



Relief Printing: Woodblock Edition



by Maria Cendejas

The final print is an original design, please do not copy. However, it is encouraged to obtain inspiration from what is seen so that you may create your own unique art piece using the process of relief printing on woodblock as the medium chosen for your creative expression.

To start off, I sectioned the woodblock process and the relief printing process into a Part I and a Part II. For this instructable, a printmaking press was used to print the design of the woodblock onto the paper which is described in Part II. Some places that may have a printing press would be at your local college, this is where I was able to print my design. You can also use a printing baren (which you can purchase

online, store, or do a DIY version), however, I do not go into detail about using this method.

Let's start with a list of the cleaning materials that you will need throughout the process. Cleanliness is important when doing any form of printmaking. Woodblock allows some flexibility in regards to where you can work when you are carving out your design, but since you are removing the wood you will be left with some excess scraps of wood. Depending on where or how you print the design, it is still important to be conscious of having a clean area to work in (especially when working with inks).



Step 1: Materials for Clean Up

Part I:

- Trashcan
- Apron (optional)
- Hand broom and dustpan (recommended)

Part II:

- Scott Shop Towels
- Blue latex gloves (disposable)
- Vegetable oil
- Mineral spirits (paint thinner)
- Rubbing alcohol
- Apron (optional)
- Newsprint paper
- Simple Green all purpose cleaner
- Old phone book pages (optional) These help with cleaning off the ink from the palette knife

Many of the cleaning supplies on this list are safe and do not contain a lot of harmful chemicals. When using the mineral spirits to clean off your brayer and space, it is recommended to go outside for this step. The materials can also be purchased at a hardware store (such as Home Depot). Newsprint paper can be found in an art's supply store. An apron is recommended, especially once you go into Part II (but it is not necessary, it would be used to prevent ink from getting on your clothes and potentially staining them).



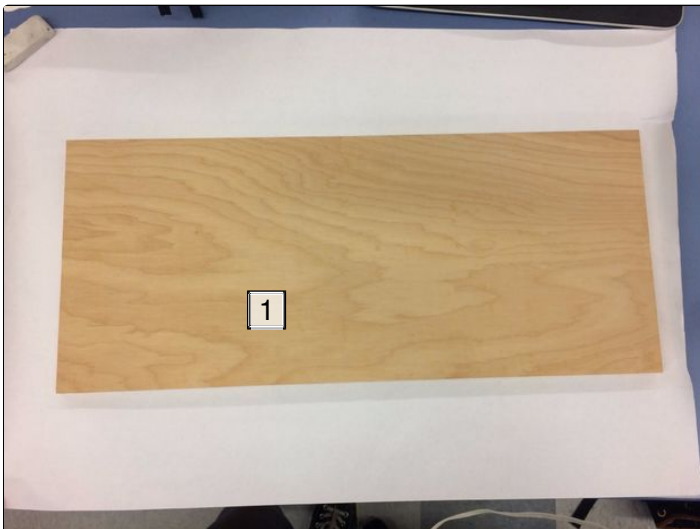
1. This picture contains the supplies I used.
2. Scott paper towels
3. Latex Gloves



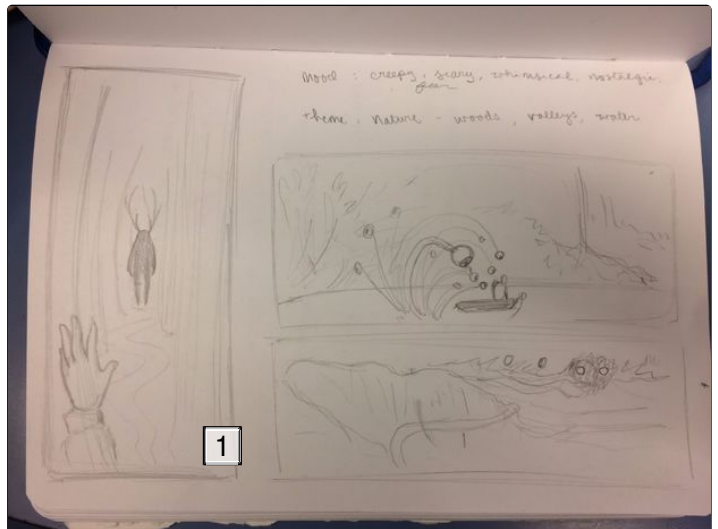
1. Will be used for the end

Step 2: Materials Part I: Woodblock

- Pencil & Eraser
- Sandpaper stapled on a small block of wood
- Sketchbook or scratch pieces of paper
- Optional: Transferring a design Trace the outside of your wood on a piece of regular paper and tracing paper, cut down to size. You will also need a 2B-4B graphite pencil and (preferably) a red ballpoint pen.
- Woodblock
 - Mahogany, poplar, ash, birch, apple or cherry plywood are more difficult to carve and require close attention to tool sharpening but retain fine details and is durable for extensive amounts of printing.
 - Softwoods such as pine, cedar or cypress are not recommended for fine details because of possible splintering and unsuccessful rendering of details, compression during the printing process may also occur. If chosen, it could yield interesting results.
- Carving tools
 - I used Power Grip, 5 piece set which consisted of:
 - v-gouge, small and large u-gouge, knife, and a wide gouge



1. Birch wood on top of paper.



1. A few sketches done in a sketchbook to get some ideas down.



1. Small u-gouge
2. large u-gouge
3. knife
4. wide gouge
5. v-gouge



1. Power Grip: 5 basic tools



1. Sandpaper taped onto a scrap piece of wood.

Step 3: Preparation Part I: Woodblock

Once you have your desired block of wood, you will use your sandpaper to sand along the woodgrain. This is to remove any splintering bits of wood from the surface in which your design will be carved onto. Sand the sides if necessary. Make sure to have your other materials ready in order to start carving. This

consists of having your tools sharpened, scrap paper at hand, pencils and pens nearby. If you would like to transfer a design you will need to have a regular piece of paper and tracing paper cut down to match the size of your woodblock.

Step 4: Instructions for Woodblock

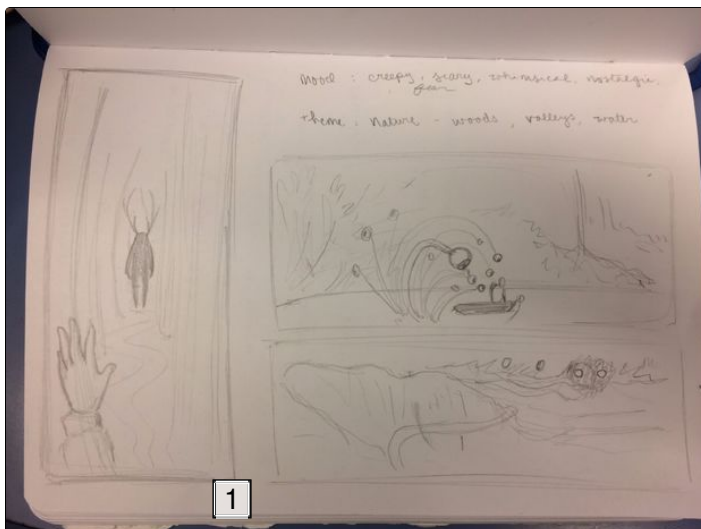
1. Sketch out some ideas in your sketchbook

* **IMPORTANT:** When making a design, remember that your image will reflect onto the paper when you are ready to print. The space that is carved out will remain un-inked when you print. The space that isn't carved will be inked when you print. Sometimes, there is a bit of backwards thinking to this process, so don't be afraid to experiment! If it helps, you can cover the surface of your wood with a thin layer of black ink (if not using colored ink) so that you can see the "white" spaces that remain when you carve.

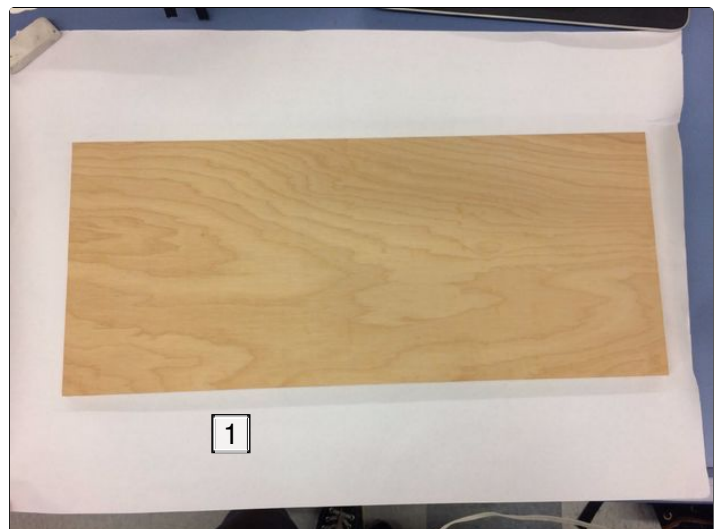
Once you decide on a design, you can either directly draw onto the surface of your wood using a 2B or 4B graphite pencil or you can transfer a design onto your wood.

For transferring a design:

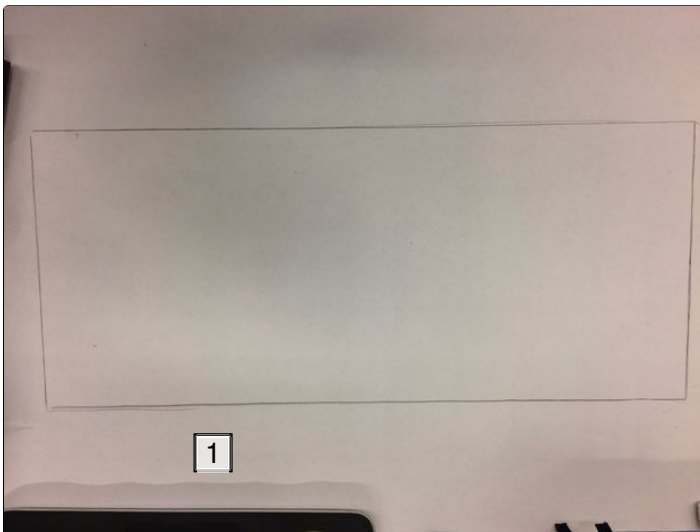
- Trace the outline of your woodblock onto a piece of paper
- Trace the outline of your woodblock onto a piece of tracing paper Cut them out Using a 2B or 4B graphite pencil, draw a design on your regular piece of paper
- Once finished, layer the tracing paper above your design and trace using a 2B or 4B graphite pencil
- Once you are done with this step, flip the tracing paper over with the graphite lines facing the wood surface of your woodblock. Tape the sides down to prevent any shifts from occurring.
- Once everything is placed, grab your pen and begin tracing your graphite lines
 - Occasionally check underneath your tracing paper to ensure that the graphite lines are getting transferred onto the wood.
- Once you are done tracing, remove the tracing paper and make corrections as needed.



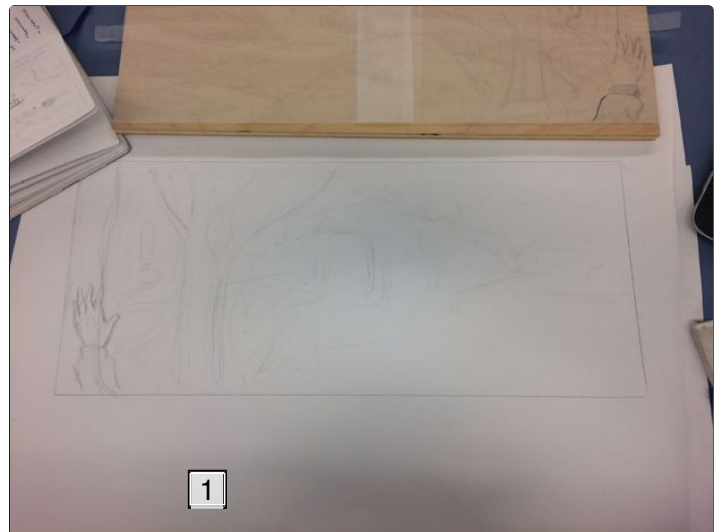
1. Start by sketching out some designs in your sketchbook or scrap piece of paper.



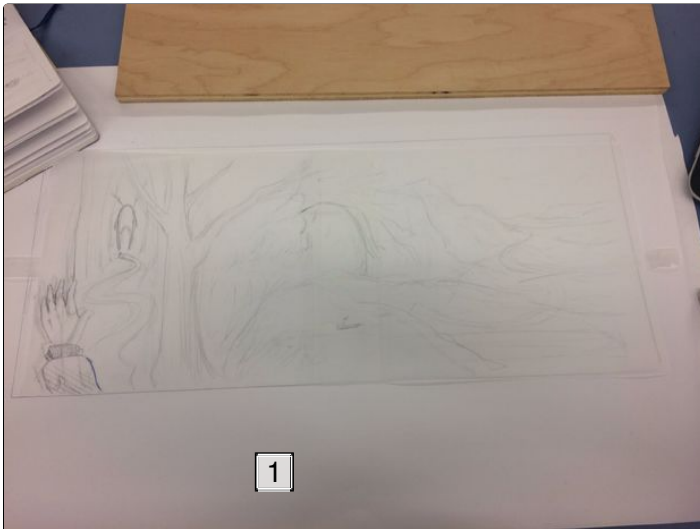
1. Place wood on top of paper. Trace.



1. Make sure to repeat this process with the tracing paper as well.



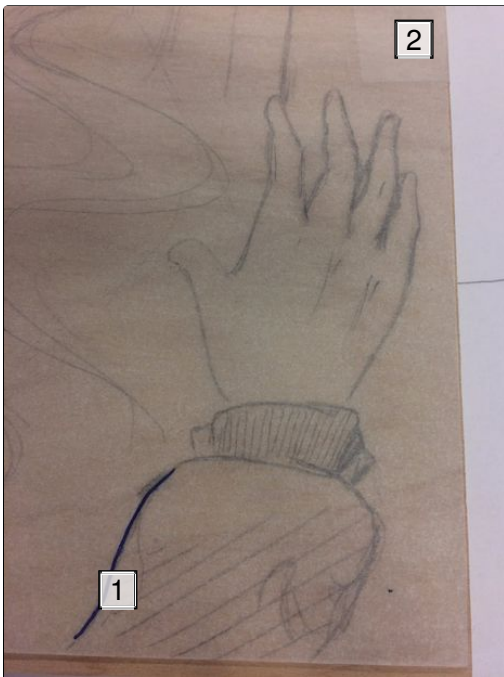
1. Begin sketching on the paper



1. Place tracing paper on top, trace the design that is underneath.



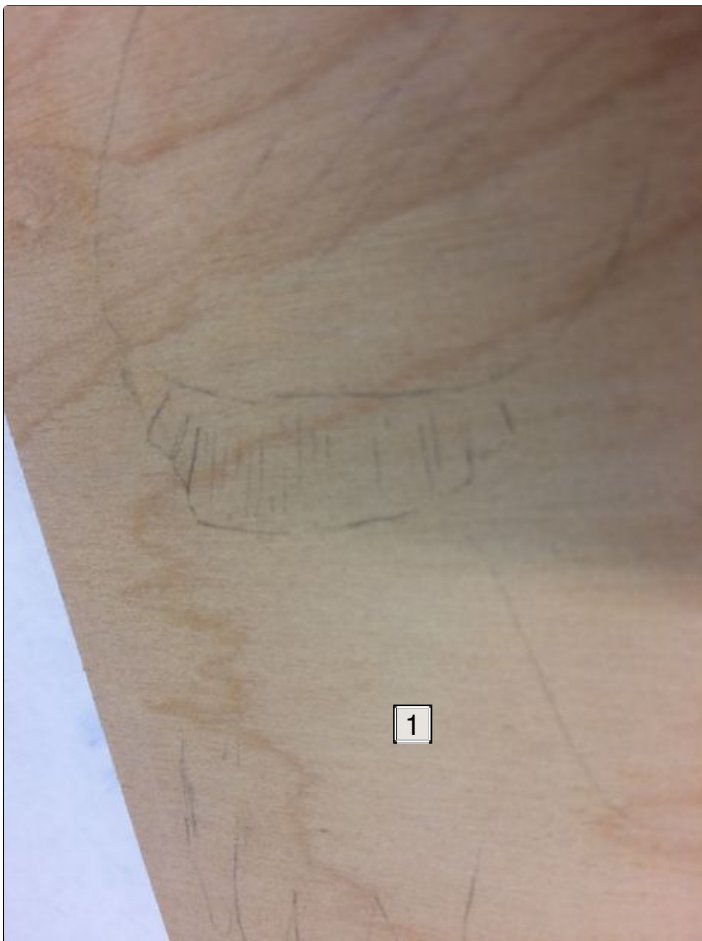
1. Flip tracing paper onto the surface of the woodblock. Make sure the side with the pencil lines are facing down.



1. Trace the lines with a colored pen. Blue or red works! It helps you see your progress.
2. Tape down your tracing paper onto the woodblock.

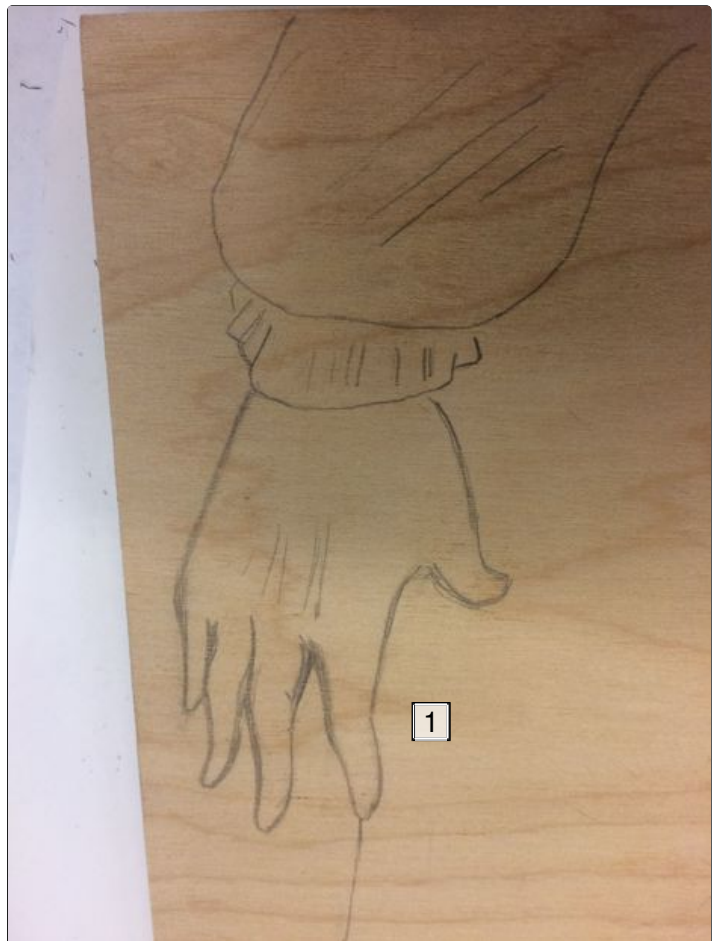


1. Make sure to cover as much as necessary.



1. (I apologize for the upside down image)

If you check underneath your tracing paper, you should see the graphite lines begin to transfer onto the surface of your woodblock.



1. (I apologize for the upside down image)

Make changes/refine as necessary.

Step 5:

2. Start carving out your design

- You should have your design onto the surface of the wood, decide on whether you want to cut around your line or cut out the lines
- If you have the Power Grip kit, then you should have five different basic tools with different ends. The ends consist of a v-gouge, a small and large u-gouge, a knife, and a wide gouge.
 - The different ends allow for different textures, experiment on a scratch piece of wood so that you know what works best for you.

Clean up:

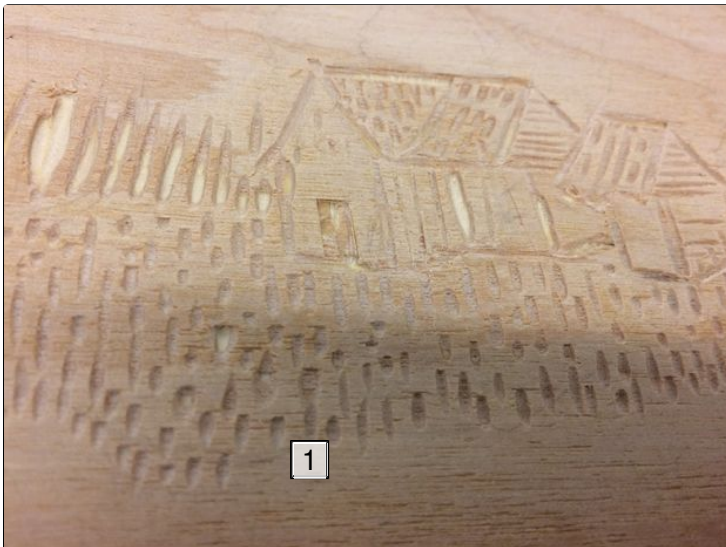
As you work, you'll notice that there will be a lot of scrap wood. It is optional, but you may want to clean up occasionally. It's not extremely messy, depending on the size of your block I have found it easy to work in a numerous amount of places. Whether it is out in a public setting at a bench, or in the comfort of my own home.



1. I am using the knife for outlining my lines. This allows for control when carving around the image.



1. I used the v-gouge to create this texture.
2. The knife works well for outlining and controlling the area that you are trying to carve out.
3. I personally enjoy using the small u-gouge to remove large spaces. The knife and wide gouge can also be used for removing large spaces.
4. The knife allows for a more precise line. I found that the small u-gouge helps clean the outer parts of shapes that the other tools were not able to remove.



1. These are some examples of the types of textures you can make with the small u-gouge. Experiment!

Step 6: Materials Part II: Printing

- GAMBLIN relief ink
 - Black ink is a recommended color choice for beginners
 - I used oil based etching ink for my colored ink, (brand may vary)
- Petroleum Jelly
- A stiff palette knife
- Glass palette table (recommended for workspace)
- Printmaking press
- Scrap piece of thin plywood
 - Sized to fit on press bed
- Newsprint
 - Big enough to reasonably cover the size of your woodblock
 - Make sure to have extra
- Flat poster board
 - Sized to fit through press, preferably larger than the plywood
- Stonehenge white paper
- Brayer
 - Size may vary depending on the size of your woodblock
- Masking tape



1

1. Recommended for beginners.



1

1. Petroleum Jelly



4

3

1

2

1. I used etching ink
2. Stiff palette knife
3. Large brayer
4. Work station has a glass palette table



2

1

1. Printmaking press
2. Poster board underneath a thin piece of plywood



1. White Stonehenge printmaking paper, cut and ready for final process.



1. You could also use a smaller brayer. It simply depends on how big your woodblock is.



1. Printmaking press. This one was available at the community college as part of a class.

Step 7: Preparation Part II: Printing

Cleanliness becomes much more important in the following steps. Before starting, you will want to cut your paper (Stonehenge is what I used) to size while your hands are still clean. Keep this in a clean area, it will be used for the very end. To prep your station, have the following materials out and ready to use:

- Palette knife
- Ink
- Petroleum jelly
- Brayer
- Phone book pages
- Scott shop towels
- Latex gloves

Put on your gloves (and apron), start by taking out some ink. The ink that I used was in a container. If you have ink that is in a container then you will want to get the ink by using your palette knife and in a circular motion scrape the surface. Do not jab the palette knife into the ink and pull out a clump, the ink will dry and ruin the rest of the ink. If you are using tubes, then simply squeeze some ink out onto your tile or the surface of your workstation. Clean of the palette knife with one of the phone book pages. Look at the amount of ink you have, then grab about half the size in petroleum jelly. Gradually mix the two, continue mixing bit by bit by rotating your palette knife and working the ink. Do this until the ink feels smooth but keeps its shape. Remove excess ink, get a bead of ink at the very edge of your palette knife. Make a horizontal line on your workspace, make the line as long as your brayer. Be conscious of the amount you put down. Once this is set up, grab your brayer and roll back and forth. Keep the ink in a square shape, you are aiming to hear a slight hissing sound when your brayer makes contact with the ink. Do this until your brayer has an even layer of ink.

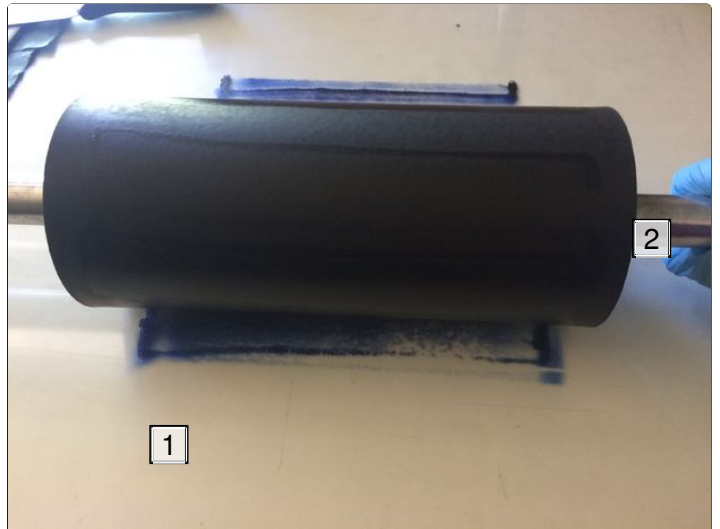
Grab a paper towel and dampen it a bit, place it down and then place your woodblock above it. For the press, make sure that the following are in order: thin plywood, posterboard, and then a piece of newsprint paper. You also want to ensure that your block has room to engage (make contact) with the roller on the printmaking press. Do a few test runs with all the materials put together to make sure that your woodblock is getting enough pressure to adequately print. You will want to avoid too much pressure. Once this is done, you can go back to your workstation.



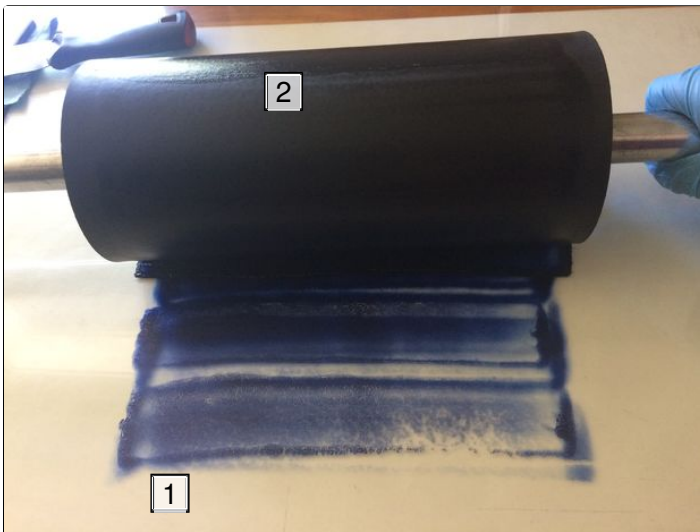
1. Ink was mixed with petroleum jelly



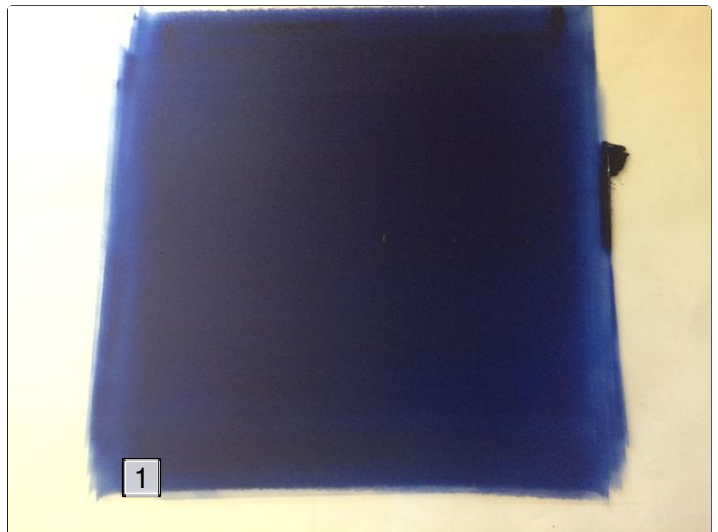
1. With the bead of ink at the end of your palette knife, scrape a line the length of the brayer.



1. Roll back and forth until there is an even coating of ink all around.
2. wear your gloves! Have a paper towel with you as well.



1. Continue rolling
2. Notice the ink



1. You are looking for a clean square of ink. Notice how it is even, your brayer should also have an even amount of ink all around it.

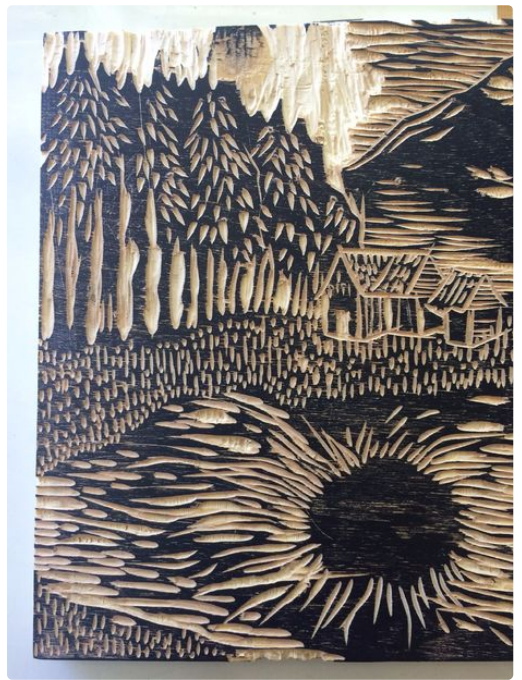
Step 8: Instructions Part II: Printing

Once everything is set up, grab your brayer and roll along the wood grain. Make sure to start at the very edge, end at the edge, and end where you started. Repeat until you have covered the entire surface, make sure to keep count of the times you go over one direction. This is important because if you plan to do an edition (more than one print) they will need to be consistent in color and positioning. Now, repeat this process in the opposite direction, this is to ensure an even coverage and to prevent any darker spots on some areas. If you have a square block then this isn't as important. However if you have a rectangle shaped woodblock, like the one I did, you will want to start by covering the shorter end and end on the longer side because this will allow for a final even coating.

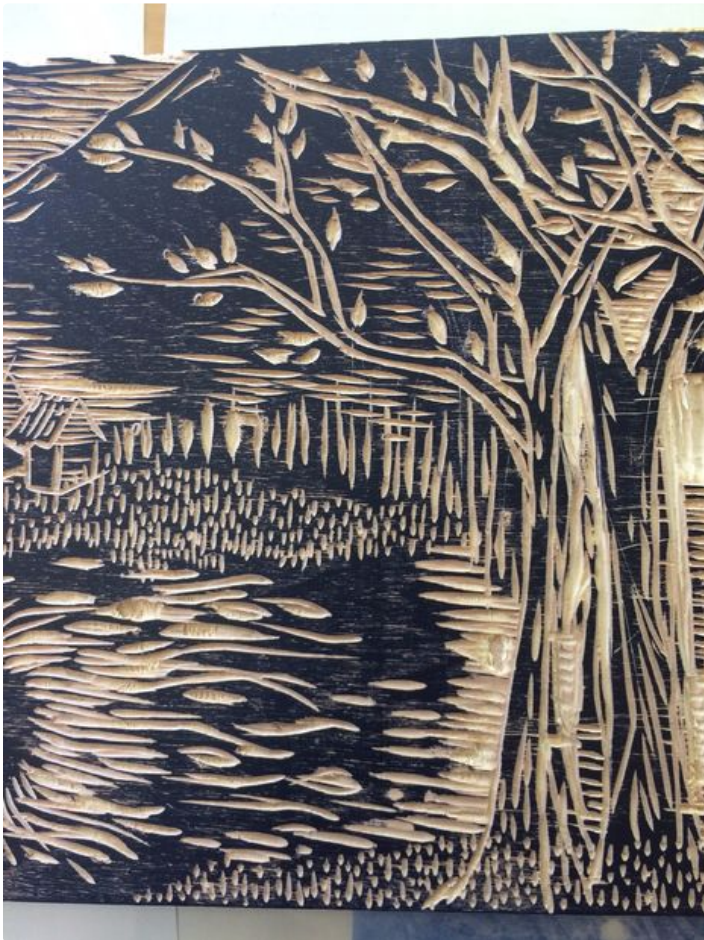
Something that I look for would be how much the light reflects off my ink. This helps me determine if I have over-inked the surface or if there are still some spots that do not have enough ink. Looking for small details such as how the wood grain looks and such can also help you determine if you need to add more ink. Keep in mind that if you want the wood grain to show, add less ink. If you want a solid color, aim towards inking

your surface with a rich, opaque color. Don't be afraid to experiment here.

If satisfied with your woodblock, take off your inky gloves and grab your woodblock. Make sure to avoid getting your hands dirty. Place the woodblock on the printmaking press. Some press beds have a grid that helps you line up your block for accurate placing of paper. If you do not have this option than estimating would be the best approach. Hold your paper from the ends and hover the page above the surface of the woodblock, avoiding direct contact. Once you are satisfied with where you want to place your paper, gently set it down. A technique that I recommend doing is putting two small strips of masking tape at the edge of your paper to ensure it holds its place when setting down your paper. Place newsprint paper on top, then the poster board and end with the thin piece of plywood. Your press should already be set to ensure the woodblock and roller engage. Run your woodblock through the press. Once this is done, slowly remove everything until you reach your print. Slowly peel the paper off, your print will be revealed.



1. This is what the first application of ink will look like on your wood. Make sure to start from the bottom, roll towards the top with a bit of pressure and bring the brayer back towards yourself.





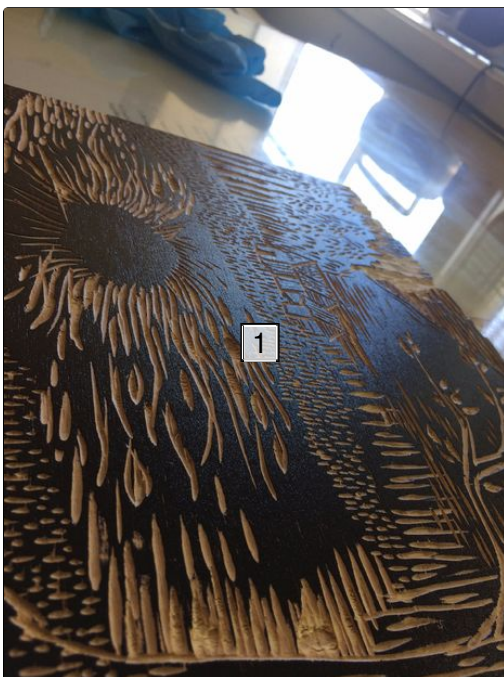
1. This is what the wood will look like if one layer of ink is applied. The wood grain (broken lines) will not contain ink if printed like this. Whether you want this texture or not is up to you. Keep this in mind.



1. More wood grain.



1. Roll horizontal, or the opposite direction. Starting from one end, ending on the opposite side and bringing it back to where it started. Repeat on both sides.

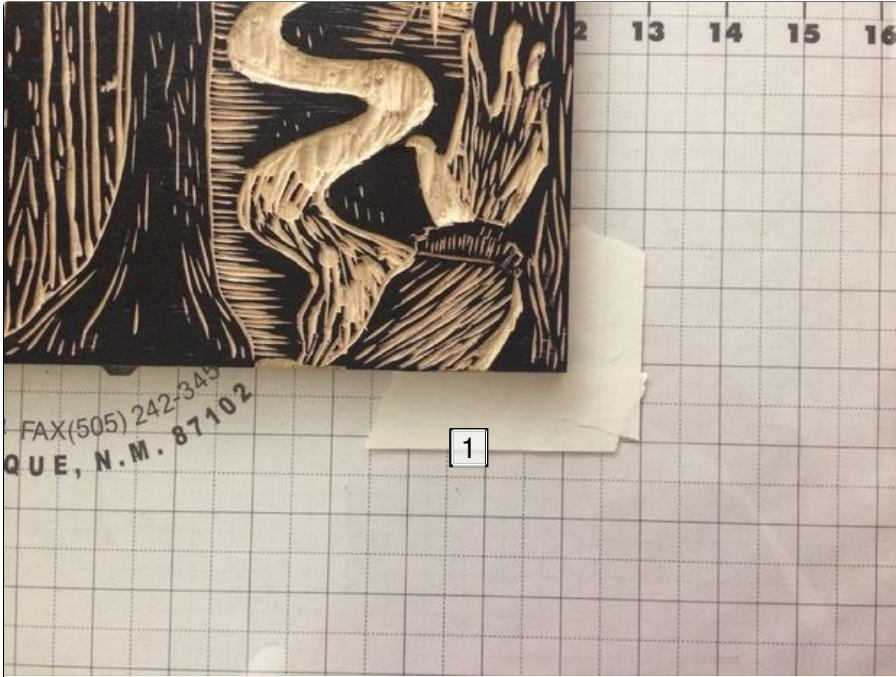


1. The reflection of light could help you determine if some spots contain less ink than others. Remember, you want to have a consistent amount of ink throughout the entire surface.

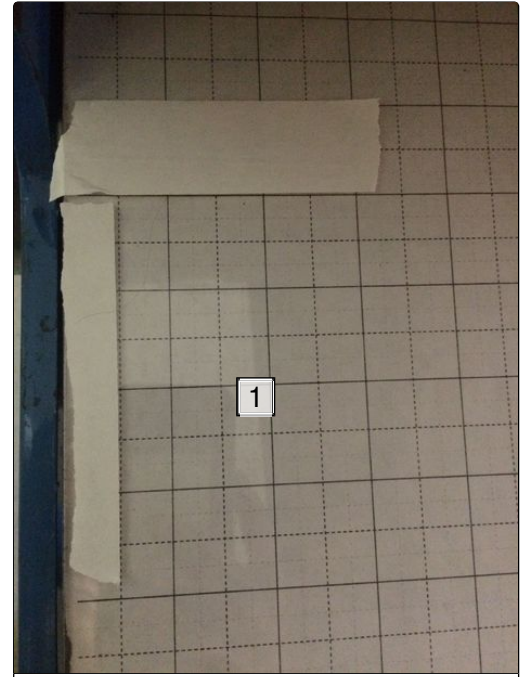


1. (My apologies for the upside down image)

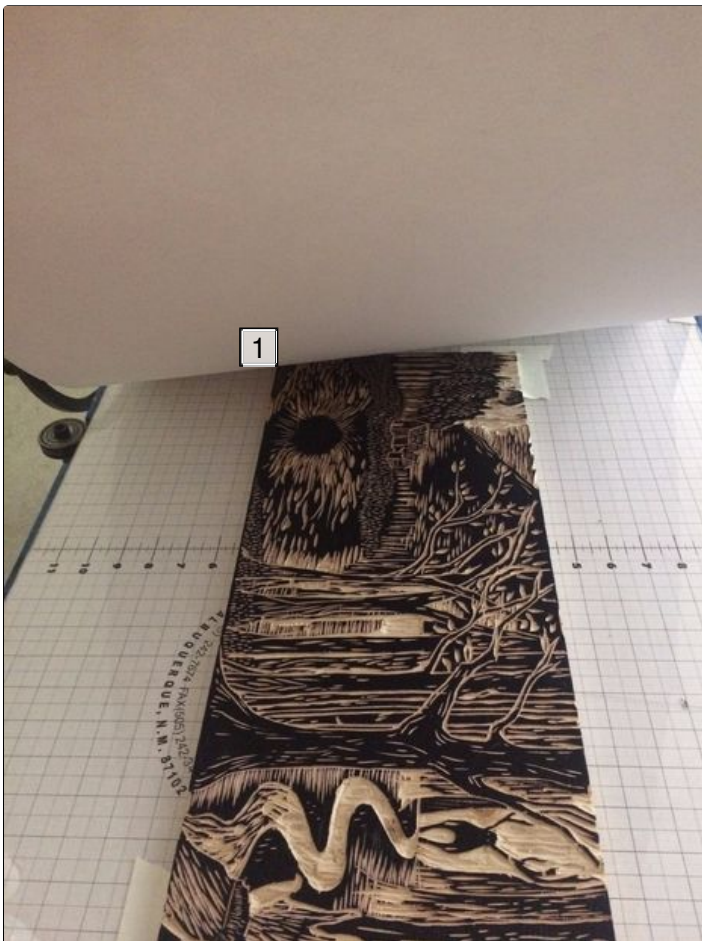
This is what an opaque layer of ink looks like.
2. When finished, place woodblock on press bed.



1. I use masking tape to mark the spot I want my woodblock to stay in.



1. Do this for the outside edges of the larger paper.

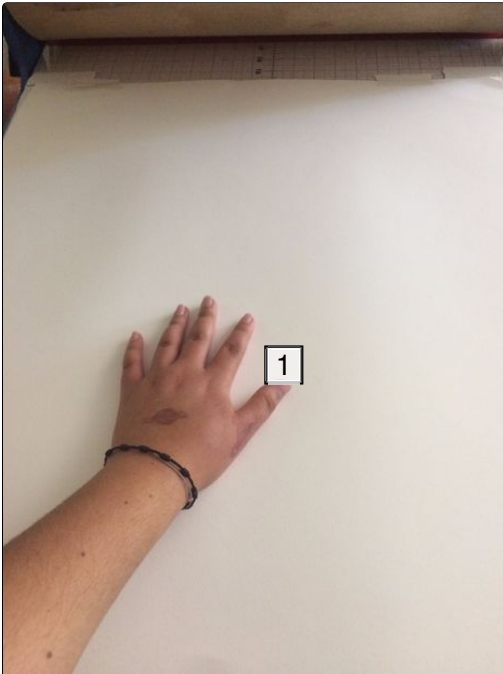


1. *not shown

The end of the paper is taped down. This can be easier if you have a person there to assist you, but it is not necessary. Ensure that your edges line up. Once you are satisfied, gently lay the paper on top of the woodblock.



1. Tape on the edge of paper, this prevents the paper from shifting.



1. Gently pat the paper down so that the surface of the woodblock can make contact with the paper. This helps prevent shifting.



1. Place newsprint paper above Stonehenge



1. Then place the poster board



1. Finally, end with the plywood. Roll the press bed



1. Once the roller and woodblock have engaged, you may find an imprint. This is good because it informs you that it did indeed make sufficient contact. However, you do not want too much pressure because it can ruin the paper.



1. Peel from the end that does not have the masking tape.



1. Image is reflected

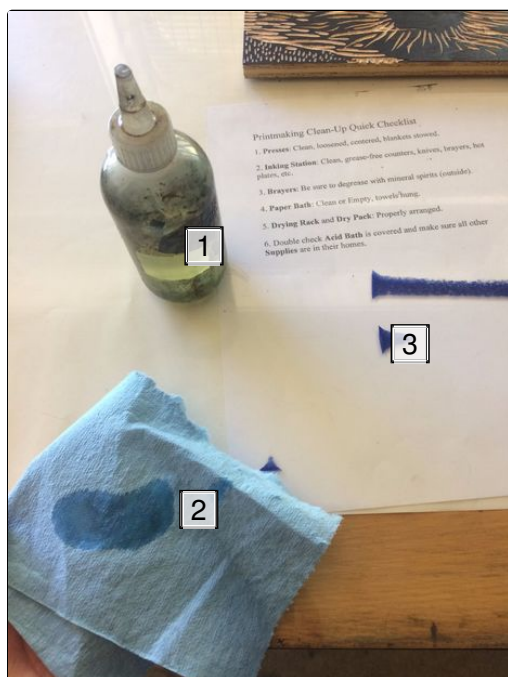
Step 9: Clean Up

Place woodblock back on press, place a sheet of newsprint on top (along with the plywood, posterboard and additional newsprint), and run through the press. This will help remove any excess ink. Wipe down press bed with a bit of rubbing alcohol on a paper towel.

For your workstation, grab the mineral spirits, your brayer, phone book pages, and a paper towel. Take these materials outside. Place down a few phonebook pages, place brayer on top. Add a few drops of mineral spirits and wipe off with the paper towel. Repeat this until the brayer is completely cleaned off from all sides and edges. Going back to your workstation, scrape any excess ink with your

palette knife. Place ink on a phonebook page, continue doing this until the space is relatively ink free. Grab a paper towel, add some vegetable oil and wipe down the area. Once ink is removed, finish off with a few sprays of the all purpose cleaner. Palette knife can be cleaned off with a phonebook page. Put everything away. That's it! Have fun printing, experiment and continue to explore this incredible art form.

Techniques and methods vary greatly, this variation is simply the way I was taught in my college class. I hope you found this helpful!



1. rubbing alcohol
2. Add a bit of rubbing alcohol and place it on a paper towel.
3. Wipe off any ink like this from your work station or press bed.



1. Use your palette knife to scrape off as much ink as you can.
2. You can wipe it down on one of these pages. Finish off with a bit of vegetable oil, wipe it down and then spray the all purpose cleaner.

Step 10: All Done!

Those were all the steps I took to get my finished product! Hopefully, this was helpful.

If you would like to sign your work afterward, make sure to only use a graphite pencil. Traditionally, you sign at the bottom of the image or towards the bottom of the page.

At bottom left corner: You write the edition number. For example, if you print more than one as your final print, you will write the total amount as a fraction. I

only did one print so I wrote mine as "1/1" if you do an edition of, for example, 8, then you will write it as "1/8" and so on. The numerator being the order in which the edition was printed and the denominator being the total amount of prints.

In the center: The title of your work goes here

On the bottom right corner: Your signature and then the year

