

# Collagraph Printing: Symbols of Self

**Level:** High School (two part lesson)

## **Lesson Overview:**

During this lesson, students will use a print-making process, collagraphy, where materials are glued to a hard board to create an elevated texture. Inspired by the work of Martin Puryear, students will explore how artists use simple shapes to represent complex ideas and how materials influence artistic choices. Through close-looking and reflection, students will create a personal response using the theme of Liberty.

Teacher Reference: Before the class, listen to:

<https://www.themorgan.org/exhibitions/martin-puryear>

## **Essential Questions:**

How does looking at several of pieces by an artist help us understand the artist's message?

How can artists use simple shapes to represent complex ideas?

How can I visually show a point of view in my work of art?

How can I use my prior knowledge to interpret the purpose and symbolism of the artist work?

How does looking at art influence my artistic choices?

As an artist, how can I communicate without words?

Why do artists make prints?

What questions do artists ask themselves as they prepare for their prints (Line quality, patterns, readability)?

## **Students will...**

- understand that a print is a work of art that is transferred by pressing one surface (plate) to another (the paper)
- understand that prints can be repeated over and over again to make multiples
- understand that artists explore ideas reflecting their interests
- understand that reversal takes place in the printing process
- create a collagraph plate
- create small editions of prints
- ink a plate properly and get a clear, strong print
- recognize that viewers bring prior knowledge to their interpretations of a work of art

## **Materials:**

6"x9" Drawing paper, pencils, 7"x10" heavy oak tag board (chip board), printing ink (blue, magenta), 9x12 white paper, non-porous tray for ink (plastic or Styrofoam), paper towels, scissors

## **Reference Images:**

- Martin Puryear, *Cloister-Redoubt or Cloistered Doubt?*, 2019 (American Hemlock, Eastern white pine, tulip poplar, red cedar sculpture)
- Martin Puryear, *Profile*, 2002 (soft ground etching with drypoint print)
- Martin Puryear, *Face Down*, 2008 (bronze sculpture)
- Martin Puryear, *Vessel*, 1997-2002 (Eastern white pine, mesh, tar sculpture)
- Martin Puryear, *Untitled (Sitting Girl)*, 1964-1966 (Charcoal on tan wove paper drawing)
- Martin Puryear, *Rune Stone*, 1966 (soft ground etching, aquatint, and open bite print)

### **Sessions:**

#### **Session 1 - Step 1: Close-Looking and Engagement**

The teacher will conduct a brief discussion of ways, as artist, we can communicate without using words. View Puryear's *Cloister-Redoubt or Cloistered Doubt?*. Draw the students' attention to the central sheltered shape. Ask "What do you see? What else do you notice about the central shape? How does the "roof" shape add to the message of the central shape? How is the message changed by the platform? What if it was low on the ground or can you think of a different type of base that would change the meaning of the artwork?" After discussion, note there are many possible observation-based responses when looking at abstract art.

One way art viewers understand an artist's work is by looking at multiple works for similarities to provide clues regarding the artist's purpose and intent. Art viewers take time to learn about an artist's themes and style, like art detectives.

Using the Martin Puryear works in the selected images in the Reference Images section above, focus on the head theme that is prevalent in his work to get additional clues about his sculptures. The teacher should lead the discussion of Puryear's artworks to have students notice common themes (self, heads, confessional, ear shapes).

Ask "What similarities do you notice about each of the works? What are the similarities and differences between the sculptures and the printed images? How are these artworks different than a picture of a specific person? How can simple shapes help a sculptor plan their ideas? How do simple shapes become like symbols?"

#### **Session 1 - Step 2: Art-making**

"Today, we are creating our own abstract personal shape and these shapes will become collagraph plates in session 2". The teacher will demonstrate creating a drawing for a personal symbol, by combining simple shapes. For example: "I like to run (shoes) and paint (pallet or brush) and read (book), so I can experiment with different ways to combine these shapes in a drawing and the combined arrangement becomes one abstract shape. That is my secret mark – personal symbol. Compositions do not have to be complicated to be effective."

The teacher will explain to the students that the image that they create for their plate will be printed in reverse and they will need to make adjustments to their drawing to account for this. While looking at a teacher sample plate and print, students will also need to note the amount of detail (or lack thereof) that can be achieved through the process.

Students will use pencils and drawing paper (6"x6") to experiment combining shapes based on things that they particularly enjoy or that are important to them. Once the students have found a symbol that they are satisfied with, they should redraw it on the oak tag paper (or file folder) and cut it out. Next, they will glue their symbol down on an oaktag backing paper. Students should be reminded that the pieces that are being glued to the plate need to be firmly attached.

### **Session 1 - Step 3: Reflection**

The teacher will have each student (or a selection of) share their image and/or plate and discuss their personal symbolism choice.

### **Session 2:**

#### **Session 2 - Step :1 Engagement**

The teacher will begin the class with a demonstration of how to ink and pull a collagraph print. Students will need to be told that they will need to work quickly because water-based inks dry quickly (if the paint dries too quickly, it can be misted with a spray water bottle).

#### **Session 2 - Step 2: Art-making**

The teacher will review the steps with the students while writing them out on the board. The students will then print their collagraph plates.

Students will print plates...

- Choose paper and lightly print your name on the back.
- Place a small amount of printing ink onto the tray.
- Roll out ink evenly with a brayer, in both directions; you should hear a tacky noise.
- Don't use too much ink or it will fill the lines made by the shapes you have created on the collagraph plate.
- Place your plate in the middle of a clean piece of paper, allowing room for a border.
- Rub a clean brayer all over the entire plate to transfer the image.
- With one hand flat on the print, beginning with one corner, slowly and carefully peel back the printed sheet.
- Place artwork to dry.
- Re-ink and repeat to make multiples. Overlaying colors can create interesting effects and new, blended colors.

After printing is complete the students will...

- Wash the plate, roller, inking tray with warm water.



- Create multiples of an image by transferring the image from the plate to the paper.
- Print their image with a minimum of finger prints and smudges.
- Add a print number and name at the bottom of their print.

### **Session 2 - Step 3: Reflection**

The teacher will lead the class in a discussion of their final work. “What have you learned about the printing process? What are some of the successes and challenges that you encountered? If you had to do the process all over again, what would you do differently?”

### **Vocabulary:**

Collagraph, print, sculpture, symbolism, brayer, baren, register/registration, oak tag board (chip board)

