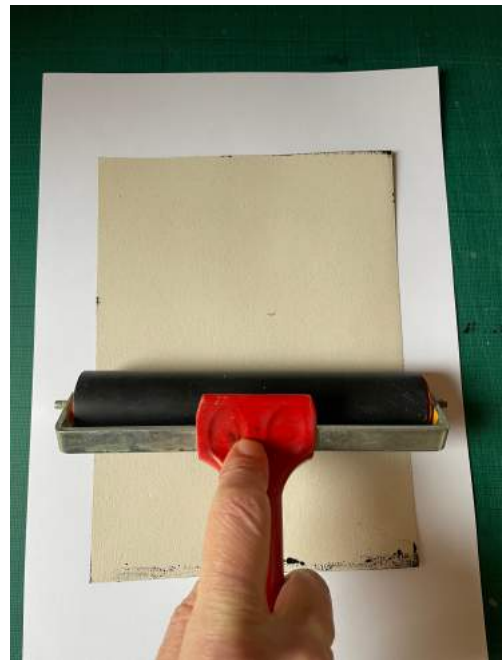


PRINTING

When the plate is inked up, it's ready to print! If the ink is starting to dry a little, you can freshen it up with a quick spritz of water.

Place the plate face down on a fresh piece of paper (photocopy paper is ideal as it's bright and smooth). Remember, once the plate is in place it must not be moved!

Using a new, dry roller, apply pressure evenly to the black of the plate to transfer the ink onto the new surface. Don't forget the edges!



FINALLY... Peel off the plate to reveal your print underneath! This is called 'pulling your print'.



HELPFUL HINT:

Children may be excited to print directly onto their prepared background – however, this is not a great idea for their first ever print. It takes practice to learn how much ink to apply to the plate, and how much pressure to use when printing. Practise first! When children are satisfied that they can make an effective print on photocopy paper, they can print onto their colourful background – OR they could even allow their best practice print to dry and collage this on to the prepared background instead (see the following images!)

SESSION 6: ADDING ADDITIONAL COLLAGE DETAILS (OPTIONAL)

In their final session, children can add any additional details to their posters – for example, adding the title of the play, the quotation that inspired them, or the name of the character. They might choose to collage this, or do some hand lettering in ink.



Text & images (unless credited) Jan Periton Dunning, The Primary Shakespeare Company (2023)

RESOURCES

ART MATERIALS FOR SCHOOLS:

E.g. stockist of heavyweight sugar paper and block printing ink

<https://www.glsed.co.uk/>

HISTORY OF COLLAGRAPHY:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collagraphy>

<https://www.peoplepoweredprints.com/collagraph>

<https://www.forartssake.com/online-gallery/medium/collagraph/>

GENERAL PRINT MAKING RESOURCES:

<https://www.accessart.org.uk/curriculum-planning-printmaking/>
(Subscription service)

Collagraph printing for younger children:

<https://ceceluna.co.uk/2021/10/15/bonus-creative-eco-craft-collagraph-printmaking/>

<https://theartofeducation.edu/2015/06/08/teach-your-students-to-make-collagraph-prints/>

ARTISTS USING COLLAGRAPHY

GLEN ALPS:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glen_Alps

<https://www.seattleartistleague.com/2017/05/23/glen-alps/>

TALLEEN HACIKYAN:

<https://talleen.weebly.com/>

<https://www.instagram.com/talleenhacikyan/>

ESTELLA SCHOLES:

<https://www.estellascholes.com/>

<https://www.instagram.com/estellascholes/>

JO BRODY:

<http://jo-brody.squarespace.com/jo-brody-jeweler-printmaker-educator-connector-portland-or/2012/02/collagraph-maniac>

IANTHE HOPE:

<https://www.itsnicethat.com/articles/ianthe-hope>

<https://www.instagram.com/ianthehope/>