

MAKE A CYANOTYPE PRINT FROM NATURE

Art | Math | Science

Possible curricular outcomes, activity dependent: Social Studies

Look Closely

Find a tree, plant or flower and quietly look at it for at least one full minute.

- What do you notice?
- Use your [viewfinder](#) to help focus on any parts that make you curious.
- What can you feel, hear and smell? Are there any interesting textures that you can find?
- What sorts of colours and shapes can you find?

Learn More

The cyanotype process was invented in 1842 by Sir John F. W. Herschel (1792–1871), using paper coated with a solution of iron salts, sun exposure and a water.

Prepared cyanotype printing paper is available online or at an art store. You can prepare your own printing surfaces with the proper chemicals, ammonium ferric citrate and potassium ferricyanide. This needs to be done in advance in a well-ventilated space with the proper personal protection gear like a facemask and rubber gloves. Paper, card, textiles or any natural material can be used to print on. For a complete list of materials and the process please visit alternativephotography.com.



Activity

Materials: natural objects to use for printing, cyanotype paper or prepared cyanotype surfaces, small sheet glass or plexiglass (optional), direct sunlight or a UV lamp, running water

1. Collect something from nature to use for your cyanotype.
2. On a flat surface, place your natural object onto the prepared paper. A larger piece of glass or plexiglass placed over the top will help keep the image sharp by pressing them closer to the paper.
3. Expose to sunlight or under a UV lamp. Exposure times can vary from five to 30 minutes, depending on how strong your light source is. Do some testing to find out the proper exposure time.
4. During exposure the paper will begin to change colour. The exposed part of the paper will turn a pale greenish colour, this will let you know the print is ready to wash.
5. Once the exposure is complete, rinse the paper in water for two minutes or until the water runs clear. A white image will emerge on a blue background.
6. After you wash your print, leave your paper to dry. If your prints are curled after drying, as paper often does, they can be placed under a heavy object like a book to flatten.

Tips & Tricks

- Find interesting objects. Flowers, plants, leaves, keys, glasses, and anything with a distinctive shape works well. Objects that have some transparency are fun to experiment with.
- If you are doing this outside, be mindful of wind!

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- Keep it flat. Lay a piece of glass or plexiglass, if desired, over plants and flowers. The closer an object is to the paper, the sharper the image will be.
- The paper is fragile when wet. Handle it carefully by holding the print by its edges.

Share!

Create a gallery of your prints to share with each other and your school! We would love to see your cyanotype creations at Glenbow: schoolprograms@glenbow.org.

Additional Questions and Thought Starters

- How is ultraviolet light different from visible light?
- What makes a cyanotype blue?
- Where can you find blue in nature?
- Are there any patterns evident in nature, big or small?

