

If it's true that fish is "brain food," then this method of teaching your students about batik will give them extra brainpower.

On a recent trip to the Caribbean island of St. Kitts, I visited a wonderful batik studio, Caribelle Batik. This world-famous studio and shop offers a wide selection of hand-painted batiks, ranging from small items and clothing to large wall hangings. A friendly artisan may be found demonstrating the wax-resist method in the front of the studio, explaining the process as she works.

Somehow I knew that I wanted to bring this beautiful technique back to my elementary-school students, but I was concerned with the safety of hot wax in the classroom. So, I simplified it by using a crayon-resist method to simulate the crisp white outlines and brilliant colors found in the Caribelle fabrics.

First, I shared some sample batik fabrics and photographs of batiks and asked students what they liked about them. The kids enjoyed the bright colors and tropical themes, and someone always notices the

white outlines surrounding the shapes. I shared photos of the Caribelle studio, available online at www.caribellebatikstkitts.com, and explained the batik process: First, liquid wax is applied as a "resist" substance; then the fabric is either dipped in dye or painted with dye; next, the wax is removed using heat; and the process is repeated for each additional color.

I told the students we can't use hot wax in elementary school, but there is something we use all the time in art class that we can substitute. They quickly guessed: "Crayons!" I informed them that it's called "crayon resist" when we paint over crayon with watercolors because the waxy crayons "resist" the paint.

Since I used an underwater theme, during the remainder of the first session I shared books and pictures of fish and ocean scenes. *The Underwater Alphabet Book* by Jerry Pallotta and *Buck Wilder's Small Fry Fishing Guide: A Complete Introduction to the World of Fishing for*



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RESOURCES

- Pallotta, Jerry, *The Underwater Alphabet Book*. Charlesbridge Publishing, 1991.
- Smith, Tim and Herrick, Mark, *Buck Wilder's Small Fry Fishing Guide: A Complete Introduction to the World of Fishing for Small Fry of All Ages*. Buck Wilder Books, 1995.
- Web site: www.caribellebatikstkitts.com



Stephanie

Ir-resist-

by Joan Sterling

MATERIALS

- 12" x 18" light gray heavyweight drawing paper or construction paper
- 9" x 12" practice paper
- White charcoal pencils or white chalk and erasers
- White crayons
- Watercolors
- Brushes, water and paper towels
- Coarse salt
- Crayons
- Fine black permanent markers
- Pencils, erasers

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Elementary students will ...

- use crayon-resist techniques to simulate the batik effect.
- create underwater landscapes with fish using warm and cool colors.



Go to artsandactivities.com and click on this button for a Web link to learn more about the Caribelle technique of batik.



Small Fry of All Ages by Timothy R. Smith and Mark Herrick are excellent children's books that show fish in their environment. Other suitable subjects are flowers, birds or tropical foliage.

We looked at photos, books and prints of fish and brainstormed features all fish have in common. The students then created their own pictures on practice paper in pencil, sketching lightly and using basic shapes to draw our fish, starting with an oval and then adding fins, a tail, an eye and mouth, with some patterns on the body and fins. Seaweed, coral, shells, rocks and sand were added to the background. Some students drew bubbles rising from their fishes' mouths. The next step was to outline everything in black permanent marker and erase the pencil.

Before coloring, we reviewed warm and cool colors, and

discussed how warm colors pop out and cool colors recede. They decided which color group, warm or cool, they would use for the foreground and then used the opposite color group for the background. While some students were resistant to the idea of red, yellow or orange water, I explained that sometimes the water looks bright when sunlight is streaming down through it, reflecting the light in a striking way. This made them feel more adventurous and willing to try something different.

The second session, we reviewed the batik process and discussed how it compares to crayon resist: hot wax versus crayon; dye versus watercolors. We used light gray paper to draw our final copies, as it makes the white crayon much easier to see. With white charcoal pencil or chalk, we lightly sketched the fish and background features, making sure the composition filled the whole paper. Next, we drew over the chalk lines with white crayon, pressing hard and going over every line several times so the wax was thick enough on the paper to resist the paint. I explained to students they should be able to feel the waxy crayon lines with their eyes closed.

The next session, students painted the foreground, including the fish, coral, seaweed, shells and so on. I reminded them to use either warm *or* cool colors for everything they painted that day and *not* to paint the water or ocean floor. Mixing and blending colors adds a variety of shades and hues.

Finally, we painted the water and ocean floor using the opposite color group. Wet-on-wet works best for this part, so I demonstrate this technique by painting one section at a time. After each section is painted, while it is still wet, sprinkle some coarse salt over the area. The crystals absorb the paint and add a very unique texture to the water. Students get very excited seeing the salt crystallize into the paints.

The use of warm and cool colors, salt crystals and the batik effect, with crisp white outlines, created magnificent underwater scenes that we found to be "ir-resist-able"! ■

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Joan Sterling teaches art at Hickory Woods Elementary School in Walled Lake, Mich., and coauthored "Art by the Book" from *Pieces of Learning* (piecesoflearning.com).