

Learning through... activity!

We have made a LOT of prints with kids at the Bubbler, and we have learned a lot about what kind of learning happens when children engage in printmaking. Using the [Exploratorium's Learning Dimension Framework](#) as an observational tool, here of some of the learning themes you can expect to see in this activity:

Engagement

Making a great print takes time and often many attempts. We often see kids:

- Spending lots of time on their image and on their foam block
- Trying the process over and over to achieve the right result
- Showing lots of emotions! Frustration often at first and excitement when things work

Development of Understanding

Printmaking is an old and very well established art. By learning its mechanics, kids make lots of connections from the medium to what they already know.

- Showing excitement when realizing how to create their print
- Refining and explaining their strategies and understandings
- Connecting to prior knowledge or past experiences

Initiative

Printing, with the ability to make textures or abstract images, seems to hold less anxiety than drawing. We like it as a visual medium as we see lots of:

- Setting goals or posing problems (especially when working with texts
- Developing strategies for the best results
- Actively seeking feedback or inspiration from each other



Inspirational texts



The little chick
by John Lawrence



Once a mouse...
by Monica Brown



Seasons
by Blexbolex



Ghosts in the house/la Casa encantada
by Kazuno Kohara



Foam Block Printing Facilitation Guide

Our foam block printing kit is an easy spin on a classing printing project. It is a great way to introduce basic printmaking concepts and invites lots of creativity and multiple iterations of a project.

- Ages 5 and up
- Mid range facilitation
- 45 min to 1.5 hrs
- Drop in or preplanned programs
- Small or large scale workshops

Materials in this kit:

- Water based block printing ink
- Foam plates
- Brayers (printing rollers)
- Paper or cardstock
- Inexpensive baking trays
- Ball point pens
- Pencils
- Sharpie markers
- Metal putty knives
- Plastic table clothes
- Foam craft sheets with sticky backs (or foam craft shapes)
- Scissors
- Cardboard

Things to know:

Backwards?!
Foam block printing is an inverted printing process. Meaning, any text included must be etched backwards to appear the right way when flipped and printed... do you tell your learners this? Up to you! It can be an exploratory process if you have time for multiple iterations, or a trick you directly teach.

Multiple colored prints
Because foam sheets can be washed and dried easily, you can easily print with multiple colors in 1 session. You can even layer prints by carving some foam, making a print, washing your plate, then carving away more to add depth or character to your image.

Take the time
Kids always want to print their name first. It really isn't until the 2nd or 3rd iteration that deep ideas come to light. If you can, give the time for multiple trials or do the activity multiple days in a row.

Printing

Skills to model:

Positive vs. Negative space

In foam block printing, you carve away what you do not want to appear in ink. This is often a puzzle that kids need to tinker with to wrap their minds around. You can help by:

- Having examples of foam blocks and the prints they make to visualize
- Doing one together with kids input and ideas
- Examining the texts and thinking about what must have been carved away and what stayed to make the illustrations

Creating textures

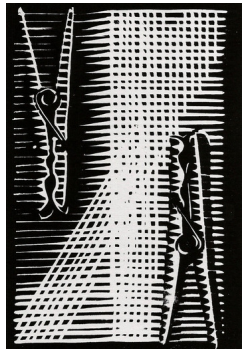
Often, print makers use different lines carved into their prints to create textures. Just playing with texture can be a great entry point for someone who is unsure of what to draw or cut out.



Cross Hatching



Lines



Weave

Layering Colors

By making an initial carving, printing, and then carving more foam away or by simply making 2 different blocks you can layer an image with different colors. This may be hard to explain without a visualization.



Printing Steps

1. Plan your image

Use a soft tipped sharpie marker to draw your image. It will not cut into the foam, so you can mess up and start over.

2. Carve your image

Using a pencil (wider lines) or a ball point pen (sharper lines) carve your image into the foam. We encourage kids to use the WHOLE plate, or else the make very tiny images right in the middle.

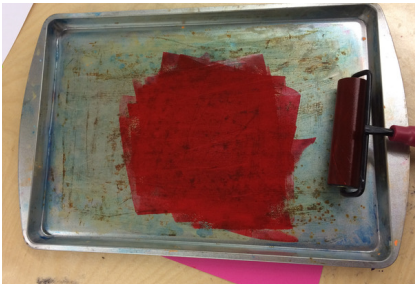
2. Or cut out your image

Using a pair of scissors, carefully cut out your image from the craft foam. Then, peel the adhesive backing off (or apply glue) to attach the foam to a cardboard base. You have now made a stamp! Move on to step 3



3. Ink up your roller

Squirt your ink into a baking tray (it helps keep the mess contained.) Use your "inking bayer" to roll the ink around until the roller is evenly covered.



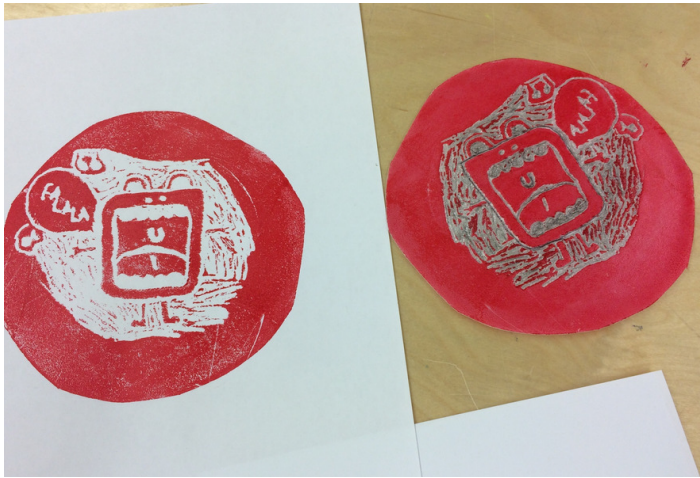
4. Ink up your block

Apply your ink to your foam plate as evenly as you can.



5. Make your print!

Turn your foam block over on a piece of paper. Use your "clean brayer" to press your block firmly on the paper. Peel back the foam plate to see your print!



Stamping vs. Carving

Our kit includes 2 ways of making foam blocks for printing. While making the blocks are different the printing process is the same.

- Carving used pencils & pens to press an image into a styrofoam plate
- Stamping involves cutting craft foam or using precut craft foam shapes and attaching them to cardboard backings.

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Best Practice: Clean up quick!

Water based block printing ink washes easily if you do not let it dry.

Use the metal putty knives to scrape it off your baking sheets and save your best foam blocks to use again or show as examples!

Best Practice: Set Up Stations

Have an inky station and a clean rolling station to make sure your brayers don't get inner mixed and to move kids down an assembly line when there are lots of prints to make.

