

Gouache and Wood-Burned Designs

This handsome technique introduces two very old art mediums to students. “Pyrography” is a term meaning “writing with fire” — the traditional art of using a heated tip or wire to burn or scorch designs onto natural materials such as wood or leather. Gouache is a traditional opaque watercolor paint that dries with a matte finish, like a fine artist’s grade tempera. The colors may be muted with white or thinned to a translucent wash to paint over the burned outlines.

Lower grade levels can use dark brown markers to give the appearance of burned lines.

Grade Levels 3-12

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

Process

1. Distribute blocks of wood. Look for design inspiration within the grain. Sand the edges of the wood to remove any roughness.
2. Plan a simply-designed landscape, portrait or abstract picture. Draw designs on a 6" x 8" piece of drawing paper.
3. Place a piece of graphite paper dark side down on the block of wood. Place drawing face up on top. Align edges and use small pieces of masking tape in the corners to hold the papers to the board temporarily. Trace the design with the pencil, then remove the papers and tape. The design will be transferred to the board. Graphite paper may be reused many times.
4. Practice using the woodburning tool on an old piece of wood first. A combination of burn time and pressure will produce different lines. Although the tools have a built-in stand, it is a good idea to protect tabletops from accidental contact with the heated tip.



Materials

Unfinished Wood Blocks (42902-1001), 12-piece package 6" x 8", need one per student

Reeves® Gouache (00807-0249), share two 24-tube sets across classroom

Wall Lenk™ Creative Woodburning Pen (60425-1025), share 3 across class

3M Production Sandpaper, fine (34916-1303), share one package across class

Dynasty® Golden Nylon Cannister, assorted brushes, (05121-9144), share across class

Round 10-Well Trays (03041-1010), share one between two students

Pentel® Color Pen, Brown (21211-8031), need one per student

3M® Tartan™ Masking Tape (24113-1094), share across class

Sally's Graphite Transfer Paper, (12918-1009) Box of 12, 18" x 24" sheets on a roll, cut to 6" x 8" pieces, need one piece per student

Blick White Sulphite Drawing Paper, 60-lb (10209-1003), 9" x 12" sheets, need 1/2 sheet per student

Blick Economy Graphite Pencils (20302-2009), box of 12, need one per student

Blair® Digi-Finish Clear Protective Coating, Matte (21722-1020), share one 12-oz can across class

Water cups and paper towels for brush cleaning

Place the wood block and tool on a metal cooking sheet.

5. Burn the design into the wood using the basic point included with the tool set. Burn directly over the gray transfer lines, using slow, even pressure. Expect lines to be somewhat inconsistent in depth, width and color.
6. Distribute 1/4" dia. dots of paint into palettes. Include white, in a slightly larger quantity. When mixing with white, add small amounts of the color to the white until the desired shade is achieved. Gouache may be thinned with water to make translucent "washes". It's best to apply the color to the wood in thin layers, so that the grain shows through. More color can be added on top if it appears too light. Gouache will absorb quickly into the wood, so dry time is minimal.
7. To finish, spray surface with matte coating to seal. Seal the back of the wood as well to prevent warping.

Options

- Attach a [Sawtooth Hanger](#) (18959-1002) to the back of the wood block for easy display.
- Combine woodburning and gouache with wood carving and sculpture.

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National Standards

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

K-4 Students use art materials and tools in a safe and responsible manner

5-8 Students select media, techniques, and processes; analyze what makes them effective or not effective in communicating ideas; and reflect upon the effectiveness of their choices

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

K-4 Students explore and understand prospective content for works of art

5-8 Students integrate visual, spatial, and temporal concepts with content to communicate intended meaning in their artworks

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