

# CREATIVE PRINTMAKING

inspired by CELTIC ART AND DESIGN

## Making Relief Printing Blocks

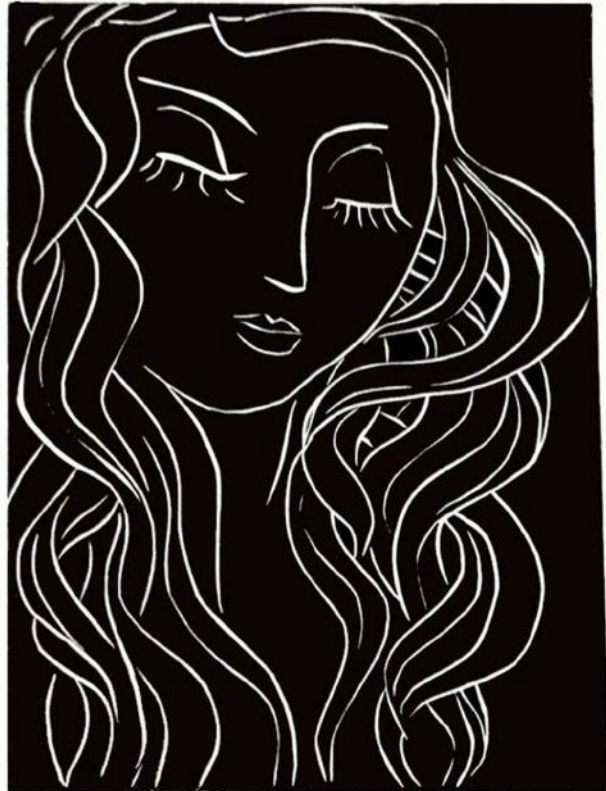
Two projects suitable for KS2

### Celtic Art and Macbeth

For these Printmaking lessons, there are many other visual images that you could use for your starting point, if you should decide not to use Celtic Art as your main design reference. However, the connection between Macbeth's setting in Scotland, and the beautiful patterns and symbols of Celtic design is a powerful one to explore and which lends itself well to the process of making the printing blocks in both techniques. The prints can be made onto paper or fabric, meaning that this technique is useful not only for creating display-worthy artworks but could also be used in creating costumes, set and props.

### Art History and Context

If your children have never done any printmaking before, it might be useful to look briefly at the history and process of printmaking. Well-known artists who have used printmaking in their work include Picasso, Matisse, Hokusai, and Durer, and there are many different forms of printmaking; linocutting, woodcutting, engraving, etching, and screenprinting, to name just a few. The technique used in the first of these child-friendly projects is most similar to woodcutting.



Images (Clockwise from top left): Picasso, Matisse, Hokusai

## Celtic Art Inspiration

The decorative arts were important to early Celtic people. Elaborate patterns and symbols were used on weaponry, jewellery, coins and tools for many reasons, including superstition and status. By looking at Celtic shields, daggers, *torc* necklaces, bronze breastplates and similar items, children will notice that spiral patterns, knot designs and symbols of nature such as boar's heads, birds and trees occur frequently. For further reference, The British Museum's exhibition *Celts* examined Celtic Art and Design in depth and included many fascinating artefacts, which can be seen in their online exhibitions archive:

[http://www.britishmuseum.org/whats\\_on/past\\_exhibitions/2015/celts.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/whats_on/past_exhibitions/2015/celts.aspx)



Image Credit: Evening Standard

## PROJECT 1 – Printing a Celtic Panel

After showing your children different examples of printmaking and helping them to identify common themes and characteristics of Celtic art, explain that for this project, they will be creating a Celtic panel design of their own which they will print onto a brightly coloured background.

## LESSON 1 – Exploring Celtic Art through drawing

### RESOURCES

- A4 paper, pencils
- A4 Polystyrene sheets (From an educational suppliers)
- Block printing inks – black and other colours
- Range of rollers and flat trays (From an educational suppliers)
- A3 Cartridge paper or card
- Tissue paper – range of colours
- Glue Sticks



Image Credits (clockwise from top left): Homecrafts, GLSED, GLSED, Design Sponge

### DRAWING

At this early stage, children should always have plenty of time to try more than one idea, to make mistakes, and to reflect and evaluate on their work before coming up with a 'finished' design. However, their final designs will be more effective and make better prints if they are encouraged to include the following in their drawings:

- **A central symbol** – perhaps an aspect of nature, symbol of war, or warrior face.
- **A border** - with looping 'knotted' design
- **A background pattern** – spirals or other simple, regular design



## LESSON 2 – Making the printing plate and preparing the background paper



In this lesson the children will transfer their favourite design onto a polystyrene sheet. This is done fairly easily using a medium sharp pencil.

Children can draw freehand straight on to the sheet, using their design as a guide, or if they are less confident, they may place their design on top of the sheet and press gently to make a faint imprint underneath. They will then need to go back over their design directly onto the polystyrene.

Getting the correct amount of pressure to make a good groove can be a challenge for some children. Too much and they will go through the polystyrene, too little and they will not make an imprint sufficiently deep enough to print well. Have some spare pieces of polystyrene ready for children to practice on until they get the hang of it.

Image Credit: Alisa Burke

### Making a textured background

Prints can be made in any colour, directly onto plain paper - however these Celtic designs 'read' particularly well if they are printed in black ink, and look striking when printed onto a multi-coloured background.

As children finish transferring their designs onto polystyrene, put these safely aside while the children make their background sheet.

For this, use a piece of strong A3 paper or card. Children should mark out an area slightly bigger than their A4 printing block and make a tissue paper collage, randomly tearing sheets of tissue paper and making sure to stick down well with glue sticks. This needs to dry completely before the next lesson.



### LESSON 3 - Printing the Design

Ideally the printing process should be overseen by an adult working with small groups, for the best control of quality.

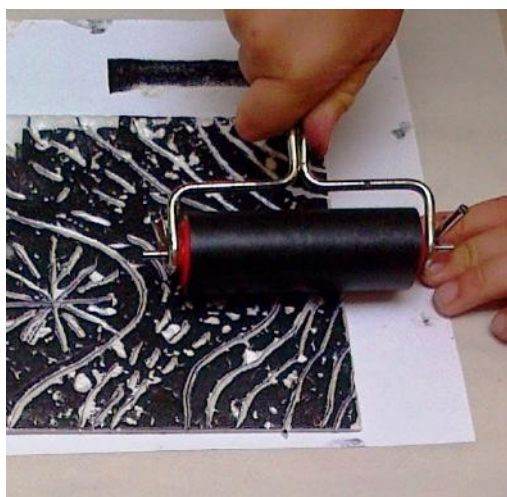
Designate one table to be a 'wet' table and another to be a 'dry' table.



On the wet table, squeeze some black printing ink into a flat tray and spread evenly across with a roller until it makes a sticky clicking sound.

Children are now ready to 'ink up' their polystyrene with a roller.

Roll ink evenly across the whole sheet, making sure you reach all edges and corners.



If too much ink is put on by accident, the excess can be taken off by pressing the block quickly onto some scrap paper. Ideally try to avoid getting too much ink into the grooves or the print will not be as effective.



When the polystyrene block is ready with ink, children should transfer over to the **DRY** table where their background print should be lying flat, ready for them.

Carefully, place the polystyrene sheet **INK SIDE DOWN** on top of the **tissue paper collage**.

Lay a large sheet of scrap over the whole thing. This will keep your paper clean and smudge free.



Now, with a **CLEAN, DRY roller**, roll over the sheet, pushing onto the polystyrene with nice even pressure.

When the polystyrene sheet is ready to be removed, discard the scrap paper.

Ask a partner to hold the background paper. Peel the polystyrene away from the top first.

Any tissue paper that comes away can be glued down later when the ink dries.

A good quality finished print should have solid, even areas of black ink, a clearly visible design, and the background colour will show up well through the lines of the design.

Lay the print in a safe, flat place to dry – printing ink takes longer than paint to fully dry and will be sticky for a number of days.

## **PROJECT 2: Making a String Relief Block**

Inspired by Celtic knots, this printing block design is particularly effective for creating borders – around display areas or even on costumes. The difference between this type of printing block and the polystyrene sheet, is that this one will print your design as a positive line, whereas the poly-block shows the design line as a negative.



### **RESOURCES**

- Strips of firm card
- Pencils
- String
- PVA glue and brushes

### **LESSON 1 – Designing and Making the Plate**

Children should design a Celtic-inspired pattern for the print – for this, spirals and simple symbols work really well. When they are ready, they should draw this lightly in pencil onto their piece of card to use as a guide.

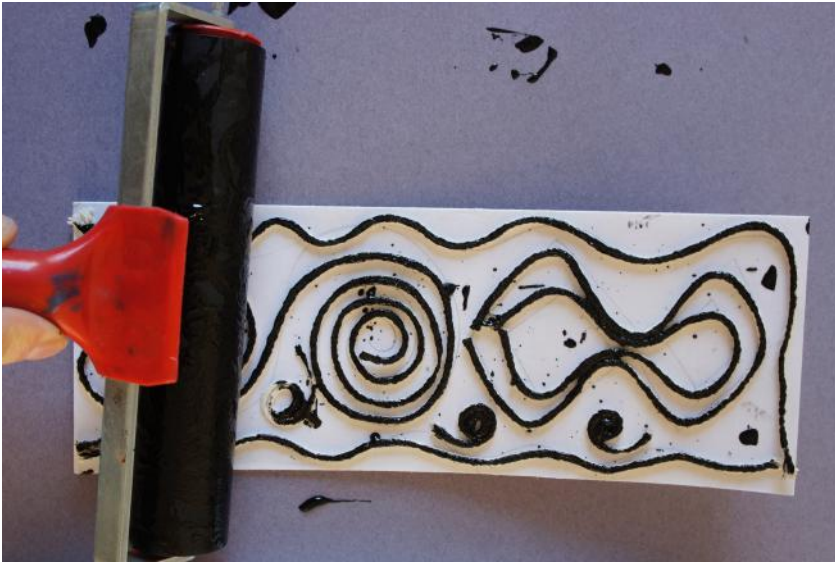
Next, coat the card **GENEROUSLY** with PVA glue – it can be done in sections if this is easier.

Using a long piece of string, gently guide the string to follow the pattern, cutting and joining where necessary.

Children may add other textures to their printing block – such as thick card cut into shapes – but for it to register on their prints, it must be a similar relief to the string.

Everything must be firmly glued down. Leave to dry overnight.

## LESSON 2 - Printing



As with the poly-block printing, create a wet and dry area in which to work

Load up your string relief block with ink by rolling over the block so that the string is coated.

Make your print by placing the string side of the block FACE DOWN onto your printing surface.

You can print onto plain paper or a background that has been decorated or coloured in some way beforehand.

The spirals should come out very effectively!



### MAKING MULTIPLE PRINTS

With both types of print, you do not have to discard the block. It is possible to make multiple prints from the same block straight away, if you don't wish to change colour.

### CHANGING INK COLOUR

With the polystyrene sheets, simply wash under running water to remove ink from the grooves and dry gently. With the string blocks, you must wait until the ink has dried before using a different colour.

**Jan Periton Dunning for The Primary Shakespeare Company  
February 2016**