

Activity 2.2 Woodblock Printing

Performance Objectives Students will become familiar with the traditional techniques of woodblock printing developed in China and how it was used for communication. Students will identify a message of importance to them, develop a woodblock, make prints, and distribute their “messages.” They will assess the effectiveness of their communication efforts by conducting a school survey.

Grade Level 9–12

Variation Grade Level 3–5

Essential Questions How have forms of communication evolved and affected ways of living?
How has China exported its ideas to other peoples over the course of history?
How does technology assist in the dissemination of information?
What Chinese breakthroughs and innovations have made a significant impact on world culture?

Standards **Social Studies**

World History

- Knowing important historic events and developments of past civilizations
- Interpreting and analyzing documents and artifacts related to significant developments and events in world history
- Studying major turning points in world history by investigating the causes and other factors that brought them about as well as their results
- Studying about different world cultures and civilizations, focusing on their accomplishments, contributions, values, beliefs, and traditions
- Understanding the roles and contributions of individuals and groups to social, political, economic, cultural, scientific, technological and religious practices and activities
- Viewing historic events through the eyes of those who were there, as shown in their art, writing, music, and artifacts

Civics, Citizenship, and Government

- Participating in school/classroom/community activities that focus on an issue or problem
- Preparing a plan of action that defines an issue or problem, suggests alternative solutions of courses of action, evaluates the consequences of each alternative solution or course of action, prioritizes the solutions based on

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established criteria, and proposes an action plan to address the issue or resolve the problem

Visual Arts

- Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes
- Taking advantage of the qualities of techniques and processes to enhance communication of experiences and ideas
- Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas
- Integrating visual, spatial, and temporal concepts with content to communicate intended meaning
- Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures

Time Required Allow at least two class periods for designing and cutting the blocks. An additional class period is needed for inking and pressing prints. One class period will be needed to develop a survey, and another will be required to interpret the results.

Materials Photocopies of the *Greater Sutra of the Perfection of Transcendent Wisdom* and **Introductory Questions** from the beginning of this section or the *Visible Traces* poster
Paper, pencil, and pen for designing blocks
Linoleum blocks for each student
Cutting instruments for each student
Rollers, ink pans, and brushes for applying ink
Ink and paper for pressing prints

Assessment Piece Block prints

Procedure

1. Block print technology was used in China as a means of spreading the Buddhist doctrine or to distribute political information. Disseminating blocks of text through this inexpensive procedure had a deep cultural impact. Distribute photocopies of the *Greater Sutra of the Perfection of Transcendent Wisdom* and discuss the **Introductory Questions**. Have students generate a list of topics relating to our society that might be circulated by similar means. They might include signs prohibiting drugs, alcohol, or smoking; political posters for upcoming campaigns; slogans promoting respect and responsibility issues for students; or community action posters related to local issues.
2. Distribute writing implements to students and have them create a page featuring an image and words expressing an important idea or goal they

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would like to share, in keeping with the tradition of woodblock sutra prints. Advanced students might create a message in Chinese calligraphy for a closer rendition of the printed sutra.

3. Remember that all images must be produced in reverse on the block in order to transfer when printed. Have students use a soft lead or drawing pencil to shade areas to be cut out of the block. These areas will remain white after printing.
4. Students should then transfer images by placing them facedown on blocks and gently rubbing on the other side of the paper. They should then remove the paper and use a pen to detail the image permanently before cutting.
5. Next students should cut out areas of blocks around words and images. Blades on cutting implements should always move away from the body.
6. Have students lay block in drip pan. They should then apply ink to the roller. Ink should be spread on a flat surface, rolled until evenly applied, and spread over block image.
7. Students should handle blocks carefully by edges to invert and press onto paper. They can experiment with color variations and thickness of application in producing a series of images.
8. They should then allow impressions to dry, laying them flat.
9. Have students post their works in a community area of the school and then develop a survey to determine the impact of their campaign.
10. Questions might include:
 - Did you see the block print messages?
 - How often in each school day?
 - Did you think about the message?
 - Did this provide new information?
 - Would this influence your opinion?
 - Is this an effective means of getting out a message or providing information?

Variation for Grades 3–5 Instead of linoleum blocks use Styrofoam blocks (4 x 6 in.) for each student (containers from grocery stores work well, but never recycle those used for meat products, as they may carry bacteria even after washing). Substitute clay sculpting tools or dull pencils for cutting instruments for each student. Have students design their images as noted above. Then instead of transferring the image onto linoleum blocks, have students press the image into Styrofoam squares using dull pencil or clay sculpting tools. Next, have them apply ink with rollers and press as per directions above.