

Gelli Plate Printmaking: Exploring Layers and Textures

Materials Needed:

- Gelli Arts® Gel Printing Plate (any size, 5x7 or 8x10 is great to start)
 - Soft rubber brayer
 - Acrylic paints (various colors, including black and white)
 - Paper for printing (Sulphite/construction paper, copy paper, cardstock, or mixed-media paper all work well)
 - A smooth, non-porous surface to work on (craft mat, sheet of plexiglass, or wax paper taped to a table)
 - Stencils (store-bought or hand-cut from cardstock)
 - Texture tools: A collection of items from around the house. Examples include:
 - Bubble wrap
 - Crumpled plastic wrap or foil
 - Leaves, ferns, or flat flowers from the yard
 - String or yarn
 - Cardboard tubes (for stamping circles)
 - Plastic forks, combs, or bottle caps
 - Mesh from a bag of onions or avocados
 - Paper towels for cleanup
 - Shallow tray or palette for paint
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Lesson Plan (Approx. 90 Minutes)

Part 1: Inspiration & Setup (10 minutes)

Goal: To understand the possibilities of Gelli printing and prepare the workspace.

1. **Inspiration Spark:** Before you begin, spend 5 minutes exploring the hashtag #gelliprint or #gelliarts on Instagram or Pinterest. Notice the incredible variety of styles. Look at how artists use layers, colors, and textures. What catches your eye? Are there any ideas you'd like to try?
2. **Workspace Prep:** Set up your station. Lay down your protective surface. Squeeze out a few pea-sized drops of 2-3 colors of acrylic paint onto your palette. Have your Gelli plate, brayer, paper, and texture tools within easy reach.

Part 2: Guided Exploration - Mastering the Techniques (25 minutes)

Goal: To learn the foundational skills of pulling prints, creating texture, and layering.

1. **The Basic Print:**
 - Place 2-3 small drops of paint on your Gelli plate.
 - Use the brayer to roll the paint into a thin, even layer across the plate. You should hear a sticky, "hissing" sound. If it's silent, you may need a tiny bit more paint. If it's squelchy and
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slippery, you have too much.

- Place a sheet of paper on the plate. Rub the back of the paper firmly with your hand, making sure to cover the entire surface.
- Gently peel the paper back from one corner to reveal your first print! This is called "pulling" a print. Make 2-3 of these basic prints to get a feel for it.

2. **Creating Texture (The Fun Part!):**

- Roll out another layer of paint.
- Before placing your paper, gently press a texture tool (like bubble wrap or a leaf) into the wet paint and lift it away. This removes some paint, creating a pattern.
- Now, place your paper on top, rub, and pull the print. Notice the negative space left by your texture tool.
- **Experiment!** Try rolling a string through the paint, stamping with a bottle cap, or scraping with a plastic fork. Create at least 5 different textured prints. Don't worry about perfection; these are for practice.

3. **Masking and Layering:**

- Roll out a light color (like yellow or light blue). Place a stencil or a large leaf on the plate.
- Place paper over the entire plate, rub, and pull the print. You'll have the shape of your stencil/leaf in negative space. This is your "ghost print." Set it aside.
- Remove the stencil/leaf from the plate. Now place a *different* sheet of paper on the plate and pull that print. You'll get the positive image of your object!
- **Let's Layer:** Take one of your earlier, dry prints. Roll a new, thin layer of a contrasting color on the plate. Use a stencil to create a pattern. Now, place your *old print* face down onto the plate, rub, and pull. You have just created your first multi-layered artwork!

Part 3: Creative Challenge - "Abstract Nature" Series (40 minutes)

Goal: To apply your new skills to create a cohesive series of three related artworks.

Your challenge is to create a triptych (a series of three art pieces) inspired by the theme "Abstract Nature." Think about the colors, textures, and shapes you find in a forest, a garden, or the ocean. This is not about making a realistic picture, but about capturing a feeling or an essence.

1. **Plan Your Palette:** Choose 3-4 colors that remind you of your chosen natural environment (e.g., blues and greens for the ocean; browns, oranges, and yellows for autumn).
2. **Create Your Base Layers:** On three separate sheets of paper, create interesting, simple background prints. These could be smooth color blends or light textures. Let them dry completely (acrylic paint on paper dries quickly).
3. **Build Complexity:** Now, work on top of those base layers. Add a second and even a third layer to each piece.
 - Use leaves, string, and other natural-themed texture tools.
 - Use stencils to add geometric or repeating patterns.
 - Think about composition. Does one print have a strong focal point? Do the three prints look interesting when placed side-by-side?
4. **Embrace the "Happy Accident":** Gelli printing is full of surprises. If a print doesn't turn out as you expected, don't discard it! It might be the perfect background for another layer, or you could cut it up later for collage. The most interesting pieces often come from unexpected results.

Part 4: Cleanup & Reflection (15 minutes)

Goal: To properly care for your tools and reflect on your creative process.

1. **Clean Up:** Lightly spritz your Gelli plate with water and gently wipe with a soft paper towel. The

brayer can be cleaned by rolling it on scrap paper until most of the paint is gone, then wiping with a damp cloth. Wash your palette.

2. **Showcase Your Work:** Lay out your "Abstract Nature" triptych. Arrange the three pieces in the order you find most pleasing.
3. **Reflect:** Ask yourself the following questions:
 - Which of the three pieces is my favorite, and why?
 - What was the most successful technique I used today? What was the most challenging?
 - What is one "happy accident" that occurred, and what did I learn from it?
 - If I were to do this project again, what would I do differently?

Extension Activity (Optional):

Choose your best prints from the day. You can use them as-is, or you can turn them into something new! Cut them up to create collage art, use them as unique greeting cards, or incorporate them into an art journal by drawing or writing on top of them.