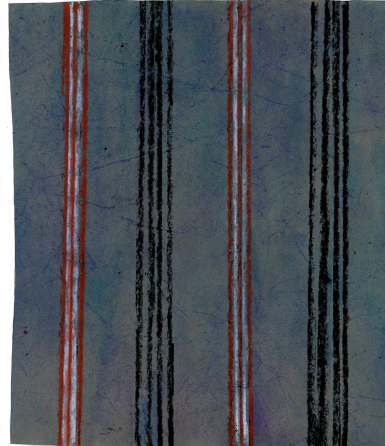


## Tapa-Inspired Pattern Painting

*An art project to teach students about pattern and the South Pacific art of tapa, using paper bags, oil pastels, and watercolor. . .*



*example work created by a Museum Educator*



*example work created by a Museum educator*

**Subjects:** Visual Arts and Oceanic Art and Culture

**Grades:** Upper Elementary (adaptable to middle and high school grades)

**Medium:** brown paper bag, watercolor paint, and oil pastel

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**Project Time:** two 30 minute or one 60 minute lesson from start to completion.

### General Description

On view at The San Diego Museum of Art, *Oceanic Art: A Celebration of Form* features works from Oceania, an area of approximately 25,000 islands in the southern part of the Pacific Ocean. Artists from the South Pacific use nature as both a material and spiritual source, and the art that they create from it contains aesthetic, spiritual, and social significance for them. Sculpture, masks, decorative and utilitarian arts, and body art were and still are created and used in the South Pacific in rituals to contact spirits, inaugurate leaders, and move individuals from childhood to adulthood or from the living world to the world of the dead.

Tapa, or bark cloth, a textile made from the soft inner bark of the Mulberry tree, is one of the most widely recognized art forms in the South Pacific, and is used for clothing, other everyday items, mask making, and in ceremony. Tapa artists, traditionally women, mix plant dyes and other natural materials (traditional colors include yellow, white, rust, black, and various shades of ochre obtained from local clays, native plant dyes, and charcoal) to stain, paint, stamp, and stencil stylized designs using geometric shapes onto the paper-like cloth.

In this lesson, designed as a jumping off point for discussing the *Oceanic Art: A Celebration of Form* exhibition with students of any grade level, the techniques of pattern design and watercolor dyeing combine to emulate the look of traditional tapa cloth as well as to mimic the process followed by South Pacific artists when creating this symbolic, nature-inspired art.

## Objectives

Students will . . .

- explore and learn about the traditional Oceanic art form of tapa.
- create their own unique pattern designs, using geometric shapes, inspired by tapa works found in the Museum-generated exhibition, *Oceanic Art: A Celebration of Form*.
- define the terms symmetry, texture, geometric shape, and pattern and be able to recognize their significance when designing tapa cloth.
- understand the value and tradition of tapa cloth making in South Pacific culture.
- be able to recognize how art can serve a function in the everyday life of a culture.
- be able to discuss artwork within a specific cultural and historical context.
- reflect on the art they have created and answer questions about it.
- present their works in a collaborative presentation (optional).

### **Adaptation Suggestions (for younger students grades K-2 and grades 6 – 12):**

This lesson can be adjusted for younger elementary grades by decreasing the size of the tapa work—so as to take less time—and/or decreasing the complexity of the pattern and final design.

This lesson can be adjusted to fit the needs of middle school and high school students by including a more in depth introduction to the art and culture of the South Pacific, through a more extensive exploration of pattern, and/or through the use of alternative materials to apply the designs (such as block prints, student-designed stamps, or student-created stencils/patterns).

*Please see the **Resources** section of this lesson for a list of library materials and website information relating to South Pacific art and culture.*

*For more information on alternative material techniques visit the following websites:*

For directions on how to create stencils, visit:

<http://www.childrensmidiaproject.org/article.asp?showid=52>

For directions on how to create stamps, visit:

<http://www.theartfulcrafter.com/stamps.html>

For directions on how to create block prints, visit:

<http://www.worldprintmakers.com/english/opm.htm>

### **Special Needs Adaptations**

This lesson can be easily adapted to suit the needs of most learners with disabilities. For students with visual impairments, tactile activities are essential to learning and present throughout this lesson. For students with tactile sensitivity, limit their exposure to more irritating items. Consider allowing them to use markers in place of oil pastels. For students with limited motor skills, try using larger paper and materials. Also consider group work, where students share the responsibility of choosing shapes, tracing, and drawing.

## Pre-Lesson Information

### Art Terms

**Functional Art** – art with a utilitarian purpose (everyday use)

**Geometric Shapes** – shapes or forms that are regular and precise (e.g. squares, triangles, and rectangles)

**Pattern** – a design made by repeating a motif at regular intervals

**Resist** – process in which a wax material (such as white crayon or candle wax) is drawn onto the paper and covered with paint. The areas which contain the wax will resist the watercolor paint and remain the color of the original paper material.

**Symmetry** – the placement of the same elements on either side of a dividing line in such a way that they form a mirror image of each other

**Tapa** (referred to as kapa in Hawaii, ngatu in Tonga, and siapo in Samoa) – a textile made in the South Pacific islands from the pulp of the Mulberry tree and decorated by hand with nature-inspired patterns using natural materials

**Texture** – the quality of a surface, usually characterized by its roughness or smoothness. Texture can refer to both the visual and tactile quality of a surface.

**Watercolor Wash** – A watercolor wash is a basic technique to establish tone and atmosphere in a painting. In a wash, the artist covers the paper with a thin or watery coating of paints. Washes are useful for filling in the background before you start painting your subject or for sealing wax materials (such as crayon) when creating a work of art.

### Materials Needed

- **brown bag paper** material (one half for each student)
- **scissors** (one pair for each student)
- **watercolor paints** (standard set of 8 colors – one for every two students)
- medium-sized **watercolor brush** (one for every student)
- **oil pastels** (in traditional tapa colors of brown, black, white, red, yellow, and ochres)
- **black, permanent marker** (optional – one for every two students)
- **pencils** (one for every student)
- **paper towels** (one roll)
- **water containers** (one for every two students)
- pre-made **cardboard geometric shapes** for tracing (several sets to be shared)
- photo-copied **visuals of traditional tapa designs** for students to view while working

## Tips for Working with Watercolor Paints

- **Using brown bag paper** – Watercolor paper is specially designed to absorb watercolor paints evenly and without buckling, however, the weight of the brown bag paper also supports this medium well.
- **Mix the colors** –Dip your brush in water first, and then into the paint, and create a puddle of color in the top of the palette or on a white plastic plate. Add at least one other color to it, to create you own color. (Example, a puddle of green, then add yellow to it.)
- **Demonstrate how to keep dip the brush in the container of water**, and gently wipe off the excess water on the edge of the container, rather than tapping the brush to remove excess water (and consequently splashing paint where you don't want it.)
- **Add water to add lightness** – unlike other paint mediums, such as acrylics, watercolors are not lightened or darkened by adding white or black paint. Instead, watercolor artists add water to make a color lighter.
- **“Create free space” by leaving the original color** of the paper. Watercolor artists don't use white paint; they leave the original color of the paper untouched.
- **Keep a tissue or paper towel handy** to wipe off excess paint or water from your brush. Clean tissue or paper towel can be used to lift excess water or paint from the painting surface.
- **It's watercolor!** Use plenty of water with the color and let the colors mix and mingle on the paper. Enjoy the unpredictability of the watercolor.

## Preparation

1. Create an example of the project before the lesson. Even if you choose not to share the work with students, a lot can be understood about the lesson by creating an example.
2. If teaching this lesson to more than one group of students, think about displaying unique student examples from the first group for students from later groups.
3. Display photographs of the South Pacific, island-related storybooks, visuals of tapa cloth, and/or natural forms for students to look at and be inspired by.
4. Cover all tables/desks with newspaper – this will ease the clean up process.
5. Gather all materials from the materials list, including your own assortment of visuals.
6. Using matte board or cereal box cardboard, create an assortment of geometric shapes for students to trace in order to create their tapa cloth designs (horizontal bars, triangles, and rectangles are typical shapes found in traditional tapa designs).
7. Distribute materials onto the tables or desks.

## Procedure

### Motivation

If possible, show students real tapa cloth or photographs/visuals of tapa cloth created in the South Pacific islands. Discuss tapa and its traditional purpose as an art form used for clothing, other everyday items, mask making, and in ceremony.

If possible, plan a trip to The San Diego Museum of Art to view *Oceanic Art: A Celebration of Form*. In looking at the works of tapa on display in the exhibition, describe for students how the bark cloth is created (bark from a Mulberry tree is pounded into very thin sheets and dried in the sun. Artists mix plant dyes and other natural materials to paint stylized designs, primarily geometric shapes, on the cloth).

*Please see the **Resources** section of this lesson for a list of tapa cloth works on view in the Museum galleries.*

While viewing tapa designs, point out the artists' use of symmetry and repeated motifs to create patterns with shapes based on natural objects (e.g. fish and plants). Discuss the influence that the artists' environment may have had on their choice of materials and colors.



*Tapa cloth (siapo vala)*, Polynesia; Samoa, early 20<sup>th</sup> century, 112 x 74 inches, Sana Art Foundation Collection



*Tapa cloth (kapa moe)*, Polynesia; Hawai'i, ca. 1850-60, 72 x 42 inches, Sana Art Foundation Collection

**When looking at tapa cloth or other textile art consider asking students the following questions:**

- In what way do the shapes, colors, and patterns in this work remind you of nature?
- How did the artist use materials from their environment to make this work of art?
- Why do you think the people of the South Pacific chose to wear and use their art?

## **Art Making Step-by-Step**

**Note:** It's essential to first demonstrate to students the steps they will be taking to create their works of art. If you have the time, create a step-by-step display. Most importantly, be sure to explain each step as you model it for the class.

### **Step 1:**

- Tear (if you'd prefer the edges to be a bit ruffled) or cut a large section of a brown paper bag (approximately 10 x 12" size).
- Crumple the paper tightly, unfold, and flatten it. Repeat this step several times so that the paper is very pliable, much like fabric.

### **Step 2**

- Using the pre-cut geometric shape patterns and tapa visuals as inspiration, have students trace shapes onto their paper in a pattern design. It is recommended that students first do this step with pencil, followed by oil pastel (traditional colors tapa cloth design colors such as yellow, white, red, and ochre), after their pattern design is finalized.

### **Step 3**

- Apply watercolor paint to the entire area of the designed paper to create a "dyed" look. Encourage students to consider colors that might be found in nature, and the effects that their environment would have on the colors available to them if they were, in fact, using natural dyes.

**Note:** As you are demonstrating this step, encourage students to combine colors on their palettes to create new colors and to use an ample amount of water, not the watercolor straight from the tray.

### **Step 4**

- Once students have completed painting with watercolors, set the works in a safe space to dry.

### **Step 5**

- When the tapa cloth is dry, reapply oil pastel or outline in black permanent marker (optional) the design for added definition.

### **Step 6**

- Have students place their names either at the bottom corner of their tapa cloth, like professional artists, or on the back side of their piece.

## Observe Artists in Action

As students are working, walk around and observe the art that they are making. Ask students to describe their choices to you. In doing this, you will help your students to evaluate their work and their aesthetic decisions while making their art. This exercise directly connects with the component: *Aesthetic Valuing*, as described in the *California Visual and Performing Arts Frameworks*. Begin by asking questions such as:

- What shapes do you think you'll use for your design and what makes them geometric shapes?
- What natural objects do your shapes represent? How does your overall design show symmetry?
- How does the way in which you used color and shapes in your design show pattern?

## Final Discussion

(Many of these ideas on discussing work with children are taken directly from the text, Children and Painting by Cathy Weisman Topal)

Looking at one's work and the work of classmates is an important part of the experience of art making, and the artistic process is nurtured by respectful and encouraging conversation between participants. If time permits, display the finished works and talk about them. Choose works that display the lesson objectives. This will help remind the other students of the project goals while they are working.

## Discussion Guidelines

- I. **Limit the time.** No more than ten minutes for young children – twenty to thirty minutes for older children. Because it may be difficult to talk about everyone's work in such a short period of time, choose only a few works to discuss this time. However, try to remember to include everyone's art in an evaluation at one time or another.
- II. **Model talking about art for your students.** For example, you might say:
  - Does anyone see a work with an exciting use of pattern?
- III. **Ask questions that call for specific responses.** For example, you might say:
  - Where, in nature, might we find shapes like those found in Javier's work?
- IV. **Focus on one or two new skills or concepts.** For example, you might say:
  - Who can point out a work of art where the artist used more than one geometric shape?
- V. **Stress the positive** – focus on student successes. To help ensure your student's success with this and future projects, while students are still working on making their patterns, be sure to travel around the room and redirect any students who may be forgetting to include necessary elements from the objectives list or who may be traveling too far outside the goals of the assignment. Be sure to redirect in a gentle way, or individually, so that the student is not embarrassed in front of their peers.



## Displaying Finished Artwork

Have students help with the arrangement of the tapa cloth works for installation. Explore ways of hanging the works together (perhaps attached together like a quilt) or individually with an artist's statement. These decisions can be made before starting the project, to ensure that students feel that they have ownership in this final step of the artistic process.

## Extension Activities

- Create **designs using alternative means** (Other methods of application might include block printing, stamps, stenciling, or overlapping sections of tapa to each other.)
- Explore the **uses for tapa**. When the tapa bags have dried, have students cut up their designs into shapes representative of the ways in which tapa is used in everyday life in South Pacific cultures (e.g clothing, bedding, mask making). Students can create a drawing set in the South Pacific and glue their shapes on top of it to create an island-inspired collage.
- Take an **imaginary journey to the South Pacific**. Introduce this area of the world to students through visuals, stories (*see Resources section for suggested literature*), tastes (e.g. coconut), smells (tropical flowers), and sounds (students can simulate the sound of the ocean) and then have students write and illustrate a story about all that they will hear, see, taste, smell, and feel on their visit to the South Pacific.
- Create an **artist's statement**. An artist's statement is the *what, how, and why* of a work of art from the artist's own perspective. Writing an artist's statement gives students another way to reflect on their work and artistic process. An artist's statement should be personal and speak to the ideas behind the work and the relationship between the artist and their work. When done well, the artist's statement and the art support each other.
- **Discuss traditional artwork** from other cultures. How do other cultures incorporate their art into everyday life?
- Explore the **work of modern Western artists** influenced by Oceanic art and culture. (e.g. Paul Gauguin, Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, André Derain, Maurice Vlaminck, and others).



*Tahitian Women on the Beach*, Paul Gauguin 1891



## Resources

### Museum Recommended Literature for *Oceanic Art: A Celebration of Form*

*Explora Australia Y Oceania* (2007) by Bobbie Kalman and Rebecca Sjonger

*The Island-below-the-Star* (1998) by James Rumford

*Nuanua: Pacific Writing in English since 1980* (1995) edited by Albert Wendt

*Oceanic Art* (2005) by Nicholas Thomas

*Tales from the South Pacific* (1997) by Anne Gittins

### Examples of Tapa Cloth Currently on View at the Museum

*Tapa cloth (kapa moe)*, Polynesia; Hawai'i, ca. 1850-60, 112 x 74 inches, Sana Art Foundation Collection

*Tapa cloth (salatasi)*, Polynesia; Futuna island, 19<sup>th</sup> century, 2 x 14 feet, Edward and Mina Smith Collection

*Tapa cloth (siapo vala)*, Polynesia; Samoa, early 20<sup>th</sup> century, 72 x 42 inches, Sana Art Foundation Collection

### Resources Available at the San Diego County Library

Visit the library website and view the *Oceanic Art: A Celebration of Form* bibliography:

<http://www.sandiego.gov/public-library/services/researchguides.shtml>

### Website Resources

More on Oceanic Art Collections in the U.S.

de Young Museum, San Francisco, CA

<http://www.famsf.org/deyoung/collections/collection.asp?collectionkey=39>

Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, MA

<http://www.pem.org/collections/oceanic.php>

More on Tapa Cloth

<http://www.art-pacific.com/artifacts/nuguinea/barktapa.htm>

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/legacies/HI/200002884.html>

## **California Visual Arts Standards Addressed in this Lesson**

### **Grade Three**

- 1.1 Perceive and describe rhythm and movement in works of art and in the environment.
- 1.5 Identify and describe elements of art in works of art, emphasizing line, color, shape/form, texture, space, and value.
- 2.2 Mix and apply tempera (watercolor) paints to create tints, shades, and neutral colors.
- 2.3 Paint or draw a landscape, seascape, or cityscape that shows the illusion of space.
- 3.4 Identify and describe objects of art from different parts of the world observed in visits to a museum or gallery
- 4.3 Select an artist's work and, using appropriate vocabulary of art, explain its successful compositional and communicative qualities.

### **Grade Four**

- 2.7 Use contrast (light and dark) expressively in an original work of art.
- 3.1 Describe how art plays a role in reflecting life (e.g., in photography, quilts, architecture).
- 4.1 Describe how using the language of the visual arts helps to clarify personal responses to works of art.
- 4.2 Identify and describe how a person's own cultural context influences individual responses to works of art.
- 4.3 Discuss how the subject and selection of media relate to the meaning or purpose of a work of art.
- 4.4 Identify and describe how various cultures define and value art differently.
- 4.5 Describe how the individual experiences of an artist may influence the development of specific works of art.

### **Grade Five**

- 1.1 Identify and describe the principles of design in visual compositions, emphasizing unity and harmony.
- 3.2 Identify and describe various fine, traditional, and folk arts from historical periods worldwide.
- 4.2 Compare the different purposes of a specific culture for creating art.
- 4.3 Develop and use specific criteria as individuals and in groups to assess works of art.
- 4.4 Assess their own works of art, using specific criteria, and describe what changes they would make for improvement.

## Tapa Cloth Shapes

Cut out and trace the shapes on this page (or design your own) onto matte board or cereal box cardboard to make patterns which students can trace to create their geometric designs.

