

**Mary Carter**

**F**or a cross-curricular lesson combining literature with a printmaking project, I wanted to try a reduction print, but was concerned about the complexity of the process. To simplify things, I limited the reduction size to 4 x 6"; I limited the subject matter to a small, simple object; and I used color separations as a guide for making the printing plate.

Students were allowed to choose the object they wanted to depict from any literary source. I wanted the image to complement the text, so I asked students to find an inanimate object that was mentioned in the chosen text. Some examples were the key from *The Secret Garden*, the golden snitch from the Harry Potter series, and the hatchet from Gary Paulsen's book, *Hatchet*.

### Sample Reduction Print

Each student was given a small 1 x 2" soft block. I showed them how to draw a three-dimensional cube, which they drew on their block, and then instructed them to erase the inside lines.

Students carved away the material



Jeena Brown, *The Miracle Elixir*, 2008, from the *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling.

# A Literary Reduction Print

around the cube, leaving it raised. I went around and quickly inked each of their blocks with yellow (the lightest color) and this was stamped down onto 4 x 6" paper. At the same time, two diagonally opposite corners were marked on the paper for registration marks. The block was wiped clean with a damp paper towel.

Next, the front face of the cube was cut away. The second color, red, was printed over the yellow, using the registration marks for alignment. The block was again wiped clean. Finally, the top of the box was cut away and the last color—blue—was printed over the yellow and red.

Completing the sample print taught

two important concepts for reduction printing:

1. Each added color has to "stand on top of" the previously printed color. This builds the final image by printing lightest to darkest.
2. The image is gradually "whittled" away as each color is printed.

### Sketch and Color Separations

Students traced the 4 x 6" block four times on drawing paper. I encouraged students to sketch their chosen object in the rectangle so that it used about three-quarters of the space. When the drawing was finished, it was then colored in with three different colors.

We made the color separations out of tracing paper to help students plan

how to cut their blocks for each color. I passed out three sheets of 5 x 6" tracing paper. Each sheet was taped to one side of the drawing like a hinge.

On the bottom sheet, students traced and colored the whole object the lightest color. On the middle sheet, students traced and colored the part of the object that would be printed with the middle value. The shape of that color had to be printed (colored) on top of an area that had already been printed with the lightest color. On the top sheet, students traced and colored the areas that would have the darkest color. The rule was that each additional color had to print over an area that had already been colored.



Elise Reger, Oh, the Places You'll Go, 2008, from the book by the same name, by Dr. Seuss.

### Final Print

The drawings were transferred by covering the back of the sketch with graphite, placing it down on the block, and going back over the drawing. Next, students compared it with the bottom page of the color separation on their final sketch.

Each student printed all eight sheets with the first (lightest) color. Registration marks were made as they printed each sheet. Then, the block was wiped with a damp paper towel to remove most of the ink.

Following the middle page of their color separation, the parts of the image that were not needed for the second color were cut away. Again, this was checked against the color separation. Then, the second color was printed on all eight prints. The same procedure was followed for the third

and last color (the darkest).

When the prints were dry, students chose the four or five of the best-quality prints. These were submitted for a grade along with the photocopy of the literary quotation they chose.



**Knowing how a reduction print is made is not the same as being able to do it.**

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#### NATIONAL STANDARD

*Students apply media, techniques, and processes with sufficient skill, confidence, and sensitivity that their intentions are carried out in their artworks.*

#### WEB LINK

[world.std.com/~deanb/zgg/reduction\\_block\\_1.html](http://world.std.com/~deanb/zgg/reduction_block_1.html)

### Materials

- 1 x 2" (2.5 x 5 cm) soft block material (buy the largest pieces so it can be cut to any size)
- lino-cutting tools
- water-based relief printing inks in red, black, and yellow
- brayers
- bench hooks
- plastic on which to roll ink
- 4 x 6" (10 x 15 cm) pieces of scrap paper
- relief printing equipment
- 4 x 6" (10 x 15 cm) soft blocks
- 8 x 10" (20 x 25 cm) white printing paper (eight sheets per student; enough for an edition of at least four, with four extra)
- water-soluble printing ink
- 5 x 6" (12.5 x 15 cm) tracing paper