

# Christmas card factory



**H**ard to believe, but it's that time of year again. That time when we are tempted to get out the snowflake stencil and that old pattern for the Santa Claus made out of a paper plate. Also the time of year when we want the kids to make Christmas cards and often hold competitions to select a design that is sent off to a commercial printer for printing, and then sold to the parents. This year why not try the simple technique of impressed printing and get the kids to design and print their own unique cards – much more satisfying and much more in line with the key messages of the curriculum – that art should involve process, design, experimentation and learning about and developing skills in art techniques. Basically the curriculum mentions the following types of printmaking:

- printing with found objects;
- monoprinting;
- block printing;
- stencilling and templates;
- impressed printing; and
- others such as rubbing and marbling.





... use only one colour of printing ink with a variety of differently coloured papers to create interesting effects

In impressed printmaking a design is drawn into a block onto which ink is rolled. The ink, because it is thicker than paint, does not flow into the impressions created and stays on the surface of the block. Thus when pressed onto paper the impressions remain as lines. In working with children the best type of block to use is thin polystyrene sheeting which can be purchased commercially as *Pressprint* or *Safeprint*. Recycled materials such as polystyrene meat/vegetable trays or polystyrene pizza bases can also be used. The only other materials you need are water based printing ink, rollers, ordinary pencils and sheets of acetate on which to roll out the ink thinly.

To begin with, the first step is to get the children to create a design for their card – this is done through drawing. The main problem is that quite often the initial drawings that the children produce are too complex and include too much fine detail. You will need therefore to engage each child in a discussion about simplifying their original drawings into simpler designs.

Once a design has been created, this design is then drawn onto the polystyrene sheeting using an ordinary drawing pencil. Again you need to discuss with the children the importance of ensuring that the impressions they are making are deep enough. If these impressions are not deep enough the ink will inevitably seep into them and a good print will not be achieved.

Printing ink is then rolled out thinly on the acetate sheeting and the roller is used to roll the ink onto the prepared polystyrene printing block. It is only by trial and error that kids will discover how much ink is appropriate – but no panic if mistakes are made initially – the blocks can be washed, dried and used again. I always recommend to teachers that they set up a printing station in the classroom to which the children must go in order to roll the ink onto their blocks – the rule is that the inks and rollers remain at this station always. It takes a while to get through all the work, but in the end it is all worthwhile. I would recommend to any teacher who is going to try this out in the classroom to firstly experiment with the technique for him or herself – this is not one that you decide to do half an hour



before the event!

It is possible to use only one colour of printing ink with a variety of differently coloured papers to create interesting effects.

White or yellow printing inks work particularly well on black or darker coloured papers.

Inks can be mixed together while they are being rolled out to create multi-coloured prints.

Single coloured prints can be allowed to dry and extra colour added using colouring pencils, paint, drawing inks or good quality felt tipped markers.

The possibilities are endless. You can view a variety of printing techniques at [www.iamanartist.ie](http://www.iamanartist.ie)

Happy Christmas printmaking!



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