

Painting & Printing - Paste Paper

The children spread colored paste over their papers and create striking patterns by twisting and pulling tools through the wet paste. For ages 6 to 13. Plan 1 session.

KEY IDEAS

- Repetition of designs
- Working with negative lines and shapes
- Creating all-over patterns

LANGUAGE

pattern, negative, repetition, overlap

YOU WILL NEED

- 9- x 12-inch sulphite construction paper or printing paper (strong enough to withstand being worked on while wet)
- Colored paste (see recipe below)
- Bowls or wide-mouthed jars for holding the paste
- Several 2- to 3-inch flat paint brushes which can be found in hardware stores
- Stiff cardboard for making tools
- Extra objects for printing, such as wooden chopsticks, wads of aluminum foil, corks, small cardboard boxes or tubes (optional)
- Lots of paper towels
- Plenty of newspaper
- Iron for flattening the newspapers and dried paste papers

BACKGROUND

Colored paste was used to decorate paper in Germany, France, and Italy as early as four hundred years ago. Paste papers were mostly used in bookmaking, either for the covers of books or as the end papers inside the books. The process began to flourish in North America during the 18th century, and the same methods of twisting and pulling tools through the paste are still used today.

Although there are several recipes for making the paste, I find this one easiest for children to use. One recipe will make enough paste to cover about fifteen 9- x 12-inch papers. For children who are allergic to wheat, you can use all rice flour. (The addition of wheat flour makes the paste easier to handle.)

4 tablespoons rice flour
3 tablespoons wheat flour
3 cups water
½ teaspoon glycerin
1 teaspoon liquid dish detergent

Tempera paint

Blend the flours together. Stir in a little water to dilute the flour and continue to stir while adding the remaining water. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until the mixture resembles thin custard and just starts to boil. Remove the paste from the heat and stir in the glycerin and dish detergent to keep the paste smooth and pliable. After the paste cools, put it through a sieve to get rid of any lumps. Gradually add tempera paint to the paste to achieve the desired color. Be sure to test the paste. If it is too thick, add cold water. If the paste runs back over drawn lines, it is too thin and needs to be cooked longer or left open to air-dry until it thickens. The paste will last about three days in a refrigerator.

THE PROJECT

First Session

Preparation

- Prepare the colored paste and test its consistency.
- Cut enough of the newspapers into half-sheets to be used under each paper while applying the paste. Creases will leave ridges in the dried paste papers so, if necessary, iron these newspapers flat.
- Cut plenty of tools from the stiff cardboard. You will need extra tools to replace those that soften from the moisture of the paste.



- Set out half-sheets of newspaper, paper for colored paste, and paper towels.
- Cover several work areas with newspaper. Each area should include one color of paste, brushes, and tools to be used with that color.

How to Begin

- Explain to the children that they will be making paste papers, an ancient form of decorating paper. Colored paste is made by adding paint to a boiled mixture of flour and water, and then spread on paper. Twisting and pulling tools through the wet paste will leave *negative* areas where the paste has been displaced and create striking patterns.
- Demonstrate how to make a paste paper. Place a paper on a half-sheet of newspaper. Load a large brush with paste and glide it across the paper continuing over the edge onto the newspaper. Use horizontal strokes to cover the paper, then go back over it again using vertical strokes to assure good even coverage.
- Show the children various ways to pull the tools through the paste. Explain that negative areas are created by the displaced paste. Repeating these negative areas can create striking *patterns*. As you work, wipe extra paste from the tools with paper towels.
- Explain to the children that all-over patterns created by *repetition* (repeated designs) are particularly effective for paste papers. Designs that *overlap* (placed slightly over each

other) can create an almost three-dimensional effect.

- Designs can also be created by stamping a paste-coated paper with various found objects. Be sure to wipe the paste from the objects before making each stamp.
- The first paste papers the children make should be exploratory to discover the effects of different tools and strokes. The second papers should be planned patterns using ideas from their explorations.
- Have the children choose a work area; place their paper on a half-sheet of newspaper; and begin exploring and making their paste papers.
- Before drying the paste papers, remove them from the paste-covered newspaper and place them on clean newspaper to avoid sticking.

Note: As the paste papers dry, they will ripple and curl. They can be flattened by pressing them on the reverse side with an iron.

NOTES

- You need to experience making paste papers before presenting this lesson to the children.
- This project is messy and may become chaotic if not well organized. The process can be simplified by having the children choose a color and remain in that specific work area for both of their paste papers.
- Plan enough newspaper-covered drying space.
- For the easiest application of the paste, use paper which is not too absorbent or too glossy. Sulphite construction paper is strong and easy for the children to handle. Regular construction paper is too absorbent. Printing papers work well, but tend to curl and ripple more when wet.
- Be sure the children put their names on the backs of their papers before applying the paste.
- It's fun to experiment with different colors of paper.
- When the paste colors are mixed together they can quickly turn muddy. It is important to have tools designated for each color.
- The paste papers need to dry before the real effect can be seen. The ridges that are formed when the paste is displaced will dry flat. They will be deeper in color and appear almost three-dimensional.

LET'S TALK ABOUT OUR WORK

- Are the paste papers filled with overall patterns?
- Discuss the patterns created by the negative shapes and lines.
- Look for three-dimensional effects when the lines and/or shapes overlap.

What the children might say...

- *The paste won't cover the edges of my paper.*
- *When I pull the tool to make my design I keep getting puddles of paste.*
- *I'm pushing with the tool, but I can hardly see my designs.*
- *My tool is getting too squishy and isn't working well.*

- *Can I use more than one color?*

What you might say...

- *Load your brush with plenty of paste and let each stroke glide across your paper, continuing off the edges onto the newspaper.*
- *Use a paper towel to wipe your tool often to avoid puddles of paste. Some puddles will form if you applied a lot of paste on your paper. When dried, these often add interesting textures to your paste paper.*
- *If your designs appear too vague, you haven't applied enough paste to your paper. Paint more paste over your designs and try again.*
- *The dampness of the paste can make your tools become soft, so I have extras when you need them.*
- *Paste papers sometimes are done with more than one color. However, since the colored paste can quickly turn muddy when it is mixed, we are going to experiment with one color at a time.*