

Block-Print Koinobori

Carp Streamers celebrate children in Japan — and around the world!

(art + social studies)

In Japan, the arrival of May is heralded by the appearance of flying fish: carp-shaped windsocks known as “Koinobori” flown in honor of Children’s Day or “Tango no Sekku” (originally Boy’s Day) on May 5th.

The carp is considered the strongest and most spirited of fish, because it fights its way upstream against strong currents. The tradition of flying Koinobori outside homes began as a way to honor the sons living within so that they would grow up healthy and courageous like a carp. Modern Koinobori are often available in sets that represent the entire family.

Block printing, specifically wood block, also has deep roots in Japanese art. The script style of Japanese lettering was better suited to this printing method than that of movable-type presses, so books and illustrations retained a certain artistic quality even when mass-produced.

In this lesson, students design a “scale”-shaped block from soft block printing material and apply it repetitively to outdoor-safe fabric that has been cut in the shape of a fish. Add details like eyes, fins, and a tail using metallic and sparkle paint, and the Koinobori is ready to hang and “swim” through the breeze!

GRADES 3-12 Note: instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

1. Cut Smart-Fab into 12" x 16" pieces, one piece per student (120 pieces per roll, cut larger if desired). Smart-Fab is a strong, non-woven fabric that is waterproof and durable enough for outdoor display.
2. Using teacher’s shears or a paper trimmer, cut Eco Karve into 2" x 2" pieces. Eco Karve is made from 100% recycled materials and is latex-free.

Process

1. Design a “scale” shape on printing blocks. Use a soft pencil to make the design or trace one of the scale shape templates on page 4 using graphite transfer paper.



Materials

Smart-Fab™ Art and Decoration Fabric, assorted colors, 48" x 40-ft roll (62500-); share one roll among class

Inovart™ Eco Karve Printing Plates, size 12" x 18" (40424-1006); share one among class

Inovart™ Quick Release Lino Cutter, handle with 2 blades (40221-1002); need one per student

Foam Brush, 1" (05114-1001); need one per student

Blickrylic® Student Acrylics, quarts, recommend Block Out White (00711-1087) and Mars Black (00711-2047), plus assorted colors; share among class

Plaid® Mod Podge® Sparkle Finish, 8-oz (02916-1005); share one among class

Aleene's® Quick Dry Tacky Glue, 4-oz (23884-1104); share 3 among class

Hygloss™ Book Rings, 2", package of 50 (64203-1002); need one per student

Creativity Street® Embroidery Floss, set of 24 skeins (63100-1009); share one among class

Blunt Tapestry Needles, #18, package of 12 (66903-1009); need one per student

Optional Materials

Sargent® Metallic Acrylics, assorted colors (00730-)

Welded Macramé Ring, 5" diameter (66909-9005)

Bench Hook (42904-0000)

Loew-Cornell™ Transfer Paper, graphite, pkg of four 9"x 13" sheets (10501-2220)

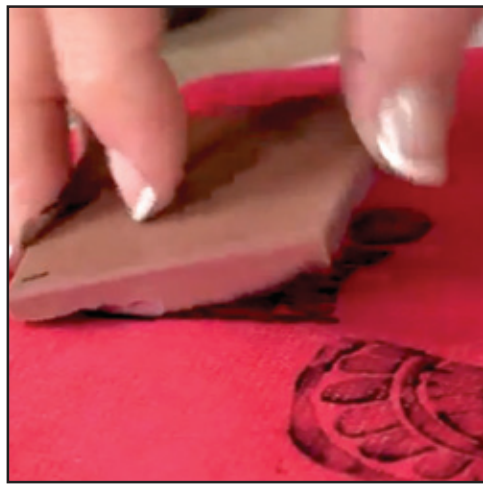
Galvanized Wire, 100-ft roll, 20 Gauge (33405-1020)

Wooden Dowel 1/4" dia x 12", pkg of 12 (60448-1412)





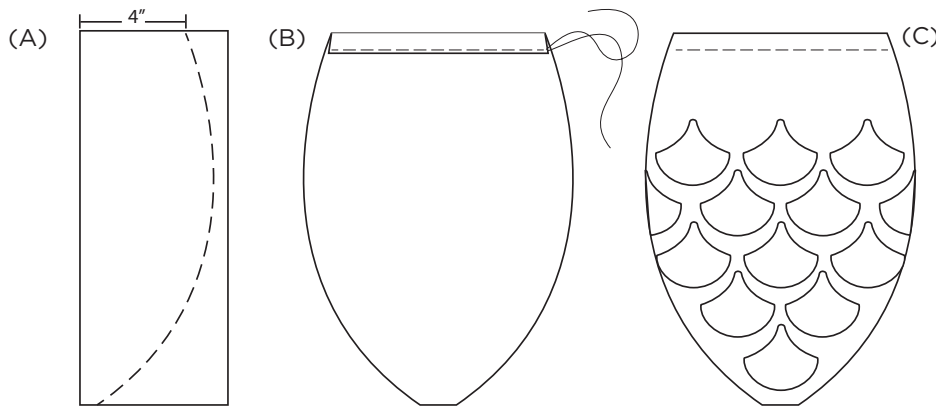
Step 1: Design and carve a scale shape on block printing material.



Step 2: Apply acrylic paint evenly to the scale shape. Make a print on the center of the fish's back, then fill the body with scale prints.



Step 3: Embellish with bright colors, metallic paints, and glitter. Use the leftover fabric to make a tail.



Process, continued

2. Carve the negative space away from the outside of the scale using a square gouge linoleum cutter. Cut the inside design with a V-shaped cutter.
SAFETY NOTE: Cutting tools are sharp and should be handled with care. Always place the hand holding the printing block behind the hand holding the cutter. For safest cutting practice, use a bench hook as a stop for the block, instead of holding it. Place one end over the edge of a table to stabilize it.
3. Fold the Smart-Fab swatch in half vertically, making a small mark 4" from the fold on one end. This will indicate the amount of fabric needed to create the mouth. Draw a curved line from that mark to the other end of the fabric to create the belly of the fish, see (A). Cut the line and save the excess fabric for a fin and tail.
4. Unfold the fabric so it lies flat. Turn 1" of fabric down at the top (where the mouth will be). Stitch

or glue a pocket, leaving it open enough to feed the book ring through, see (B). Place the fish on a piece of scrap cardboard, a plastic tablecloth or paper towels to protect surfaces.

5. Use a foam brush to evenly coat the scale shape with acrylic paint. Make a test print or two on a paper towel to determine amount of paint and pressure.
NOTE: for best results, use Block-Out White on darker fabrics and Mars Black on light-colored fabric.
6. Position the paint-loaded scale in the center of the fish's back, leaving approximately 4" for a head and eyes, see (C). Press firmly with hands, applying even pressure, then lift off. Repeat with a print directly next to the first one. Reload the paint and print scales until the fish is covered, then clean the block with water and allow the fish to dry.
NOTE: the print will reveal the fabric's texture — expect imperfections.



Step 4: Use a book ring to make the fish's mouth. Glue the sides of the fish together along the edge, incorporating the tail.

7. Embellish the fish with brightly colored acrylic paint, metallics, and glitter paint. Create eyes and gills. Cut a tail and fin from the leftover fabric and paint them to match. Allow to dry.
8. Open a book ring and insert it into the pocket formed for the mouth. Gather the fabric and stitch or glue it together to close the mouth around the ring.
9. Position the tail and fin in place and stitch or glue along the belly of the fish on the outside edge. Do not glue the entire body of the fish together or it will not function as a windsock.
10. Twist wire around the ring mouth to make a strong hanger and place where it can catch air currents.

Options

- For koinobori that will be used indoors, tie to a 12" dowel as a "pole".
- As an alternative to block-print scales, paint designs directly using a brush.
- Full-size windsocks can be created using 24" x 30" pieces of Smart-Fab and 5" macramé hoops.



National Standards for Visual Arts Education

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

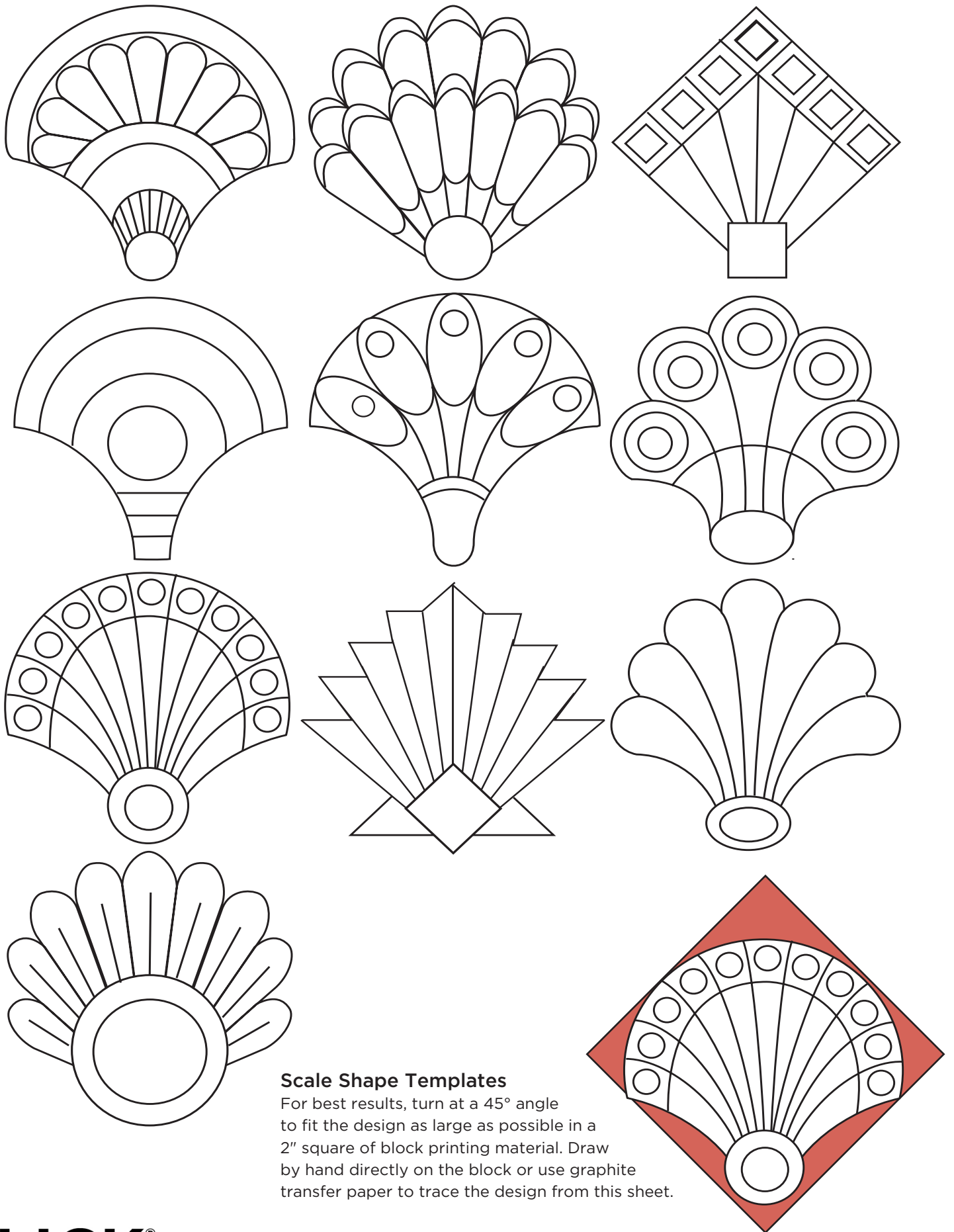
9-12 Students conceive and create works of visual art that demonstrate an understanding of how the communication of their ideas relates to the media, techniques, and processes they use

Content Standard #4 — Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures.

K-4 Students know that the visual arts have both a history and specific relationships to various cultures

5-8 Students analyze, describe, and demonstrate how factors of time and place (such as climate, resources, ideas, and technology) influence visual characteristics that give meaning and value to a work of art

9-12 Students describe the function and explore the meaning of specific art objects within varied cultures, times, and places



Scale Shape Templates

For best results, turn at a 45° angle to fit the design as large as possible in a 2" square of block printing material. Draw by hand directly on the block or use graphite transfer paper to trace the design from this sheet.