MAKING A MONOPRINT

ABOUT PRINTING PLATES

Printing is a confusing word.

- **Printing** is what you do when you make squiggly letters with a pencil.
- "**Print**" is the name of the key you push on the computer when you want a "hard copy" of what you wrote.
- A **printer** is the name of a machine that makes copies.

Here's our definition:

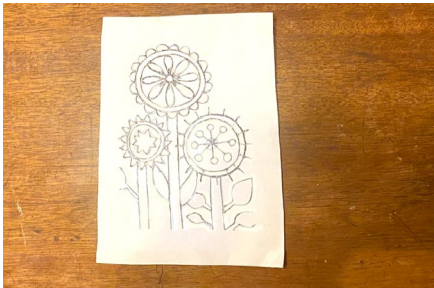> **Printing is a way to make copies of words and pictures.**

Nowadays, most printing is done by computers, but years ago, we used printing plates in machines called presses. With a printing plate in it, a machine can make many copies of one page very quickly. Printing plates are still used in some printing machines.

WHAT YOU NEED
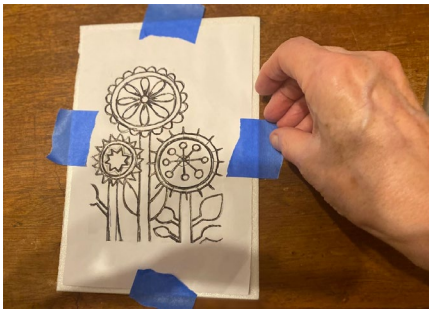
- A sponge
- Washable markers

- Ballpoint pen (no gel pens, no sharpies)
- Blue painter's tape
- A piece of styrofoam (throwaway pieces from supermarket packaging are fine)
- Paper (coated paper is best but typing paper will work)

WHAT YOU DO

Step 1

Cut your paper so that it measures 5x7". Draw a picture on it with a pencil. Leave a one inch border on all sides. Keep your design simple.
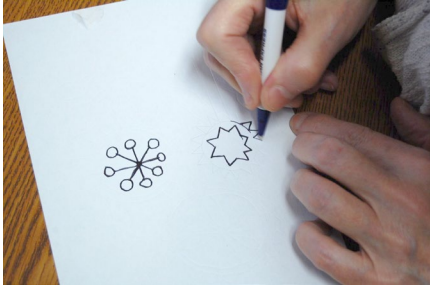

Step 2

Cut your piece of styrofoam so that it measures 5x7". Put your drawing on the styrofoam. Use the painter's tape to make sure it's secure.

Step 3

Trace your pencil lines with the ballpoint pen, pressing down fairly hard. Your pen will make an indentation on the styrofoam.

Go over the lines again, making sure they are smooth and even. Don't press so hard that you rip the paper.

Step 4

Remove the paper. Do another round of tracing, filling in the indentations on the styrofoam with the pen. You're turning the lines into trenches.

Step 5

Color your picture with markers, just like you would in a coloring book. Use your lightest color first and your darkest color last.
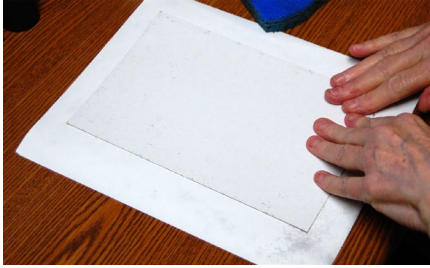
Step 6

When you finish, take a moment to admire your printing plate.
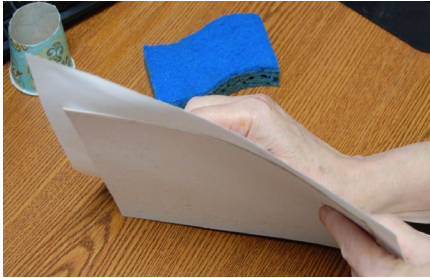
Step 7

Get your piece of paper, a sponge, and some water. Dip the sponge in the water and squeeze most of the water out. The sponge should be wet but not dripping.

Drag the sponge across your paper, one direction first, up-and-down, and then left-to-right. The paper should be glossy, with a bit of shine, but there should be no really wet areas.
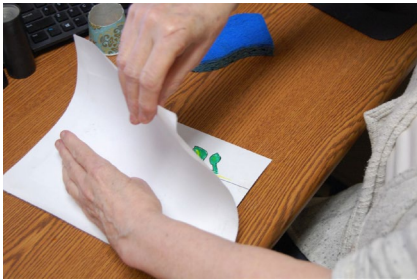
Step 8

Take your printing plate and turn it upside-down. Place it on top of the paper and press down. Move your fingers as you press, almost as if you're massaging the paper. Make sure nothing slides around.

Step 9

Carefully flip the Styrofoam and the paper over. Massage the other side. You'll start to see the edges of your printing plate.

Step 10

Slowly peel off the paper. You should see that the color on the printing paper has disappeared, and the paper displays a copy of your image.

Step 11

Take a moment to admire your first monoprint.

If your print looks faint and speckled, your paper was too dry or you didn't have enough marker on the printing plate. Try again. (Making mistakes is how we learn.)

That's it! You have your first monoprint.

To make another monoprint with the same printing plate, color it in with different markers and follow steps 6-10. (If there's a little too much color on the plate, just wash it off under the tap.)