

CHILDREN'S PAPER CUTS: Silhouette Scenes and Photogram Cyanotypes

Two Projects based on Hamlet

Introduction

Silhouette and cut-out art is very appealing to children and is relatively easy for them to tackle.

These two short projects can be taught back-to-back and produce striking yet different results.

The first project uses simple paper-cutting and collage to illustrate a scene from the play, while the second project builds on paper-cutting skills but employs the very beautiful lens-less photographic approach of making photograms through cyanotype printing.

Both projects can be used with children as young as KS1, but they will need to have a certain level of competence and independence using scissors.



Objectives

Both these projects will encourage children to discuss different and unusual illustration techniques; and think about how they might decide what is essential to show in any scene, and what is less important. It may also be possible to draw from the children the interesting idea that silhouettes are effective because they don't show too much – they allow the viewer to fill in detail with their own imagination. This may be

particularly helpful when illustrating scenes from Hamlet, as many key scenes in the play are ambiguous or leave room for interpretation.

In terms of practical skills, working with cut-outs develops children's drawing, their fine motor skills, their awareness of perspective, angle and profile, as well as the crucial importance of design and layout. With the photogram cyanotype project, it is possible that links with Science and photography may be made; particularly concepts of light, dark and shadow.

Launching the Projects – Immersion in Silhouette and Cut-Out Art

To fire up the children’s imaginations and get them talking about how silhouette art might be made, you could show a range of sources. They might already be familiar with the work of **Jan Pienkowski** – his beautiful illustrations to Joan Aitken’s fairytales are often found in primary school:



With Pienkowski’s work, point out how a colourful background provides the best contrast with the black silhouette shape, as well as noting how characters are usually viewed in profile, and how their pose needs to convey their emotions.

Hans Christian Andersen made cut-out artwork, alongside writing his famous stories. With Andersen, it’s nice to see the effect of a white cut-out against a dark background, and also to talk about how folding helps create symmetrical shapes:

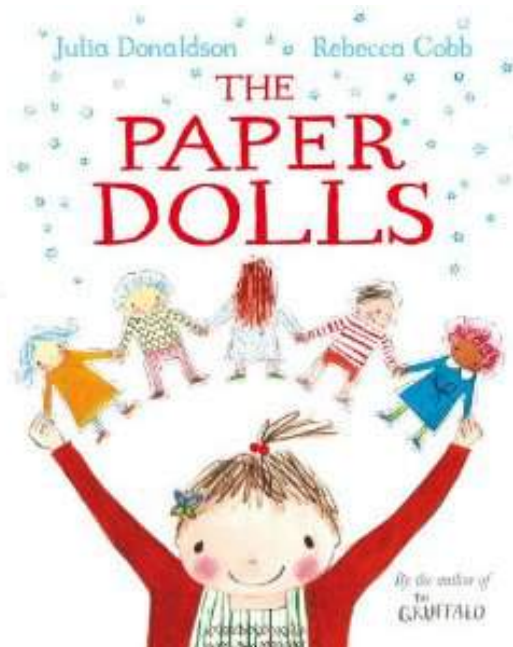


The fairytale films of **Lotte Reiniger** show how cut-outs and silhouette art can be used to create films, using stop-frame animation techniques. A range of her work can be found here:

https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=lotte+reiniger



While for much younger children, **Julia Donaldson's** book *The Paper Dolls* is a nice way into the art of paper folding and cutting:



Timescale for the projects

Each project should take a maximum of 2 sessions, after spending some time immersing the children in the genre. Depending on children's ability to use scissors unsupported, allow an 1-1.5 hrs for each session. I have included a short, optional practice exercise solely to develop/assess scissor skills, which may not be needed for older children.

PROJECT 1: SILHOUETTE SCENES

Resources

You will need:

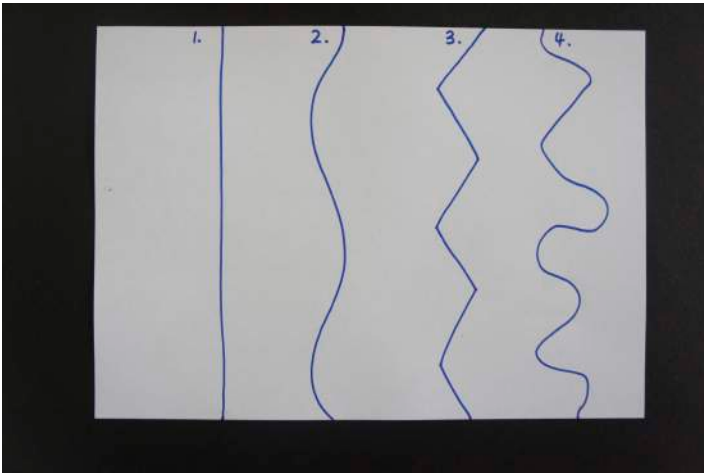
Scissors – enough for every child (including left handers)

Black paper (not card)

Watercolour paper or good quality cartridge paper and a tray

Either marbling inks or oil pastels and watercolour paint

Optional Practice Exercise (suggested for KS1 pupils)



Give each child a sheet of A4 paper. Ask them to draw 4 types of line width-ways across it. The lines should be straight, wavy, zig-zagged and 'crazy' (their own choice).

Starting with the straight line, the children should cut the paper, following these lines. Model a good hold for cutting scissors, check left-handers have appropriate left-handed scissors, and ensure children are using the deep 'V' where the scissor blades cross over (not the tips) when they make their cuts. This quick assessment will help you to see which children may need adult support for the project and which may work independently.

Lesson 1 – Creating a Background and Designing a Scene

Ask the children to recall scenes from Hamlet that involve action or a memorable event. Children should each choose a scene to illustrate and decide what they will need to show, and where the action takes place.

They will start by making the background for artwork (if time is an issue, these can dry while the children are making their cut-outs, condensing this project into one session). The example used here is Hamlet seeing his father's ghost. The background needs to show that it is dusk or sunset. There is any number of ways to make a vibrant background for cut-outs.

One approach, referencing Pienkowski, might be to use marbling ink:

Drop a few different colours of oil based inks so that they float on the surface of a tray of water. After swirling the ink around, place a sheet of cartridge paper on top - the kaleidoscopic pattern is absorbed into the paper.



Another approach more appropriate for interior scenes might be to use oil-resist and watercolours:



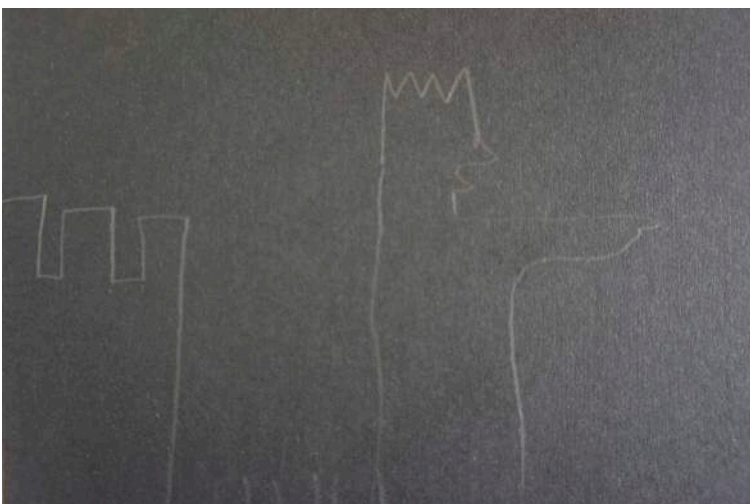
Using oil pastels, children shade onto watercolour or cartridge paper. They might think about creating weather or a texture that is suitable for their scene.

Next, use watercolour paint and a large brush to paint a watery 'wash' over the oil pastel shading. The oil will repel the paint, filling in gaps where there is no pastel. The result is very striking.



Remember that the lighter the background, the better the silhouettes will look, so even if children choose a scene inside the castle, encourage them to use relatively light, even if not bright colours.

Next, get children to think about the action they wish to show, and how their character is feeling.



Children should draw their scene in pencil onto black paper. There is no need to shade in, or add detail – they should focus on creating a strong outline for their characters and any other features of the scene. Remember that small drawings are much harder to cut out – and simplicity of line is key!

Lesson 2 – Cutting Out and Arranging the Silhouettes

In this lesson, have some named envelopes handy so that children can put their cut-out pieces safely away once they have finished them. This removes the risk of any important detail being swept into the bin!

Hints to help the cutting-out process

- Roughly cut around the feature or character you want to tackle first – it's easier to cut detail if you are holding a smaller piece of paper.
- For any really tiny detail such as noses, do this bit last, when you have cut out the main shape.
- If the thing you are cutting out is symmetrical, fold it in half and cut one side.
- For children needing adult support – consider making a line of paper dolls that they can then customise into the shape they want.
- Inevitably someone will cut off a leg or arm or other important bit from their character! Don't worry – just save everything in an envelope. It can be glued back on at the final stage and the effect will still be great.
- In reality, very few cut-out pieces are needed to suggest a narrative – concentrate on cutting out the most important ones.
- If eyes or windows are required to be cut out (and it's not really necessary) – adults may do this with a scalpel or craft knife on a cutting mat.

Arranging the cut-outs and sticking down

This is the fun part where the cut-outs and background really come together.

Children should play around with the lay out of their cut-outs before they stick them down. They may work better arranged differently from their original drawing. Hold back on the glue stick until you are really happy!

Here is Hamlet meeting his father's ghost against a marbled background:



Here's the same scene imagined slightly differently, in front of the oil resist/watercolour background.



Extend This

Ways you might extend children to make more ambitious work include challenging them to add more detail or to experiment with layering their cut-outs. They might also use different shades of paper, but think about making background details lighter and foreground features darker to create the effect of depth.

To take children's cut-out and design skills further and apply them to a different process, see PDF for Project 2 – Photogram Cyanotype Printing.

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