Think Small... 

ACHIEVE SUCCESS!

by Hugh Petersen

A seashell, house fly, and bird tilted slightly and printed four times, create a kaleidoscopic effect for these sixth-graders' 12" x 12" prints.

I enjoy making linoleum block prints. Students are also excited about this project because they get to work with tools to carve the linoleum; for many this is a new experience. Because we work with tools that are sharp, I like to wait until the sixth grade before the students do a linoleum block print.

Printmaking—being able to make reproductions of a drawing from a carved flat surface—is one of the oldest graphic arts. Because of this history and the excitement of experiencing this art medium, I have incorporated it into my art curriculum.

The problem is, with the tightening budgets, it’s getting more difficult to provide this experience to my students. I would like them to experience carving a large piece of linoleum, but costs prohibit it.

This lesson lets the students create large prints using smaller pieces of linoleum. It also lets the students make a limited edition of their print which is an important aspect of printmaking. Printing an edition requires the students to be consistent with their prints: not over- or under-inking their blocks, and not making uneven or gray prints. This is a good learning experience for them, and they find out that printing requires practice.

For this lesson the students need to make four quality prints. The idea is to connect these four prints together to make it look like one. To do this we start with a 6" x 6" square piece of drawing paper. When the prints are put together I wanted it to look like the print was framed so we drew a 3/4-inch border on the edge of the square, along two sides. On this border edge, the students were allowed to draw any design they wanted for their frame.

After the frame border was drawn that left us a square shape to draw our subject. Within this square format we drew another square, the repetition of this square in our drawing adds interest and unity when we put the prints together. In this square format the students were to draw any subject of interest. Many drew their subject at an angle so when they put their prints together it was like a kaleidoscope effect.

After their drawings were complete, we transferred them to 6" x 6" pieces of linoleum, using carbon paper. Next, safety was stressed and demonstrated before the students began carving their linoleum. The students were then shown how to use a brayer to roll out the ink and apply it to their blocks.

We printed on 9" x 9" white drawing paper. To help achieve consistent prints we rubbed the back of the paper using the back of a spoon. The spoon is used like a baren, which is a tool used to rub on the back of the paper to make a good, strong print.

Finally, when the students completed four good-quality prints, we carefully cut them out and glued them together on a 12" x 12" piece of white tag board. The result looks like one big print. The students gain a lot from this printmaking experience.

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