

# ***Visual Arts 8: Relief – The Bridge to Sculpture***



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## ***Relief – The Bridge to Sculpture***

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The instructional hours indicated for each unit provide guidelines for planning, rather than strict requirements. The sequence of skill and concept development is to be the focus of concern. Teachers are encouraged to adapt these suggested timelines to meet the needs of their students.

To be effective in teaching this module, it is important to use the material contained in *Visual Arts 7–9: Curriculum Framework*. Therefore, it is recommended that this be frequently referenced to support the suggestions for teaching, learning, and assessment in this module.

### Icons Used in this Module



Formative  
Assessment



Summative  
Assessment



Demonstration



Key Point



Extension



Cross  
Curricular



# ***Visual Arts 8: Relief – The Bridge to Sculpture*** (26 Instructional Hours)

## **Overview**

### **Rationale**

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Relief is an art form that bridges the gap between flat two dimensional work, and the fully three dimensional realm of sculpture. As such, it has some of the qualities of both fields of expression and is very accessible to students. However, it is an art form with which students may not feel they are very familiar. Relief was generally incorporated as part of architectural design, and in North America buildings with relief are those built in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century or before. Due to the current architectural styles and cost of embellishment in architecture, traditional relief is hard to find in many small communities.

Despite the fact that few examples exist locally, there are some common contexts with which students may be familiar. Coin design is one area, and the Canadian mint is very active in creating and promoting coins. Research in this area will reveal many detailed and elaborate forms of relief. Another accessible source in many communities is old graveyards. Gravestones dating back to the 1800's will often have elaborate low relief carvings, and a visit to a local graveyard can provide an opportunity to explore this art form in a local environment, as well as doing gravestone rubbings.

Historically, one of the strong elements of relief is narrative. Friezes in churches, temples, monuments and other prominent buildings often have a narrative element. In this module, students will have the opportunity to explore the strongly narrative quality of relief work. As well, there are opportunities to discover the effects of relief decoration in architecture by the addition of friezes to the school environment.

The overlap of two-dimensional and three-dimensional concepts is present in this module, through the language of both visual design and sculpture. Students will become familiar with the language of design, through concepts such as pattern, line, shape, texture, positive and negative space, symmetry and asymmetry. Sculptural concepts include the shaping of forms that stand out from the surface, surface texture, lighting, and the placement of the work in the environment.

The range of themes that can be chosen for work in relief is as wide as it would be for any art form in two dimensional drawing. In addition, themes that lend themselves to bold interpretation or decorative elements also work well. Animals, plant forms, figures in action in activities such as sports, typographical designs and even abstract work, are all examples of topics in addition to the traditional topic of story narrative. Themes selected should be of interest to the adolescent in a personal way.

Because so many of the examples of relief are based in cultures and times that are not contemporary, students may need assistance with the appreciation of the art form. Ensure that a mix of historical and contemporary pieces is seen, along with the application of the language of art and design. The students' own personal experiences with relief will give them a context and appreciation for the art done in a different culture and time, as the module progresses. As with all modules, a sketchbook or response journal containing unlined paper will provide a format for planning and responses.

## Outcomes

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- Learners will analyse how a variety of contemporary and historical works of art across various communities and cultures communicate multiple perspectives
- Learners will create purposeful and meaningful works of art
- Learners will formulate personal responses to a variety of works of art

# Unit One: Cardboard Relief Tiles

## (4 hours)

### Introduction

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Cardboard will provide one of the easiest materials to work with and introduce students to the concept of relief. A variety of materials will make the project more interesting for students, but even just corrugated cardboard and/or boxboard will yield interesting results.

For the initial exploration of relief, work should remain abstract, dealing with principles of art and design such as pattern, repetition, positive and negative space, balance, symmetry, etc. Focus on two or three in each exploration, so students are not overwhelmed with different concepts to explore.

After the tiles are created, they can be meshed to create an architectural relief “wall” in the school. As relief was often an architectural feature historically, displaying the work as a feature allows students to see the impact that light and shadow have in adding architectural interest to an area in the school.

### Materials

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- selection of cardboard from boxes or found sources (these can include corrugated cardboard and boxboard, ticket board, Bristol board, and textured papers)
- small flat objects from found materials such as washers, buttons, beads, and old jewelry
- string or yarn
- white glue and brushes (bristle) for glue, glue containers

# Teaching, Learning, and Assessment Process

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## LESSON ONE: INTRODUCTION TO RELIEF

Introduce the concept of relief. Students will likely not be familiar with this term, and a more familiar concept may be “texture.” Examples of relief can include coins, gravestones, Braille writing, and a variety of examples in the school, such as the lines between concrete blocks or bricks that create a recessed area.

The first piece the students create should be just experimenting with the possibilities in the materials. Each student should have one or more “tiles” (no bigger than 20 cm x 20 cm) cut from a piece of corrugated cardboard. In addition, they should have available a selection of other materials to work with, including corrugated cardboard scraps, ticket board and box board.

Within the space of the piece of cardboard, ask the students to create an abstract design by layering glue and the materials as desired. The piece remains essentially flat, but materials are built up to create a textured surface.

Students might explore the following options:

- cut small shapes and glue them in patterns
- use string to create a series of lines, swirled or regular
- tear corrugated cardboard to reveal the inner texture, and use torn or cut pieces on the tile
- build up some areas more than others



After clean-up at the end of class, have students sketch their “tile” or “tiles” in their sketchbooks, and based on their experiences, discuss or note what makes an interesting looking tile. Share ideas with partners, in groups, or with the whole class. Give feedback during the discussion process and note which students need assistance with developing their ideas or understanding the concepts.



## LESSON TWO: SKILL DEVELOPMENT

In this lesson, students will build on the skills developed with the exploratory tile and extend these skills to using some elements and principles of design. Select no more than two or three elements and principles, such as symmetry, pattern, and repetition of shapes.

Activate prior knowledge through a discussion of the elements you have chosen. Show some examples of art that uses (in an abstract way) these elements and principles. See Australian aboriginal art, Egyptian relief and tomb art and Islamic tiles as possible sources of abstract design. The student textbook, *How Artists Use Pattern and Texture* is a source of related images.

Have students do thumbnail sketches in their sketchbooks or on cartridge paper. Several possible tile “designs” using the elements and principles in the lesson can be explored. A small square template can be used as a pattern to encourage students to use a square shape in their planning.

When the designs are completed and students have indicated where in their design they have used the elements and principles, work proceeds as it did for the first experimental tile.



As students are working on their sketches, circulate around the room and note students’ use of the elements and principles in their designs. Give positive feedback to those who are and prompting those who have not. For example:

- This use of repetition of shapes along the edge of your tile is very effective.
- Where are you thinking of putting line (or pattern, or whatever element is missing) into your design?
- What design do you prefer? Why?

### *Tips for Teaching Success*

Students sometimes draw more detail than can be realistically achieved with this medium. Watch for excessive detail. Emphasize that these are thumbnail sketches of ways to use the design ideas, not extremely detailed drawings.

Some students may be frustrated with the drawing step. Allow rough minimal sketches that simply indicate what they are going to do. Encourage further manipulation at the stage where they are gluing down before the actual gluing takes place.



Using a checklist, note which students are building on previous knowledge in an effective manner. Look for the following evidence:

- the use of the new design concepts introduced in this class such as line, pattern, shape, and repetition
- increased confidence and skill in use of the relief techniques, and understanding of the nature of relief as a shallow textured surface
- appropriate use of materials

In small groups or with partners, have students discuss their use of the elements, and get feedback from their peers.

Post the design concepts on the board. Using small index cards, ask students to comment on any of the principals or concepts covered, asking for clarification. Use this as an “exit card”, to inform the next lesson.



The above “tile” lessons can be repeated to create as many tiles as desired. Design concepts can change from lesson to lesson. For example, one tile lesson may cover pattern and shape repetition, another might cover positive and negative space, another might then do shape, pattern, and line. Remember to not cover too many new concepts in one lesson.

### LESSON THREE: FINISHING TILE SURFACES

There are a number of options for finishing the surface of the tiles. Consider the following choices:

- Gesso the tile, front and back (to avoid warping) or use latex wall paint. Lightly sponge, brush or roll a second coat of acrylic paint over the surface, letting some of the recessed areas remain unpainted.
- Apply a thin layer of tissue paper and glue. (Mix the glue with water, to the consistency of milk). Use light colours and a thin layer to retain the details of the relief.
- Apply black or brown paste shoe polish, letting the polish sink down into the cracks more, and buff the surface with a rag or paper towel.
- Apply a thin layer of aluminum foil over the tile, pushing the foil down in and around the spaces with a dull pencil or popsicle stick or Q-tip, so as not to tear the foil. A thin layer of glue under the foil may be needed, depending on the level of relief on the tile.

#### *Teaching Tips for Success*

- If you are going to display work as a whole, chose one finishing method for all students.
- Do not let finishing distract from the relief. Too much variety in tissue paper colours will create a visual distraction, if too busy or contrasting in terms of colour.
- Have students first test the finishing methods on their practice tiles. Materials can interact in unexpected ways, disappointing students with the results.
- Avoid warping by taping or pinning down the tiles or by working on the front and back.



Display the tiles together as a frieze or wall somewhere in the school. The easiest way to do this is to pin them to a display board as a group. Students can work in small groups, arranging the tiles and determining the direction and order of placement.

In Supporting Materials, a sample rubric for assessing this unit can be found. Adapt this rubric as needed to assess the elements and principles covered in your lessons. Discuss in advance with the students the criteria for the areas of “not yet met” “developing” and “met” as your lessons proceed. Assessment may be done by the teacher, a peer, or as a self-assessment.

# Unit Two: Metal Relief (Repousse)

## (6 hours)

### Introduction

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Relief work done in metal through the technique of repousse has been used by artists throughout the world, both ancient and modern. As such, it provides a good context in which students can look at and appreciate the work of other cultures as well as their own. Mexican, Peruvian, and other South American cultures have commonly used this technique, as well as those in the Middle East. An Internet search will yield examples that may be used to illustrate the detail that is possible with this technique.

Students should continue working with the elements of art and design, such as pattern, line, shape, and texture. In this unit, these are created by pushing the soft sheet of aluminum into a padded underlay, and then reversing the sheet and pushing from the other side to create a low relief.

Metal relief is best done on thin sheets of copper or aluminum. If these are not available, a very heavy aluminum foil may be used if it is carefully worked with tools that are not sharp.

### Materials

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- heavy aluminum foil or embossing foil cut into small pieces or strips and large enough to practice a variety of marks
- blunt coloured pencils, one for each student, to use as a shaping tool
- sketch books or response journals
- thin paper such as photocopy paper
- pencils and ball point pens
- aluminum metal tooling foil cut to size for each student (*Note: the size will depend on the amount of metal tooling foil you have, and the number of students. Students should know the size in advance, as designs should be planned for the size they will be working with.*)
- photos or images of relief examples
- inks, such as India ink
- markers
- shoe polish

# Teaching, Learning and Assessment Process

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## LESSON ONE: INTRODUCTION TO REPOUSSE

Introduce students to the concept of shaping metal by pressing down with a blunt object. Small squares of heavy weight tin foil laid on top of several layers of newsprint and a blunt pencil will serve to introduce the concept. Students can experiment with marking on the tin foil, and then looking at the reverse side. The metal is pushed outward, creating a “relief”. The technique of pushing out metal and stretching it to form a relief is called “repousse”.

Students can experiment with a variety of patterns and ideas using these simple materials, and then tape them into their sketchbooks. For example, a series of parallel lines will create a distinct texture. Dotting the pencil will create another texture; a series of wavy lines will create another, etc. Pressing down and colouring in a shape will result in the whole area being pushed inward (or outward, when looked at from the back). The foil can be flipped and worked from both sides.

After the initial experimentation, students should have an opportunity to research repousse, looking at examples from various time periods and cultures. Students can do a web quest, using the Metropolitan Museum of Fine Art site ([www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org)) or do a Google search: repousse site:metmuseum.org.

During the web quest, students can explore questions such as:

- What is repousse? What material is used, and how is it done?
- What kinds of items were decorated using this method?
- What cultures used repousse?
- Are repeating patterns or shapes used? How?
- What is a “motif”?
- Can you find any contemporary artists who use repousse? Try searching under “metal relief artists” or “repousse artists” to find contemporary pieces.
- Does the contemporary art differ from the more historical pieces? If so, how?
- Do both the historical examples and the contemporary artists have some elements in common? What are the similarities you can find?

Have students make a response by writing and sketching in their journals or sketchbooks. End the class with a discussion of some of the questions.



Using a checklist, note which students are engaged in exploring the questions. Assist students in noticing the similarities and differences in contemporary and historical works.

*Tips for Teaching Success*

Some students are more computer literate than others. A prepared handout with the websites listed and specific questions to respond to, will facilitate students using their time to best advantage.

## LESSON TWO: PLANNING

Choose a common theme for exploration. As students will be working from observation for this unit, choose a theme that lends itself to expression with the technique. However, some themes will work better than others. Make sure that the theme selected is one that lends itself to metal relief work. Ideas that are too elaborate or difficult to draw will not work well. Ideas need to take advantage of the positive effects to be obtained by repousse. For example, plant shapes (leaves and vines), living creatures (insects, animals, fish, reptiles), or other themes lending themselves to pattern and repetition make good subjects for repousse. In addition, traditional patterns and designs such as those found in Celtic work or African fabric kente designs can also provide a good source of ideas.

After a theme has been chosen, students may use illustrations in books or on the Internet as a reference to help them with in sketching their ideas in the shapes they are using.



Monitor the choices that students are making with regards to subject matter. If the images are too complex, inquire as to what the student is planning. The initial experiences with the aluminum foil are an important aspect so students realize that only limited detail is possible. Remind students of this experience, and assist with the initial choices, to prevent later frustration.

Once students have some visual references, they may begin to plan their design. Small thumbnail sketches may be completed at this stage using several composition ideas. Have students discuss what makes an interesting composition. Consider the following:

- borders
- patterns
- repeated motifs
- placement of a focal point or main idea
- use of background textures or patterns
- simple shapes with no pattern, but pushed out with repousse
- size of ideas
- outlining shapes

By shading or hatching, students may indicate where textures will go on their thumbnails.

Provide some time for students to share ideas with a classmate or in small groups and observe them giving feedback and sharing ideas. Stress the importance of positive feedback.

### LESSON THREE: CREATING A REPOUSSE DESIGN

Review the concepts covered in the previous lessons. Post them visually in the classroom, along with the specific elements of art and design they are considering.

Using their images of relief examples or other practice sketches and research, have the students draw their final design idea as carefully as possible. Use paper that is the same size as the piece of tooling or embossing foil they will be using.



While students are drawing, circulate and discuss their ideas with them. It will be easy to see whether students have considered the elements of art and design that have been discussed in this unit. Draw attention to successful examples of incorporating pattern in borders, or textures in the background. Ask questions that help students to notice any further elements that they might include.

When the design is complete, have students tape it to the tooling foil and begin to retrace the design using a ball point pen and some pressure. The drawing will transfer as a slight imprint onto the foil.

#### *Tips for Teaching Success*

- Ensure that students check the completion of the design by lifting only part of the paper and leaving some part taped. It is almost impossible to realign the design once the paper is removed.
- Only the outlines should be indicated. Textures and patterns inside shapes do not need to be traced. The outline is a guide only.
- If the pen is not leaving a light imprint on the metal through the paper, place a few sheets of newspaper under the work to create a pad.



## LESSON FOUR: DEVELOPING THE TECHNIQUE

In this lesson, students are ready to do repousse on their designs. A demonstration will help them to see some of the possibilities.



- Demonstrate to students the method for doing “repousse”. Embossing tools, popsicle sticks, blunt pencils, pens, or anything that will imprint on the foil with pressure and make a mark may be used. Use a newspaper “pad” under the work.
- By turning the work over and working from the back, details may be brought into further relief. Shapes may be made to stand out by rubbing the entire area with a popsicle stick or other rounded wooden piece.
- Textures in the background may include stippling, parallel lines, and other decorative patterns.
- A finished piece of repousse artwork will inspire students to extend the level of details and the elements of art and design that they are using in their own work.

Students may then begin to work on their own repousse technique, flipping the piece over as needed.



When their work is complete, but before applying any finish, students should self-assess, considering the elements of art and design that have been emphasized in this unit. The assessment could be in their sketchbooks or take the form of an exit card.

## LESSON FIVE: FINISHING



This lesson is an optional extension. Repousse has enough visual interest without a final finish on it.

Metal relief may be finished in a number of ways. Consider some of the following options:

- The most effective, other than leaving it alone, is a method where the deeper recessed areas are darker, and the higher areas are more reflective. India ink or shoe polish may be brushed on, and the highlights or raised areas wiped off.
- Colour may sometimes be effective, depending on the subject matter. It is advisable to test the finishing methods on small scraps of metal foil, so students are not disappointed with the results. Drawing inks or marks or thinned acrylics may be used for coloured effects.

If all the pieces of foil are cut the same size, it is possible to do a collaborative wall or frieze. Students might cooperate with planning the designs they place on each piece so that the designs link together. Linking devices might include similar border patterns or sizes, repeating motifs, or patterns that visually link the frieze into one continuous element. The foil pieces could then be nailed into place using carpet or upholstery tacks.

Tooled foil also lends itself to a mixture of art and craft, and tooled items may be incorporated into other projects such as book covers, wall plaques, trays, and boxes. A combination of metal working, and wood working is a natural fit.



A rubric to assess this unit may be found in the Supporting Materials. This can be adjusted to fit the criteria and content of your metal relief unit.

# Unit Three: Plasticine Narrative

## (8 hours)

### Introduction

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Plasticine is easy to obtain and provides flexible modeling material for the shaping of reliefs. Because it is so malleable, it takes textures easily, and on flat surfaces it can be quite permanent.

Many students will be familiar with the artwork of Barbara Reid whose relief illustrations are prominent in many children's stories. An excellent resource for this unit is her website, and any of the illustrated stories she has done. Public libraries and the internet are both sources for this material.

In this unit, students will develop a basic vocabulary for relief, as well as explore the narrative elements of relief work.

The time required for the completion of this unit is variable. It depends on the size of the cardboard, the strength in the student's hands, their general working speed, and the level of detail they put in their work. Knowledge of your students will allow you to help them determine the size of cardboard they should use. Students who tend to work very slowly and carefully and/or put in a lot of detail, should work with smaller (20x20 cm) pieces of cardboard. Students who work more rapidly could handle a larger size, up to 30x30 cm.

### Materials

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- plasticine blocks in a variety of colours and cut into smaller "bite size" chunks
- backing surface, such as corrugated cardboard, matboard scraps, or any stiff surface
- texturing tools
- plastic knives or clay tools
- scissors
- Ziplock baggies for clay storage
- used or new CD cases (or similar)
- sketchbooks
- drawing materials

# Teaching, Learning and Assessment Process

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## LESSON ONE: PLASTICENE EXPLORATION

The purpose of this lesson is to give students a range of options to use when working with this medium. Many students may have experienced plasticine but might be unaware of its full potential. The first lesson involves creating a collection of colours and textures that students could use throughout this unit.

### *Tips for Teaching Success*

- Protect the tables from plasticine grease by using plastic placemats, scrap paper from recycling bins, or plastic. Newspapers are not recommended.
- To prepare the plasticine for students, use a cutting board and heavy chopping knife to cut it into pieces roughly 2cm square. Store cubes of similar colours in labelled buckets for distribution.
- Distribute small amounts of plasticine at a time, to prevent improper use of the materials. It is then easier to track how much plasticine a student has used, and if they used it appropriately.
- Plasticine needs to be at room temperature. If it is very cold and stiff, it can be put in warm water for a time or near a radiator (watch carefully as it will melt!)

Provide each student with a small bag of various colours of plasticine. Include the three primary colours, as well as black and white and any other colours that are available. Students should have access to a small collection of texturing tools (consisting of anything that can make a mark in the clay). Students could participate in the collection of “tools”. Each student should also have an empty CD case in which to keep their experiments.

Using the colours in their bag, have students experiment with colour by mixing the plasticine, forming small examples of at least 9 new colours and pressing them into the CD holder, patchwork fashion, just deep enough to fill the case and have the cover close.

### *Tips for Teaching Success*

- Start with a greater quantity of a light colour, such as yellow, and add smaller amounts of the darker colour such as blue, or red.
- Colour can be partially mixed in some cases leaving swirls, but all colours should not be left unmixed. The point of this is to practice making completely new colours which students can use later.
- Some basic review of colour mixing can be done, reviewing primary and secondary colour mixing, and tints and shades.

Once students have filled their CD cases with a flat patchwork of 9 to 12 mixed colours, they may begin exploring textures. Each colour should have a different textured sample. Very common implements can produce a variety of textures. For example, an ordinary pencil can produce three or four different textures when imprinted in the clay. Challenge students to discover how many different kinds of marks an implement can make.

To create a texture, the mark needs to be repeated multiple times, i.e. the tip of the pencil pushed lightly onto the surface will create a stippled effect. The eraser end of the pencil used repeatedly will create a different effect. Additional implements might include markers, plastic forks, knives and spoons, coins, buttons, nails, screws, random objects from students' school supplies, and other small items.



Observing students at work, take note of the following:

- Are students using the materials – clay and tools – appropriately?
- Is there a variety of textures in the student's sample, or are many textures simply repeated?
- Have they mixed new colours, or are they just using the ones in their baggie?

Encourage students to experiment with colours and with tool exploration.

## LESSON TWO: LOOKING AT AND PRACTICING THREE DIMENSIONAL EFFECTS IN PLASTICENE

Have students look at and discuss some of the illustrations done by Barbara Reid. See the Internet and/or books of her illustrations. Discuss questions such as:

- How does she make the work look three dimensional?
- What makes the illustrations interesting?
- How does she use shapes? Lines? Textures? Colours?
- How has she applied the clay? Are some parts done before others?

Working with a small piece of corrugated cardboard “tile” (about 15 x 15 cm) have students “paint” a plasticine background, by smearing small amounts of a single colour on the cardboard until it is covered with plasticine. An Internet site that demonstrates this technique is:

<http://www.barbarareid.ca/makingpictures.html>

Next have the students do an abstract design using the concepts of repetition and pattern to fill the space with 3-d shapes. They should not yet attempt a picture of something. Emphasize that this remains exploration. Some techniques to cover include:

- rolling small balls, and placing them side by side, or using them to create lines — vary the sizes
- rolling coils, and shaping them into patterns such as spirals, hatched, undulating, etc.
- rolling clay flat (use a marker as a roller) and cutting it into shapes such as squares, then overlapping them like tiles
- pinching or altering the surface so it stands up from the background
- using a garlic press or other extruding tool to create multiple “threads” of clay which can then be adhered to the background

### *Tips for Teaching Success*

- The background needs to be smeared on or it will not adhere to the cardboard.
- Keep the work abstract, to maximize exploration. Encourage students to explore repeated shapes and lines, creating larger patterns of raised textures.
- If all the cardboard has been cut to the same sized squares, the work can be assembled into one whole, when finished. Pushpins will hold the cardboard to a classroom bulletin board.



Have students document in their sketchbooks, a list of patterns they tried with illustrations. What might some of the patterns be used for in illustrations? Can they find other examples to try in the future by examining the work of fellow students? They can include these in their notes, crediting the source (the original student or artist who did the work). An exit card can be used for this as well, having students document their three most interesting patterns.

### LESSON THREE: PLANNING THE ILLUSTRATION

At this point, students are ready to create their own narrative illustration. Have them brainstorm several of their favourite stories. These can include fairy tales, tales from elementary school, movies, cartoons, and even novels. Next, have them select a scene from one story to illustrate in plasticine.

Preliminary rough sketches should be done, and the best ideas selected. Some discussion about composition may be helpful. Encourage students to fill the sketch with details of the scene, rather than just a picture of one of the characters. Notes can be made on the rough sketch about texturing tools, colours, etc.

#### *Tips for Teaching Success*

- Discuss with students the elements they think should be on a rubric for a good illustration in plasticine relief. Concepts in the discussion should include items such as the use of textures, colours, shapes, and relief techniques.
- Plasticine is not a coloured pencil. This may not be obvious to students when planning. Encourage them to keep their designs large and bold, rather than tiny and full of fine detail.
- Some designs may benefit from cropping—homing in on the essential details and then enlarging that to fill the relief. Encourage students to do their own designs rather than copying stock cartoon characters. If they are using a well-known character, the rest of the design should be original. Students should not plagiarize or simply lift an entire scene from a cartoon.



Assessment for learning is critical at this stage. Have students share their ideas with others so that they can get feedback and troubleshoot any technical issues before they begin the plasticine steps. Look closely at student work, to see if they have a clear idea about how they are going to proceed. Consider the following:

- Are the contents of the image large enough to be rendered in clay, or does the student need to zoom in on the image and enlarge it?
- Is there enough detail to make an interesting picture in the background areas?
- Is there too much detail so that rendering it in plasticine will be very frustrating for the student?
- Has the student thought about the effective use of colour and texture?



## LESSON FOUR: COMPLETING THE ILLUSTRATION

Provide students with corrugated cardboard for their backgrounds. Students can fill in the background colours using the smear techniques. Background colours should be just that—background. All other objects should be shaped and attached on top of the background. Textured details are added last, along with other small coloured details.

### *Tips for Teaching Success*

- Corrugated cardboard scraps can be obtained new from box making companies or use boxes from grocery stores. A good paper cutter will cut cardboard. Avoid bending the cardboard, as it weakens it.
- Plasticine needs to be firmly smeared or pressed and smoothed onto the cardboard. Warming it in the hands first will help.
- Avoid really large pieces of cardboard. They will become heavy and are very time consuming. About half the size of a piece of letter-sized piece paper is the right size for the design.

Review with students, some of the successful illustration techniques done in relief, as in the work of Barbara Reid. Have them review their own samples in their groups as a way of sharing ideas and reminding them of creative possibilities and solutions. Students can then begin to layer the plasticine onto the smeared background which has been completed.

Plasticine can be rolled, and shapes cut out with a pair of scissors or dull knife. A garlic press is useful to create “shreds” for hair, grass, and similar textures.

When the students are done, have them look at the design for places where they could add details, and complete a self-assessment.



The self-assessment can cover the criteria discussed at the beginning of the unit, and/or during the unit. It will include such things as:

- Did I think through my planning for my illustration? Have I considered feedback from others, in my work?
- Have I included relief techniques and considered textures and shapes that make the artwork come up off the page and look more real?
- How have I used lines, shapes, and colours to make the work visually interesting?
- Is my work original, even if it uses characters that have already been created by someone else?

A rubric to assess this unit is included in the Supporting Materials.

# Unit Four: Relief Assemblage

## (8 hours)

### Introduction

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Assemblage is a term that refers to assembling a number of different materials together, to create an artwork. In this unit, students will be working with a mix of materials to express a theme using relief. These materials will include those with which they are already familiar from the previous units, with the addition of found materials.

This final unit builds on the previous knowledge from the cardboard relief and the plasticine relief. It introduces the idea of incorporating a mix of materials in one art piece. This unit also re-introduces the concept of the “big idea” under which themes themselves can fall. The idea that certain themes have enduring value has been articulated in *Rethinking Curriculum in Art* (Stewart and Walker, 2005). They state:

*Enduring ideas comprise concepts that have drawn the attention of humans through the ages. The task force characterized enduring ideas as the life issues that extend beyond specific disciplines and that have lasting human importance. “The inner quest for self-knowledge,” “the relationships between humans and nature,” and “the relationships among humans” are examples of such enduring ideas because they allow subject areas, including the arts, to be developed in substantive ways. (p. 17)*

When an enduring idea is chosen as the basis for expression, students respond from a deeper and more connected level. Themes can be chosen that relate to or derive from these larger ideas of substance.

In this particular unit, any number of themes can be chosen. The example given is not the only theme that a teacher might choose to explore. The unit is laid out in such a way as to demonstrate how the materials may be worked within relief assemblage, but the theme chosen, and the materials could alter. The principles of instruction and engaging students with the enduring idea, however, should remain as the primary motivation and focus throughout this final unit. Assemblage relief should remain the format.

The theme chosen for purposes of illustration is “My relationship with nature and the living environment”. In a world that is increasingly urbanized, an appreciation for the power and importance of the natural world is something that comes to the foreground. Increasing numbers of people are using national parks and wilderness areas to experience the natural world. This unit involves the exploration of students’ impressions, experiences and appreciation of that world.

## Materials

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- books and journals
- magazines
- images of artists listed in lesson 3, or other artists whose work is expressive rather than photo realistic
- cardboard, boxboard, and/or Bristol board
- scissors
- white glue and glue brushes
- air dried synthetic clay or mache pulp
- clay tools either purchased or homemade, such as popsicle sticks, toothpicks, plastic knives and forks, small sponges
- small found objects such as pebbles, shells, pieces of metal
- tempera and acrylic paints, or gesso
- brushes for paint

## Teaching, Learning and Assessment Process

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### LESSON ONE: INTRODUCING THE TOPIC

When working with a “big idea” it is important to start small. If the idea presented is too vague or general, students will not connect with the concept on a personal level. Therefore, the first step is to activate prior knowledge of experiences that students have had in nature. This can be a writing activity, or a discussion of times students have been in a natural environment, including those things that were interesting, intriguing, challenging, or special about the experiences they have had. For students in an urban setting, favourite parks or specific places to go can be discussed. Experiences at summer camps, cottages, visiting relatives, and field trips can be included.

Students in more rural areas will have extensive experience with the natural environment. Have them consider special moments when they may have been alone, or in more powerful situations such as during a storm, at night, or at a time of day such as dawn or sunset.

The student’s personal recollections and memories of is the basis upon which the artistic exploration of these ideas takes place.

Next, have students record their recollections in their sketchbooks. Ideas can be expressed as sketches, point form notes, or whatever form suits the individual. For example, if a student has a favourite place (even if it is their back yard) they could sketch an interpretation of it, jot down descriptive words, or make a list of everything that is special about the backyard.

## LESSON TWO: COLLECTING IMAGES

Explain to students that they will be creating a personal “landscape” that can be totally imaginary, based on real experiences, or a combination of the two. This lesson continues to explore what inspires students about natural landscapes. These images will be used in two ways:

- As a source of ideas: What are some of the varying types of landscape features that are potentially inspiring, such as mountains, forests, jungles, the seaside, waterfalls?
- To assist students in their expression and interpretation of landscape, observation of actual forms can be helpful. What does the skyline of mountains look like? It is not simply a series of upside down V shapes. How does a tree actually “branch out”? Photographs can help as a reference for a deeper exploration than the usual schemas children develop for representation.

This image collection is an extension of exploring landscapes. It may or may not relate to the previous lesson where students explored personal experiences. A student who has never travelled outside their small town or village may be fascinated with the enormous sand dunes of the Sahara and have those in their image collection.

To collect images, there are several possibilities. Magazines such as *National Geographic* or *Canadian Geographic* provide a diverse range of terrains and landscape features. Brainstorming landscape features in class and then using computers and the Internet to search for inspiring images to use as a reference is another option. A field trip or school outing can sometimes provide an opportunity to collect images using digital cameras or sketchbooks.

Have students share what was interesting or special about the images they collected. Engage the five senses in a discussion about the textures – sounds, smells, and sights they might imagine in the pictures, or in their experiences outside gathering images.



At this point, introduce the assessment rubric (see Supporting Materials) for this unit and discuss criteria with the class so students are clear about what the assessment criteria. Due to the personal, expressive nature of the project, it is important students work cooperatively and collaboratively. Some discussion of what this means, and the outcomes addressed will help students remember what is involved in creating a supportive classroom environment. This is best done through discussion, rather than “rules”. Elicit from the students what a cooperative and collaborative environment looks like.

*Tips for Teaching Success*

- Students need to understand the importance of positive participation in discussions, whether it is about their own work or that of others (see final rubric).
- An atmosphere of trust is essential in encouraging personal expressive work in the art room. In group work or partner work, monitor exchanges between students closely so all students are receiving the encouragement and support they need. Students can be thoughtlessly hurtful towards peers' attempts at self-expression and ideas, under the guise of "fooling around".

### LESSON THREE: LOOKING AT LANDSCAPES

At this point, students are ready to make the link between their personal relationship with nature and landscapes and creating an artistic representation of that relationship. What needs to be stressed is that it is not about photographic realism (although some well known artists have gone that route). Students often think that a “good” landscape involves realism, whereas some of the most famous landscapes are more expressive of the artist’s relationship with nature than they are realistic.

Some artists to research when looking at landscapes in art are:

- Van Gogh
- Emily Carr
- Lauren Harris
- Henri Rousseau
- Paul Cezanne
- Paul Klee

As well, the student textbook series *How Artist’s Use* has a number of landscape examples throughout that provide examples of a variety of landscape interpretations.

During the discussion, encourage students to notice how the artist’s interpretation differs from a very realistic landscape. Discuss how the artist captured a mood or feeling in the landscape. What kinds of techniques were employed to make the work expressive? For example, in Van Gogh’s “Starry Night” the sky is alive with swirls of colour and seems to be in motion. The stars in the sky are large and bright. If students imagine a photograph of this location, would it be as visually exciting? What is the feeling in the painting?

Fantasy landscapes and surreal work can be considered as well. The jungle landscapes of Henri Rousseau are a good example of imaginary landscapes based on reality. Rousseau never went to the jungle, but his paintings are rich and evocative.

In looking at art, make sure students take the time to go through the steps of looking and describing and then take time to really be in the painting. Once they have described what they see, they can extend into questions like:

- What does the painting remind you of?
- What mood or emotion or feeling do you get from the landscape?
- What personal associations or experiences do you have when you look at this?

## LESSON FOUR: BEGINNING THE ASSEMBLAGE

Explain to students that they will be creating their own personal interpretation of a landscape using relief techniques. They may use any combination of landscape elements that they have chosen, and the work can have fantasy or imaginary elements.

Have the students work initially with cardboard relief which is then overlaid with a self-hardening clay or papier mache clay (see *About Clay* further in this unit). Objects may be glued or added into the landscape at the initial stages or near the end.

The cardboard background can be shaped, so that landscape elements such as mountains or trees can give an irregular outer edge to the cardboard. Relief elements can also extend off the edges of the cardboard. Students do not have to be limited by a “rectangular window” but can let the image extend and feel like it has no boundary, just as a landscape has no boundaries. Therefore, the final shape of the assemblage can be whatever is wished.

Begin by having students plan, doing small thumbnail sketches. Remind them to use their visual images and memories to represent the kind of landscape they would like to create. Emphasize that the cardboard does not need to be rectangular; it can be any shape: round, irregular, blobbed, etc. Landscape features can extend off the cardboard.

Students can combine the realistic with the imaginary in any way they would like. For example, some students might like to do an “alien” landscape, as imagined on another planet but using realistic elements from their images. The miniature landscape is another realm for exploration, imagining themselves as very small, and creating a landscape from that perspective.



Circulate through the room, and notice students who are struggling with naming ideas. Assist students in looking back through their images and notes and ask leading questions to help them focus their ideas to narrow them down. Stress that the piece does not need to be “realistic” in order to be successful; however, visual images can be helpful as a springboard, which can then expand using their imaginations.

Continue to monitor students’ ability to create a collaborative and cooperative environment. There should be no mocking or negative comments about other students’ work, and materials and tools should be shared in a positive fashion at each table. Due to the personal level of the work, students need to have a safe environment in which to express themselves, and this can only happen with cooperation of all students in the class.



Once the ideas stage is complete, allow students to proceed to building up the relief background. The large basic shapes in the landscape will be formed at this point. A demonstration will help students move from the concept and planning stage to the relief.



- Cut the cardboard background in the desired size.
- Major landscape features can be built up in relief, using the glue and cardboard techniques learned in Unit One.
- Other materials can be glued on here as well, to provide a base for clay or mache details to follow.

## LESSON FIVE: CLAY OR MACHE DETAILS

Using small amounts of air dried clay, such as Das or Plastibo, or papier mache modeling pulp (not strips of newspaper), have students build up details in a more organic way on top of the cardboard relief. The amount of the relief that is covered with details in clay is up to the individual student. Branches of trees, textures in the ground, and small details like rocks and boulders all benefit from detailing with clay.

### *Tips for Teaching Success*

- All clays are not created equal. Do not use clay that will crack or not adhere to the cardboard relief. Some clays are advertised as “air dried” but are simply just clay, similar to the type one would make pottery or ceramics with. Real clay or simulated air dried clays will not work.
- Look at the package or instructions to determine if the clay will adhere to an armature without cracking and falling off. Das and Plastibo are two types of clay that will adhere to a background. Test products before using them in the classroom! *Note:* If students bend cardboard or if cardboard is very flexible, even the clays above will crack and fall off. Once the details are added, the work is fragile.
- Papier mache pulp, (not strips of paper) is another useful modeling material that adheres well to cardboard. This pulp will go a long way and is relatively economical. It does not have the same capacity for detail that air dried clays have. It is possible to make a homemade papier mache pulp.
- Wood fibre or paper fibre mixes designed to have water added to a clay-like consistency can also work for relief.
- Homemade “clay” can be created using equal parts of flour and salt and adding water slowly to create clay that is very workable for specific purposes. Knead the clay, which should be the consistency of unbaked pie crust or biscuit dough. *Note:* This clay does not keep very well and should not be made in quantities that need to be stored for long periods. As well, it cannot be applied more thickly than a couple of centimeters, as it takes too long to dry. It will adhere to cardboard. An interesting texture and colour can be created by adding small quantities of fine beach sand if it is available.
- Plaster bandages can be used as a clay substitute, and by using small pieces and dipping them in water, they can be modeled to add details.



Demonstrate to students how to apply the clay to add details to a relief background. In preparation, practice the techniques, as all “clays” handle differently and what works for some will not work for others. Some points to emphasize include:

- Clay needs to be firmly pressed onto the background and the edges smeared a little onto the cardboard.
- A wet sponge (damp, not dripping) will help by dampening the background a bit, and can also be used for smoothing clay out, or keeping fingers moist. *Note:* a lot of water should not be used as this may damage the underlying relief.
- Clay can be textured with modeling tools when wet. Remind students of the skills they learned for creating textures when working with the plasticine.

When the clay is wet, small objects such as pebbles or shells, pieces of glass, beads, etc., can be embedded in the clay.



Encourage students to begin to bring out the mood or feeling of the piece, through the addition of details. Using a response card, exit card, or their sketchbook, have students consider

- Have they used texture?
- Are there things hidden in their landscape which the viewer will only see if they look closely? Where are they including details?
- What feeling or emotion do they want to communicate with their piece?
- What problems are they having? What might a solution be?

Observe and use a checklist for the appropriate materials and tools used. At this point students should be very familiar with classroom expectations around clay use. Summative assessment checklists are useful here, not only to assess what has been achieved, but also as a classroom management technique as well.

## LESSON SIX: FINISHING

Additional objects to be glued on can be added when the clay is totally dried, such as small pebbles, shells, bits of bark, and other small items. Objects can be added before or after painting, depending on whether the paint will interfere by covering the object. Small items such as sparkles, or sequins are best added last if a fantasy element is wanted.

When the clay is dried, it can be painted. Acrylics or tempera can be used. Another option is to paint the entire relief white, using a latex wall paint or gesso. Painting the entire piece white will bring out the shadow and light effects of the relief, and this presents a more classical appearance.

Some review of the colour wheel will be helpful, as well as encouraging students to think of the mood and expressive qualities colour can bring, rather than straight realism.

### *Tips for Teaching Success*

- Students can be very challenged in painting the landscapes if they are too focused on realism. Detailed painting can be time consuming. A simple coat of a colour or two, loosely brushed over the surface to capture the mood or feeling, can be more effective as a “finish” rather than trying to paint every leaf and branch. Students can focus on the mood they are conveying, rather than on realism.
- If the paint is thinned, it will flow easily over the surface and into cracks.
- Rolling the surface with a sponge roller, or dabbing paint on with sponges, will highlight the top parts of the relief landscape in either light or dark contrasting colours.



A sample rubric to assess this unit is found in the Supporting Materials. Observation checklists may be consulted when doing the final assessment. Exit cards or sketchbook notes can be submitted by students for the final assessment.

# Supporting Materials

## Unit 1: Introduction to Relief

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| Expectations (criteria)   | Working On It  | Almost There | Got it! | Comments |
|---|--|--------------|---------|----------|
| has used a variety of principles of art and design, as covered in class, to create a relief composition |  |              |         |          |
| has reflected on their own work   |  |              |         |          |
| has participated thoughtfully in discussions and/or written reflections on relief                       |  |              |         |          |
| is beginning to use the language of the art elements in discussing and reflecting on art                |  |              |         |          |
| cares for and uses equipment properly and safely  |  |              |         |          |
| has worked collaboratively with others in relief design   |  |              |         |          |
| Assessed by (circle):<br><br>Teacher<br><br>Self<br><br>Peer  | Name:<br><br>Class:                      Date:<br><br>Notes: |              |         |          |

## Unit 2: Metal Relief Rubric

| Expectations (criteria)   | Working On It   | Almost There   | Got it!   | Comments |
|---|---|--|---|----------|
| Demonstrates the ability to discuss their own work and/or the work of others in an appreciative manner  | Beginning to participate in discussions about art, in a group or one-on one. Has difficulty appreciating others' work | Participates in discussions and is beginning to show appreciation for work of others                               | Always participates in discussions in a group or one-on-one and shows appreciation for work of others                       |          |
| A web quest or other form of investigation has been completed, and student demonstrates an understanding of metal relief in varying cultures      | Just starting the investigation of metal relief   | Some investigation of relief has been completed, and student demonstrates some understanding of metal relief       | Investigation of metal relief has been completed and student can identify several different aspects of relief, historically |          |
| Using the language of art and design in analysis of their own work and/or historical works  | Struggles with using the language of art and design when responding to their work, or the work of others              | Responses (written or oral) are evidence student occasionally uses language of art and design in analysis of work  | Responses (written or oral) often show use of language of art and design in referring to own works or historical works      |          |
| Designs were completed that use elements from the environment which have been researched and drawn  | Trying to express ideas in the metal relief. Design is random.  | Metal relief design uses ideas from the environment as a basis for expression in some part of the relief           | Metal relief design clearly uses ideas from the environment and is well researched and drawn                                |          |
| An understanding of the use of design principles and the elements of art has been demonstrated through the planning and executing of metal relief | Struggles to apply design principles in the planning and/or in the final execution of the metal relief.               | Some design principles covered in the unit are visible in the planning and/or final execution of the metal relief. | Most design principles covered in the unit are clearly visible in the planning and/or final execution of the relief.        |          |
| Assessed by (circle):<br><br>Teacher<br><br>Self<br><br>Peer  | Name:<br><br>Class:                      Date:<br><br>Notes:  |  |   |          |

## Unit 3: Plasticine Narrative Rubric

| <b>Expectations (criteria)</b>  | <b>Working On It</b>  | <b>Almost There</b>   | <b>Got it!</b>  | <b>Comments</b> |
|---|---|---|---|-----------------|
| A personal interpretation of a narrative was created in detail, using original ideas  | Ideas are not yet original. Work needed more details.   | Relied on another artist's interpretation but did contribute some of their own original ideas. Some details were present. | Most ideas in the piece are original, not derivative. Work was very detailed.   |                 |
| Materials were used to advantage, and concepts covered such as texture, shape, and colour were thoroughly explored                                | Very few elements of art were used in creation of piece. More variety needed.   | A few concepts were explored. Student shows an understanding of some of the elements of art in the use of clay.           | An understanding of the elements of art covered in the unit was clearly demonstrated in use of clay. Good variety.            |                 |
| Respect for materials and tools was demonstrated. Student shows a good understanding of the proper use of clay as outlined and presented in class | Struggles to use clay appropriately, and/or tools were not used effectively. Needs to demonstrate proper materials and tools use. | Usually respected the materials and/or the tools, and usually understood the proper use of clay                           | Consistently respected the materials and tools, and showed an understanding of the proper use of clay                         |                 |
| Demonstrates the ability to reflect on her/his own artwork, and has participated in self assessment in discussions or written work                | Did not complete Self-assessment and participation was minimal  | Some reflection on the artwork has occurred. More details would improve the self assessment                               | Self-assessment is completed in detail, and student has reflected on their work in a thoughtful manner.                       |                 |
| Illustration successfully communicates several ideas about the chosen narrative   | The illustration did not readily connect to the narrative. Communication needs to be clearer.                                     | Illustration does connect to the story, and communicates about the chosen narrative, but the work needs more detail.      | Illustration clearly communicates the story chosen and illustrates it very well. Details are very suited to the story chosen. |                 |
| Assessed by (circle):<br><br>Teacher<br><br>Self<br><br>Peer  | Name:<br><br>Class:<br><br>Notes:   | Date:   |   |                 |

## Unit 4: Relief Assemblage Rubric

| Expectations (criteria)  | Working On It  | Almost There  | Got it!  |
|--|--|---|--|
| Demonstrates increasing complexity in the manipulation of materials, from the beginning of the module to the final project. Shows increased understanding of the possibilities in relief work. | Working to develop use of relief techniques or skills.                     | Demonstrates increased understanding of relief techniques and shows some increase in skill and understanding. Work could be further developed by. . . | Shows a thorough understanding of relief and has increased skill level and complexity in relief work, through the level of relief details in this project. |
| Has developed concepts and imagery based on personal experiences and has used them as a basis for visual expression. Assemblage is personally expressive and meaningful to the student.        | Working to make personal connections with work. Needs to do more planning. | Concepts and imagery were developed and have some personal meaning to the student. Work could be further developed by. . .                            | Concepts and personal meaning are well developed and articulated. Work is expressive and well thought out through preliminary preparation.                 |
| Student has worked cooperatively and collaboratively with peers, in sharing materials, tools, ideas and in creating a supportive creative environment during discussions and studio times.     | Working cooperatively remains a challenge.                                 | Demonstrates the ability to work cooperatively and to create a supportive environment in the classroom. An area that needs improvement is. . .        | Always worked cooperatively and was supportive with others in creating a collaborative classroom environment.  |
| Demonstrates awareness of safety and proper use of tools and materials, particularly cutting and clay tools, and the use of clay   | Working on proper use of tools and materials                               | Proper use of tools and materials was usually demonstrated, as instructed in the class..  | Proper use of tools and materials was always demonstrated, as instructed in the class.   |
| Student has reflected on their own work, and/or the work of others, in either written form or orally, during small group discussions or one-on-one interviews.                                 | Needs to reflect about their work.   | Reflections on work were usually completed, although more details or content would be desirable.  | Reflections on work were detailed and thorough, and student participated in discussions about her/his own work and the work of others.                     |
| Assessed by (circle):<br><br>Teacher<br><br>Self<br><br>Peer   | Name:<br><br>Class:<br><br>Notes:  | Date:   |  |



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