

# Architectural Letters

## art + language arts

One of the definitions of the word “architecture” is “the art and action of building or constructing.” In this lesson plan, students design and construct a 3-dimensional letter using one of their initials. The surface can be decorated with descriptive words and images that are personally meaningful and unique to the student’s identity.

Instead of wet, messy adhesive, this process uses paper packing tape to create papier mâché. This tape is inexpensive, easy, and tidy to use, and the finished letters are hard and durable.

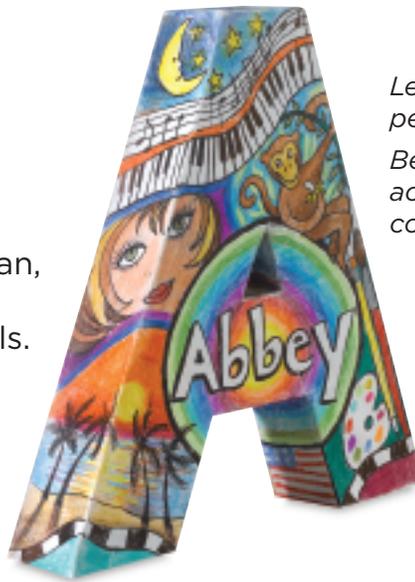
Adapt to older grade levels by having students design a logo or their own font, or have them work in teams to create words.

### Grade Levels 3-12

*Note: instructions and materials are based on a class size of 25 students. Adjust as needed.*

### Process

1. Design the shape of a letter on drawing paper using a pencil. The letter should be a minimum of 2-1/2” thick in all areas, but may be up to 14” x 22” in overall size. Cut the letter out and use it as a pattern to trace onto both chipboard pieces, then cut out.
2. Take one chipboard letter, right-side-up and glue paper cups onto it, staggering them up and down so the cups fit together, see (A). The more cups used, the stronger the letter will be. Allow glue to dry until tacky (or longer), then glue the top letter in place, being careful to align it with the bottom letter. Allow to dry completely.
3. Dampen a sponge and place it onto a plate. Cut paper tape into a variety of lengths. Dampen the adhesive on the tape and press an end on the



Left: “A” embellished with colored pencil and marker

Below: “D” embellished with acrylic gel medium and acrylic colors.



## Materials

All-Purpose Chipboard, single thick, 22” x 28” (13115-2222); need one sheet per student, cut in half to 14” x 22” pieces

Paper cups, 5-oz bath size

Fiskars® Student Scissors (57016-1065); need one per student

Blick® White Sulphite Drawing Paper, 60-lb (10209-1009); need one sheet per student

Household sponge

Gummed Kraft Paper Tape, 2” x 600-ft roll (24118-1002); share 4 rolls across classroom

### Select Materials for Decoration, including:

Blickrylic™ Gesso, quart (00711-1017)

Faber-Castell® Red-Line Colored Pencils, (20553-1036)

Blick® Broadline Water-Based Markers (21224-0089)

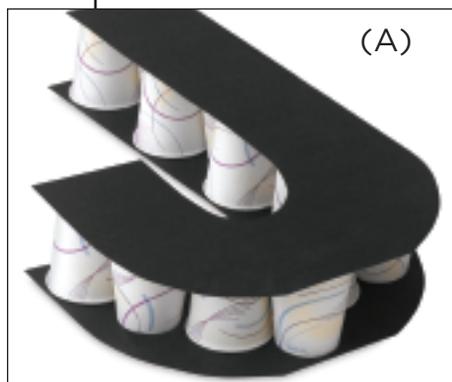
Roylco® Paint Scrapers (04986-1004)

Colour Shaper™ Kid’s Set (04935-0601)

Sargent® Metallic Acrylic Colors, assorted colors (00730-)

Blickrylic™ Student Acrylics, assorted colors (00711-)

Blickrylic™ Gel Medium, quart (00711-1007)



## Process, continued

top side. Smooth gently around and adhere it to the back side. Continue until all surfaces are completely covered with at least two layers of paper tape. Apply the tape as smoothly as possible, avoiding excessive overlapping. The letter will look like (B).

4. As an option, apply two coats of acrylic gesso to make the surface white and help seal any edges. Allow the gesso to dry between coats.
5. Embellish the surface of the letter with descriptive words, images and symbols that are meaningful to the student's personal identity. Some options for surface decoration include:

**Drawing:** Coating the packing tape with acrylic gesso will create a smooth, white surface for drawing with colored pencils or markers; see example on page 1.

**Collage:** Collect photos, magazine cut-outs, colorful paper, tissue and more. Apply them decoupage-style to the surface of the letter. Gesso is not needed as a primer for this technique.

**Painting:** Priming the surface with gesso first will make colors brighter and easier to apply. Use acrylic or premium-grade tempera colors to create designs.

**Metallic/Gel Architectural Letter:** Working on one side of the letter at a time, use a plastic knife or craft stick to spread gel medium to about 1/16" thickness across the surface. Use paint scrapers, modeling tools and other items to create words, textures and designs in the gel. Gel will appear white when wet but will be clear when dry. After all sides of the letter are textured and dry, paint them with black acrylic paint and allow them to dry. Sponge metallic color over the black paint.

## Options

1. Older students can design their own fonts or logos, or work in teams to form words with their architectural letters.
2. Instead of paper packing tape, use [Activa® Rigid-Wrap Plaster Cloth](#) (333507-1004) to cover the letter form, see (C). When dry, letters will be very hard and may be painted and embellished with any of the ideas listed above.



(B)



(C)

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## National Standards

Content Standard #1 — Understanding and applying media, techniques and processes

**K-4** Students use different media, techniques and processes to communicate ideas, experiences and stories

**5-8** Students intentionally take advantage of the qualities and characteristics of art media, techniques and processes to enhance communication of their experiences and ideas

**9-12** Students conceive and create works of visual art that demonstrate an understanding of how the communication of their ideas relates to the media, techniques and processes they use

Content Standard #2 — Using knowledge of structures and functions

**K-4** Students use visual structures and functions of art to communicate ideas

**5-8** Students employ organizational structures and analyze what makes them effective or not effective in the communication of ideas

**9-12** Students create artworks that use organizational principles and functions to solve specific visual arts problems

Content Standard #3 — Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols and ideas

**K-4** Students select and use subject matter, symbols and ideas to communicate meaning

**5-8** Students use subjects, themes and symbols that demonstrate knowledge of contexts, values and aesthetics that communicate intended meaning in artworks

**9-12** Students apply subjects, symbols and ideas in their artworks and use the skills gained to solve problems in daily life