

Prints Charming

You can introduce your kids to the magic of printmaking with some everyday objects and a little paint

Written by Kris Bordessa

EVER SINCE MY BOYS, Brad, age 11, and Evan, eight, were little, we've had fun printmaking together. They love how easy it is to get results worthy of framing, and they're hooked on the element of surprise (you never know exactly what each print will look like). Over the years, we've tried all sorts of printing techniques. When Evan was four, he even tried making Bubble Wrap prints on his bare belly! The following pages feature some of our favorite materials and techniques, all of them simple enough for even very young artists. We bet you can't stop after just one print!



Stocking Prints

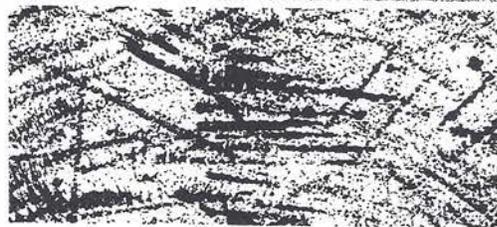
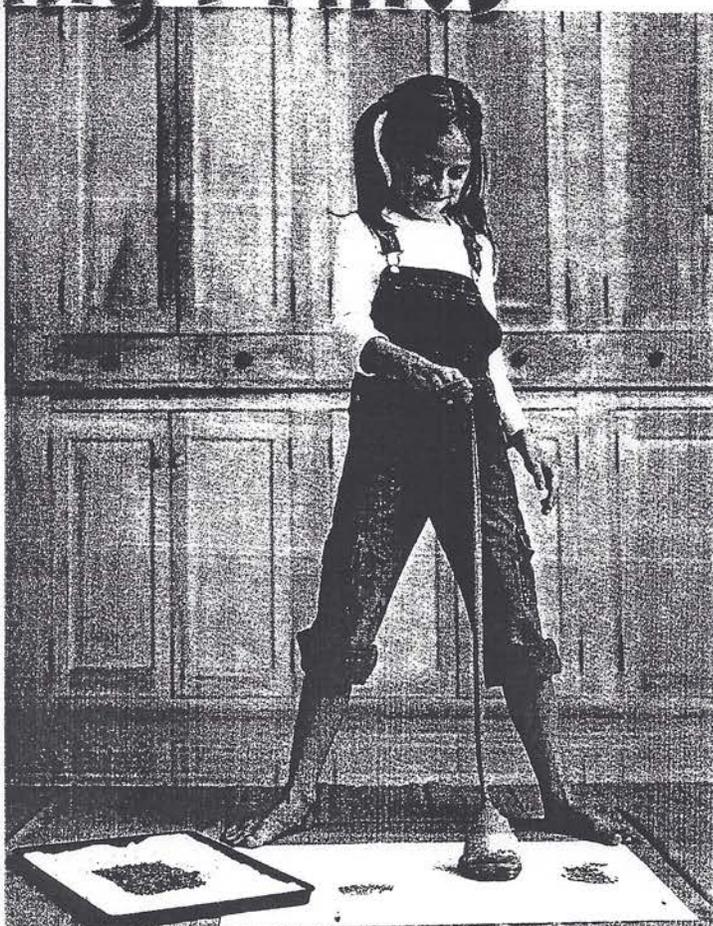


Bounce a stocking full of uncooked, broken spaghetti, or experiment with beans and other items



This yo-yo-like technique harnesses the stretchiness of panty hose to create a one-of-a-kind printing tool

1. To protect your floor, cover a large area with newspaper or a drop cloth. Lay down a large sheet of paper (avoid newsprint; it's too thin).
2. Cut a leg off an old pair of panty hose and fill the toe with $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 cup of uncooked, broken spaghetti. To weight the base for a good yo-yo bounce, pour about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of sand or clean cat litter into a plastic sandwich baggie, knot it closed, and drop it on top of the spaghetti. Tie a knot in the hose to hold everything in place.
3. Line a cookie sheet with an old kitchen towel that's been dampened. Spread several tablespoons of washable paint such as tempera (or, for different effects, liquid watercolors or glitter



- tempera) onto the towel. If the paint seems too thick, thin it with water. The towel will act as a stamp pad and help control the amount of paint picked up by the panty hose. (It takes very little paint to create a nice print.)
4. From a standing position, your child can bounce the panty hose onto the paint pad and then repeatedly onto the paper.

FUN VARIATIONS Replace the spaghetti with dry rice, beans, sand, bits of sponge, foam peanuts, or anything else you like.

JUST ADD PAINT

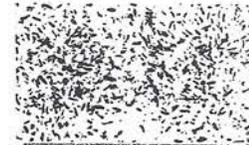
Looking for even more ways to print? Try the household items below with your child's favorite colors of tempera paint.

Bubble Wrap: Tape a piece of Bubble Wrap to your work surface, bubble side up. Paint a design on it, then press paper onto the painted surface to lift a print. Or



create a Bubble Wrap mitt by folding a rectangle of Bubble Wrap in half (bubble side out) and taping all but one side closed. Slip on the mitt, dip it in paint, then press on your paper.

Rice: Fill an old cookie sheet with dry rice. Mix 2 parts water and 1 part paint in a spray bottle. Squirt the rice until it's covered. Press a piece of paper onto the rice to



lift a print. If rice sticks to the finished print, let the paint dry, then gently rub off the rice.

Textured textiles: Use a brush or spray bottle



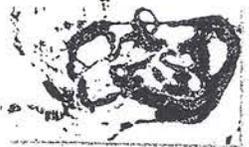
(see rice) to paint upholstery scraps, carpet remnants, burlap, or lace. Press the paper onto the painted surface to lift a print.

Corrugated cardboard: Feel the top layer off a piece of corrugated



cardboard to reveal the ridges. Use a sponge or sponge brush to paint the ribs (avoid the valleys). Press a piece of paper onto the painted cardboard to lift a print.

String: Dip various types of string into paint. Lay the string on newspaper



in an abstract design. Set the paper on which you want to print on top of the string, then press down to lift a print.

Finger paints: Have your kids finger-paint on a tray or cookie sheet (use finger paint rather than tempera). Place a piece



of paper on the finished finger painting and rub the entire surface with the palm of your hand or a rolling pin. Carefully remove the paper.

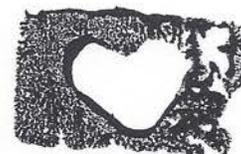
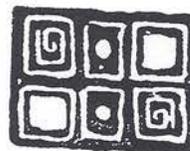
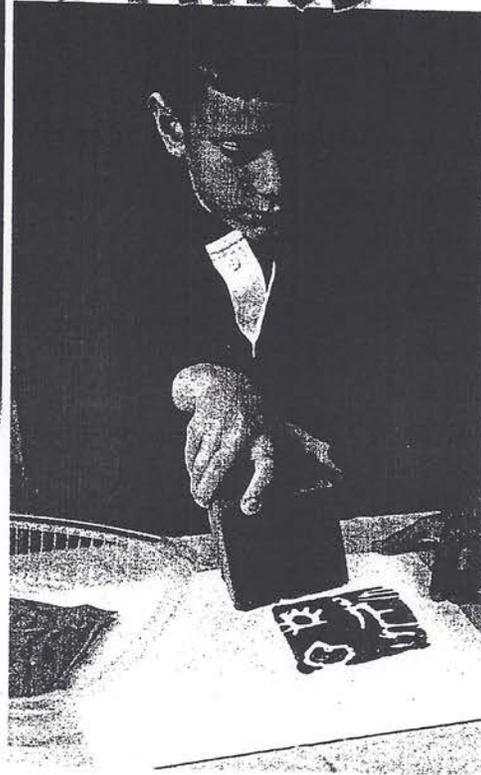
Floral Foam



Since floral foam's soft enough to carve without a knife, it's a fun and safe alternative to woodcut or linoleum-block prints

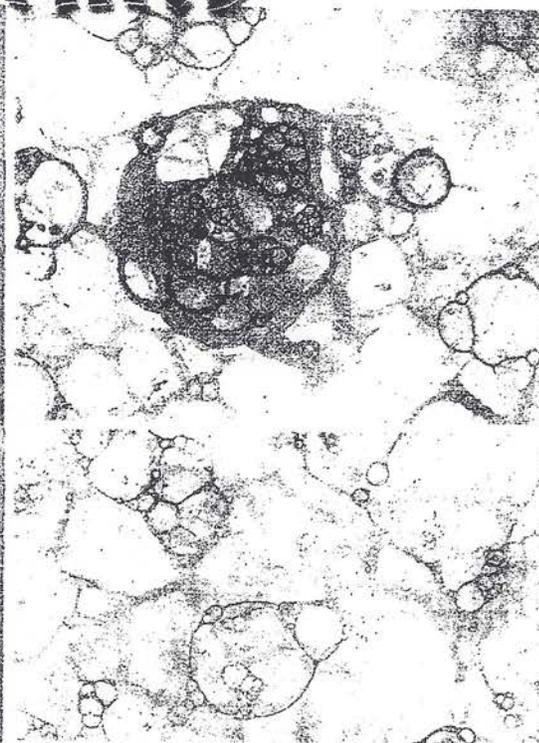
1. Protect your work surface.
2. Using a chopstick or dull pencil, carve a design into a block of floral foam (available for a few dollars at craft or florist shops and some discount chain stores). Very fine lines will not print well; carved lines should be about 1/8 inch wide and deep. Use a small, soft paintbrush to gently remove any foam that gets stuck in the carved lines.
3. Once the carving is complete, cover the bottom of a disposable shallow container (the kind with a smooth bottom, such as a takeout salad container) with a thin layer of tempera paint. Too much paint will result in an unclear image.
4. Lay out your paper. This works on all but the flimsiest papers.
5. Press the carved side of the foam block into the paint until it's evenly coated. If any of the design fills with paint, use a pencil tip to clear it. Press the foam block firmly onto the paper, then lift it off carefully to avoid smearing. Before changing colors, clear the block by repeatedly stamping it onto newspaper.

Prints



Using small card stock rectangles, kids can create artful notecards

Soap Bubble Prints



The bubbles will pop as they touch the paper, leaving a unique print every time

Normally, blowing bubbles with a drinking straw is taboo for kids. Not this time! In fact, that's half the thrill of making these marbled prints.

Cover your work surface with a thick layer of newspaper or a plastic tablecloth.

Gather several shallow disposable containers, such as aluminum pie tins. In each, blend 1 cup of store-bought or homemade bubble solution with $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of tempera paint. (To make your own bubble solution, mix 3 cups of water, 1 tsp of dish soap, and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of corn syrup.)

Set out your paper (try copier paper or light-colored construction paper) and several plastic drinking straws. For younger children, pierce a small hole halfway up the straw with a pin; this will help prevent accidental swallowing of the

paint but won't interfere with the bubble-blowing process.

4. Now for the fun. With one end of the straw submerged in the bubble solution, the kids blow until bubbles mound up in the container. The best time to take a print is just as the bubbles begin to overflow.

5. Gently touch the paper to the bubbles and then lift to see your print, repeating until the paper is sufficiently covered. Blow more bubbles as needed. For a different effect, try printing one color over another.

Freelance writer Kris Bordessa lives in Placerville, California.

