



Image Credit: Nora S. Unwin, Eggplant, n.d., Wood engraving, 1996.5.27

Botanical Print from Observation

OVERVIEW

This lesson will focus on student's ability to observe a botanical life cycle, illustrate a unique point of view, then translate that to a linoleum block to create a series of prints.

STANDARDS

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How can we create a unique point of view for a botanical print?

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students Will:

- Observe living plant material
- Inspect the plant through a microscope (if possible)
- Measure various parts of a plant
- Create a botanical print of their own

STANDARDS: FOURTH GRADE | VISUAL ART AND SCIENCE

4th Grade | VISUAL ARTS 3, 4 | SCIENCE 9

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ART DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- How was this work of art created?
- Do you notice any unique detail about the carvings?
- Which direction do the carved lines follow? Do they just go straight up and down or side to side?

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Nora Spicer Unwin was born on February 22, 1907 in Surrey, England, where she spent her childhood. She and her twin sister were the youngest of a family of five. The Unwin family had for several generations been involved in printing and publishing, and the children were exposed to the process of book-making from an early age. Both Nora and her twin sister loved art and music as children, and their parents encouraged the artistic tendencies of their daughters. After finishing high school, Nora had eight years of specialized training in a variety of artistic techniques — pottery, wood carving, embroidery, and etching and engraving, among others. Of these techniques, she enjoyed wood engraving and illustration the most. She received her first book illustration commission in 1925 at the age of eighteen and illustrated two more books before she graduated from the Royal College of Art in 1932 with a diploma in design.

From 1933 to 1946 Unwin served as a part-time teacher as well as a painter and illustrator of children's books. She attributed the five years spent with a group of children in

the countryside during World War II as a great learning experience, insofar as the children's criticism of her work taught her what they liked and did not like about her pictures. In 1937 Unwin met Elizabeth Yates, an author for whom she illustrated a number of books. The two women eventually became close friends, and when Unwin emigrated to the United States in 1946 she settled in New Hampshire, where Yates and her husband owned a farm.

Unwin moved from New Hampshire in 1956 to Wellesley, Massachusetts, where she served as art director of the Tenacre Country Day School for two years. Moving back to New Hampshire, Unwin then taught at the Sharon Art Center. In the later years of her life she concentrated more on her painting, printmaking and teaching than on book illustration. Unwin died on January 5, 1982.

Unwin illustrated more than one hundred books by other authors, most of them for children, and wrote and illustrated nine of her own. In the course of her long career she won awards from such prestigious organizations as the Society of American Graphic Artists (1951), the National Association of Women Artists (1953), and the National Academy of Design (1958), as well as many others. Among the many books she illustrated were such classics as *The Secret Garden* (1949) and George MacDonald's *The Princess and the Goblin* (1951). Two of the books she illustrated for Elizabeth Yates won special distinction: *Mountain Born* (1943) was a Newbery honor book, and *Amos Fortune, Free Man* (1950) was the Newbery winner for 1951.

CURRICULUM CONTENT

The emphasis of botanical illustration is on science rather than visual art. Botanical illustration is always a true and lifelike representation of a plant. It should highlight a plant's particular distinguishing features which enable botanists to tell one plant from another.

Botanical illustrations should be based on:

- observation of living plant material
 - inspection of plant features using a microscope, if possible
 - accurate measurement of the different parts of the plant
 - a very good understanding of the morphology of the plant
- shapes and form are a great help in distinguishing one plant from another



Botanical Print from Observation

ART INSTRUCTION

MATERIALS

plant, fruit, vegetable - something to observe and draw; blank paper, pencil, linoleum block, printer's ink or stamp pads, linoleum carving tools, brayer

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1** Trace the outline of your linoleum block onto a piece of paper. This will ensure that your drawing will fit onto your carved surface later on.
Draw your specimen from observation. When drawing from life it is essential to break the subject down into manageable parts. Consider the plant before you – do not process the plant as you would a coloring sheet, only seeing the outside lines. Delve into the shapes that encompass the subject. By breaking the drawing down into basic shapes first, you will then be able to go in and add in the fine detail.
- 2** Once you have your initial drawing complete, review Nora Unwin's Eggplant print. Notice how her carved marks curve around the eggplant's surface giving the vegetable dimension and alluding to its dimensional reality. Consider your initial drawing – do you need to add in additional lines to correctly convey your subject matter?
- 3** To transfer your drawing onto the linoleum block, simply place your drawing face down on the block. Using tape or a firm hand, secure the paper to the block so it does not move. Using the handle of your linoleum carving tool, rub over the entire back of your drawing. Peek occasionally to ensure that your pencil lines are transferring well enough onto the block.
Note: Your art will be backwards on the linoleum block. This is correct! A print is a mirror image, so when you ink later on your artwork will show correctly in your final print.
- 4** Start carving your block! Safety warning: the linoleum carving tools can cut your skin! Be mindful of where your hands and fingers are at all times. To safely hold your block while you carve, put your hand to the side or behind the tool. Your hand should never act as a bumper wall to stop your tool.

When carving in linoleum, your blade should resemble a "v" or "u". The blade needs to be flat and parallel to the linoleum block and glide across the surface. To practice, begin cutting in an area without much detail, like the background. It will give you a feel for how best to handle the tool and successfully carve your block.

Once you have finished carving out your block, it is time to ink. If you are using printer's ink and a brayer, you will need to put a small dollop of ink on a flat surface and roll it out. Your ink should not be thick and bumpy – if the ink is applied to the linoleum too thick the ink will get into your carved lines ensuring that your print is a mess.

Roll the ink onto the top of the linoleum block. Once the entire surface is covered, carefully place a blank piece of paper onto the block and rub over the entire surface with a firm, flat hand.

Grab one corner of the paper and slowly pull the paper up from the block.

Voila, a print! Printmaking artists generally write at the bottom of the print. For example, Nora Unwin wrote from left to right: Eggplant Ed/50 Nora S. Unwin.

Consider doing the same for your work of art, start with an edition of 5 prints numbering each print as 1/5, 2/5, 3/5, etc. Sign your name and initials and put a title on there for good measure.

EXPAND

If you use oil based ink, once your print dries you can use watercolors and give your print some color.

If you print on a larger piece of paper than your linoleum, it will give you a border to write information about the plant. Such as, labeling the plant and describing its life cycle and characteristics.

High Point University professor and artist Lea Lackey-Zachmann creates vibrant microscopic paintings. Paint what you see in the microscope to accompany your realistic botanical print.

TERMS

BOTANY - the study of plants.

REALISTIC - art work that attempts a photographic likeness of the subject matter; sometimes refers to the choice of subject that is commonplace as opposed to courtly and idealized.

MICROSCOPE - a very powerful magnifying glass

PRINTMAKING - where an artist creates an image using one material, (for instance wood, metal plate, styrofoam etc..) by etching, or carving lines into that material base.

OBSERVATION -the act of careful watching and listening

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