



DIY BLOCK PRINTED HOLIDAY CARDS

Featuring Versatex Screen Inks

By: Tanya Alexander



Many people are looking for new methods of exploring their creativity. Creating holiday cards by hand allows DIYers the chance to not only make something beautiful and unique, but also share messages of hope, love and happiness... no better time to do that than 2020!

Dive into the fun (and slightly addictive) process of lino block printing (using two different techniques) with this fun Holiday Card tutorial, featuring Versatex Screen Inks and some basic block printing tools.

Happy Crafting, from your friends at Jacquard Products!



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MATERIALS

- Strathmore Printmaking Paper (light or heavy weight, amount depends on card size)
- Jacquard's Versatex Inks (your choice, I like blending several for custom colors)
- Linoleum Blocks (size based on desired card size; I used unmounted blocks)
- 4" brayer roller (soft rubber)
- Lino block carving tools
(A Speedball Lino Tool with tips set is an economical choice, but I much prefer working with a Power Grip basic set and a micro set for fine lines)
- Piece of Plexiglass (to roll out ink on)
- Palette knife (for mixing ink & spreading ink for rolling)
- Steel ruler
- Exacto knife
- Shallow pan with water (for soaking paper cards to prep for printing)
- Kitchen towels (to blot water from paper and use during ironing)
- Paper towels (for cleanup and tidy fingers while working)
- Fine tip Sharpie
- Pencil and eraser
- Bright colored pencil (for marking cutting areas on lino blocks)
- A couple pieces of chipboard (for creating registration template)
- 3" caster wheel (easily sourced from local hardware store)
- Clothing iron (for flattening cards)



OPTIONAL SUPPLIES:

- Tracing paper (for transferring traced designs to the lino block)
- Bone tool (for scoring and folding)
- Twine & clothespins (for a drying line)
- Jacquard's Pearl Ex Powdered Pigment and Jacquard's Gum Arabic (for creating shimmery ink)

LEFT: A snapshot many of the supplies you'll need for this project.

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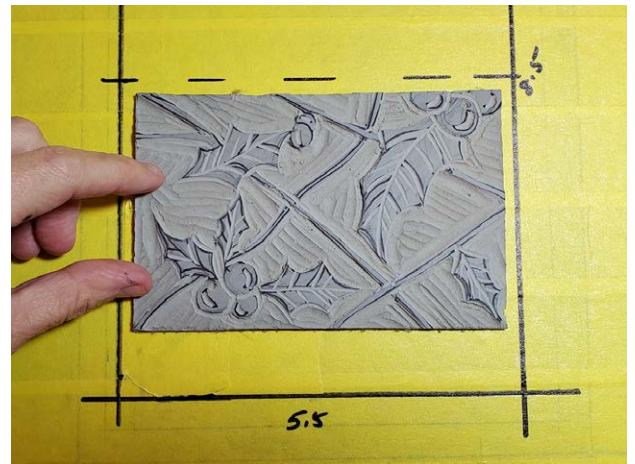
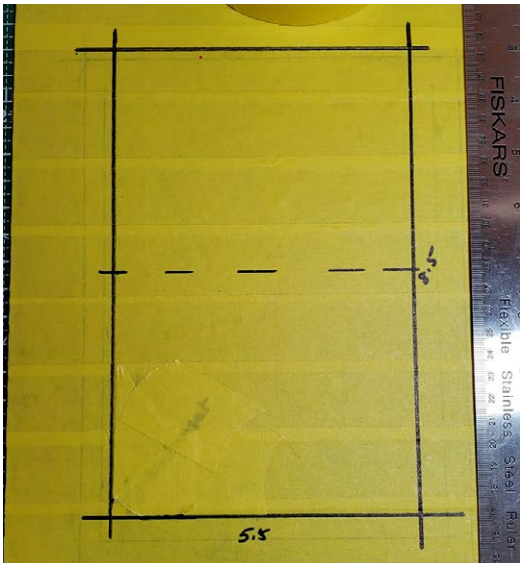
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SELECT YOUR CARD SIZE

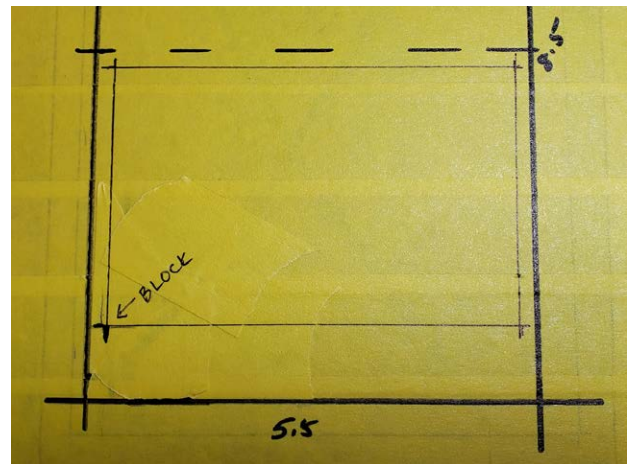
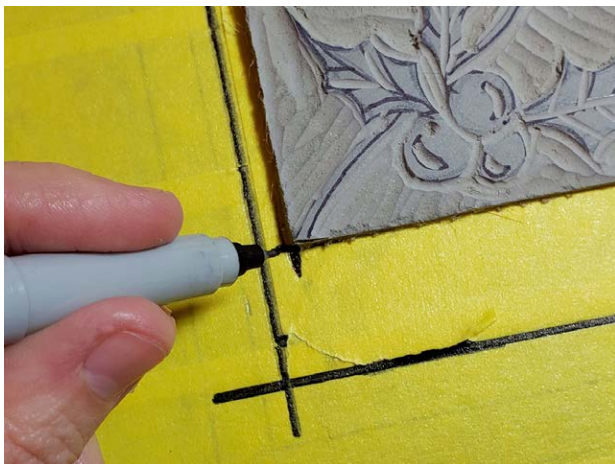
It is important to determine the size of your finished greeting cards before starting. Working with 11" x 14" printmaking paper, I chose to go with an A2 size card: 8.5" x 5.5" (flat) / 4.25" x 5.5" (folded), a cute size I can easily find envelopes for and can get two cards from each sheet of paper. Just Google "standard greeting card sizes" to find more card size options that are easy to find envelopes for. Next, let's create a registration template, a handy tool to help keep your block and paper in place when printing!

MAKE A REGISTRATION TEMPLATE

1. Using a steel ruler and fine line Sharpie, draw out the shape/exact size of your flat card dimension on a piece of chipboard, extending the lines past the corners. This is how you will reference where to place your paper when printing. NOTE: I covered my chipboard in yellow masking tape, to make it easier to see the drawn guidelines.

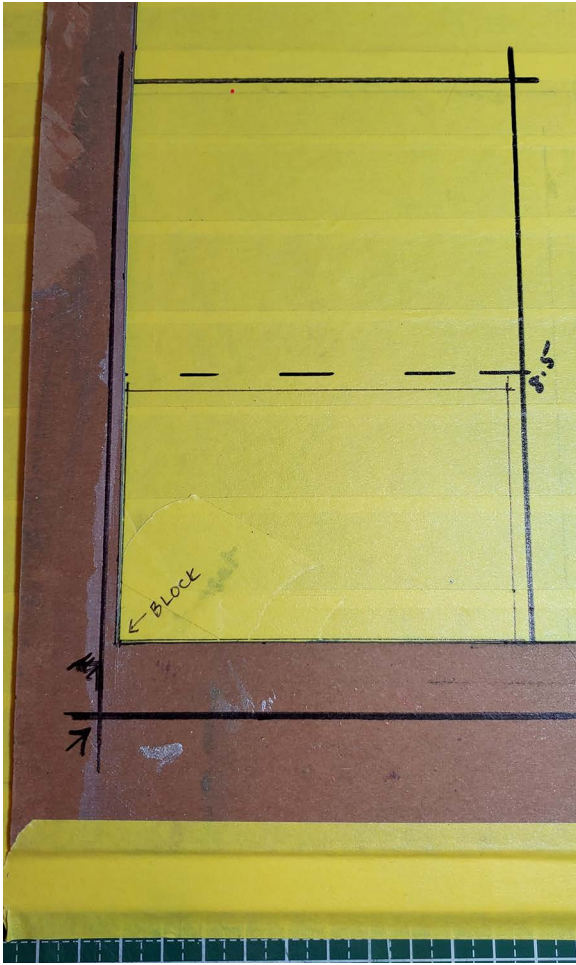


2. Using your lino block, "float" it in the space on the front of your card (in my case, the bottom area of the card, allowing for a bigger bottom margin to embellish). Trace the block outline in its final position, extending the lines past the corners. This is how you will reference where to place your block when printing.



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3. Using a steel ruler and Exacto knife, cut a 2nd piece of chipboard into an uppercase "L" and line up inner edge to your lino block mark. Tape down on bottom edge, transferring paper mark onto the "L" so you can see where to line up your paper. This "L" will hold the block in place while you print, and give you a definitive place to line up your paper (always register to bottom left corner, as shown).

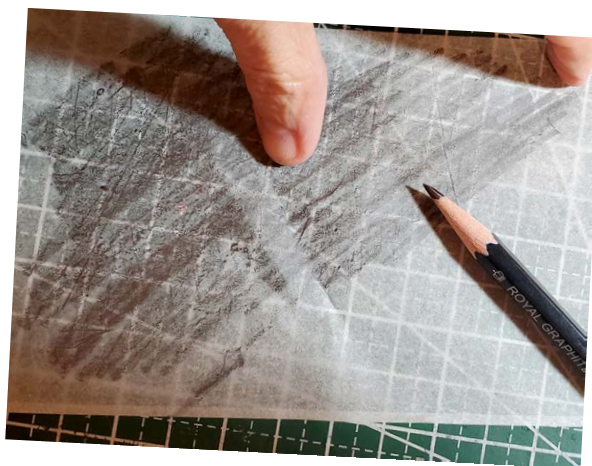


PROJECT STEPS

1. Using a steel ruler and Exacto knife, cut your printmaking paper down to your finished flat card size (do not fold into cards). Measure and cut your lino block to size; I like to leave a small border of white paper to "frame in" my design... about 1/8" is a good amount (a little larger at bottom if you want to write a greeting on the front). Cut enough cards for your desired finished amount, plus 5-10 extra (to allow for misprints).



2. Draw out your basic design in pencil. You can draw your design freehand, or if you'd rather trace an existing design onto the block, you can do a simple graphite transfer:



Use your pencil to fully color in a piece of tracing paper on one side.



Lay the pencil side down on top of the lino block. Place your image on top, and use a pencil to "trace" the lines of your design, making sure to keep the papers from moving while working.

Once you've traced your design, lift away the papers and you'll see the image transferred to the block.



Using fine tip Sharpie, trace your design's main reference lines to "lock down" your design, and erase remaining pencil from block.

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3. Time to carve your lino block! At this point, you'll need to decide which type of block printing method you'd like to do: a mono block, or a reduction block (instructions for both included):

MONO BLOCK: You carve a simple, complete design into the block, and do one single press pass. The block can be saved and used again with repeatable result (meaning you can print the same design at any time down the road). It can be printed in single or multiple colors (more on that later).

REDUCTION BLOCK: You carve a bit more strategically, based on the number of print layers you are looking to print. It is also known as a "suicide block," because once you carve and print a color, you re-carve the block specifically for the next color; therefore, this means you must print any pieces you'd ever want with the first color, because it is recarved, it can never produce the same result. It is a favored technique for printing more complex designs without carving multiple blocks for each layer. Here is a fantastic resource video that demonstrates this technique: https://youtu.be/NfU91PSVU_k.

Instructions for both methods are included in this project.

MONO BLOCK PRINTING

IMPORTANT: Lino block carving tools are **VERY, VERY SHARP!** Please handle with care, and keep away from younger artists ... never place your fingers in the path/area you are carving (tools can slip on the block and things can get very stabby!).

1. Using your lino block carving tools, carve away any areas from your design where you want the paper to show through. This can sometimes be tricky to visualize. My secret trick is to lightly color in the entire block with a colored pencil on top of the Sharpie'd design, and then "carve away" the areas I want to remain white. Carving depth varies; however, you want to make sure your cuts are low enough to avoid picking up the ink, but not cut down to the bottom of the block.



2. Once you've completed carving your lino block, brush your work area clear and toss the lino scraps. Set your carving tools aside and out of the way. Place your cut cards in the shallow pan of water, letting them soak while you prepare to print (about 20 minutes is ideal).

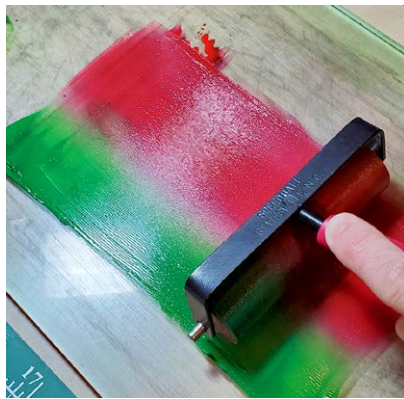
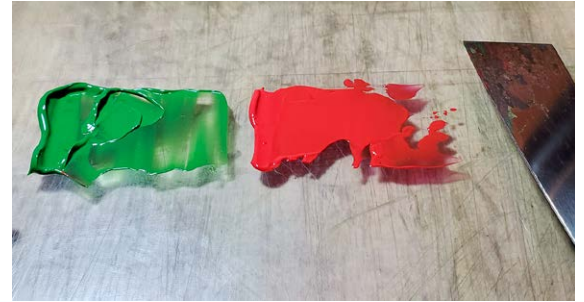
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3. Use your palette knife to scoop out a small amount of Versatex onto the top area of your Plexiglass sheet. If working with multiple colors, space them apart on the top. Use a paper towel to wipe your palette knife clean between colors. For this demo, I chose two colors straight from the jar: 315 Yellow Green and 306 Bright Red.



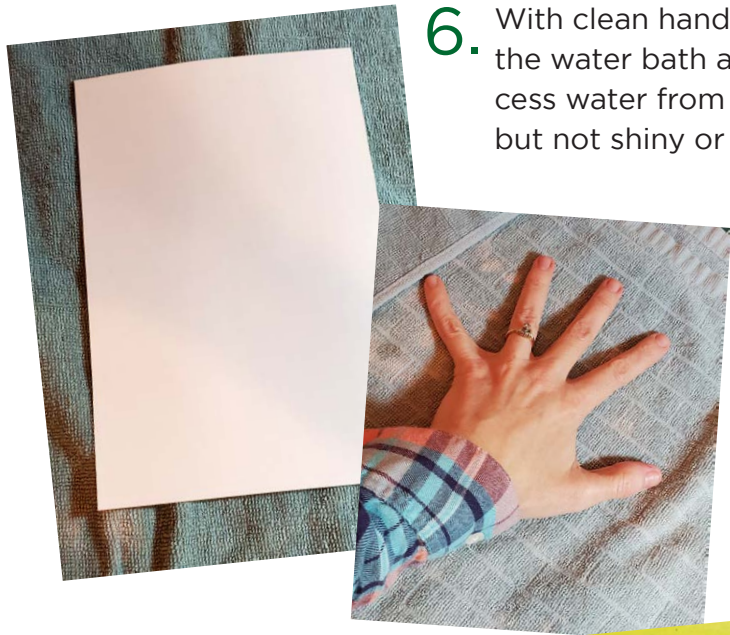
4. Use your palette knife to lay a small "bead" of each color side-by-side a couple inches below your main scoops. Using your 4" rubber brayer, roll into the two beads of color and pull down, working the roller up and down to create a blended (or "rainbow" roll). Continue until you hear the roller "hiss" ... do not overload the roller with ink!



5. With lino block on paper towel, use loaded brayer to roll the ink onto the block. You'll want to make sure to keep the roller moving in one lateral direction to avoid muddying the gradient. Ensure all of the raised/flat areas of the block are coated with a thin layer of ink.



6. With clean hands, remove one sheet of printmaking paper from the water bath and place on flat, dry towel. Use towel to blot excess water from the paper. Ideally, your paper is cool to the touch, but not shiny or glistening with water.



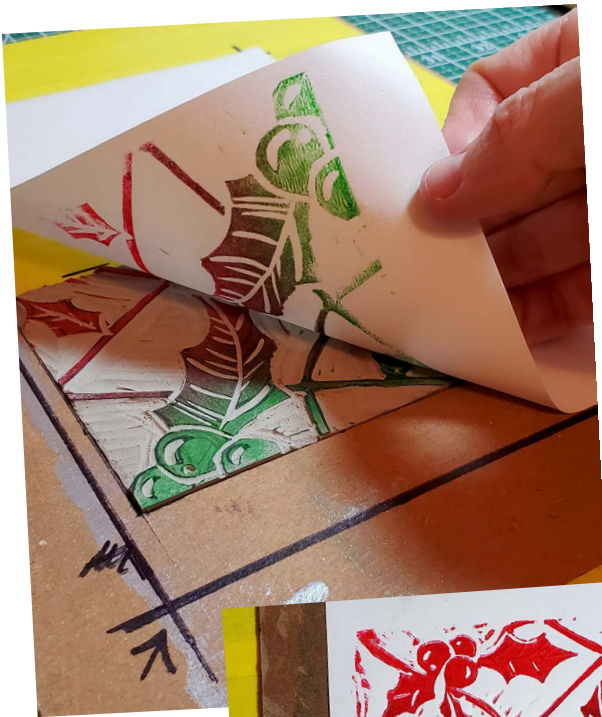
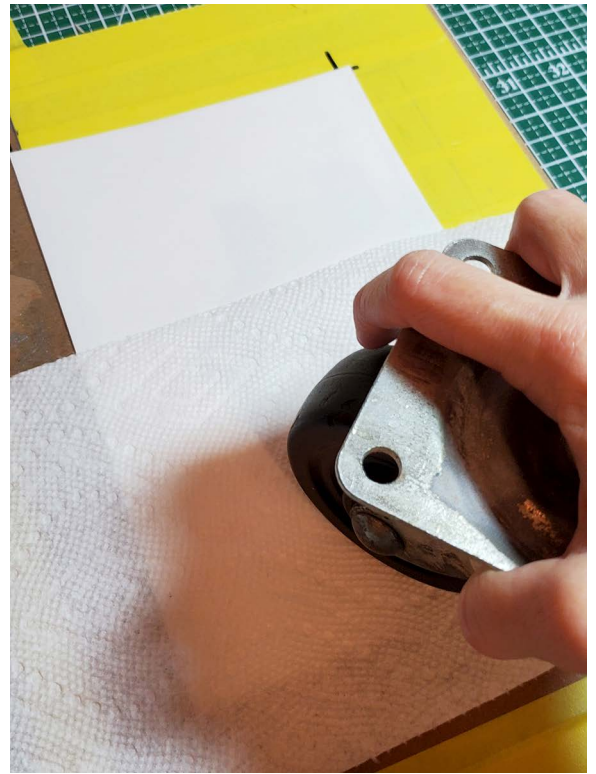
7. Lift "L" and set the block (ink side up) in the block area of your registration template. Drop "L" back in place, making sure inked block is snug against lower left corner.



8. Carefully line up your paper to the registration guide on the left side, then gently lay the paper face down onto the inked block. Use your hand to gently press the paper onto the block, making sure you do not allow the paper or block to move.



9. Place a clean paper towel on top of your paper. Keeping one hand on the paper at all times, use your 3" caster wheel to imprint your design onto your paper by rolling the wheel carefully over the paper towel, multiple times and in multiple directions. The idea is to use the wheel pressure to press the damp paper into the inked block (without the means of a printing press). You can "peek" at the progress of the print by carefully lifting up a corner of the paper (keeping your other hand firmly on the back of the paper so it does not shift).



10. Continue rolling and checking the print until you are satisfied with the impression. Then, carefully peel up the paper and lay on a clean, flat surface (or hang from optional clothesline) to dry. Allow to dry overnight.



REDUCTION BLOCK PRINTING

Reduction block printing is great for more complicated designs. The registration template allows you to easily line up the paper between printed layers, and you can experiment with how these generally transparent inks interact when laid over one another, to achieve interesting color shift effects. The printing process is very similar to the mono block printing instructions, but there are some key differences you'll need to keep in mind:

- Reduction block printing is done in multiple, carved layers. Once you carve your first layer, you will need to print all of the cards you'll ever want with this design before moving on to the next layer. The block is forever altered, once you carve into it for subsequent layers, and you'll never be able to print that first carved layer again.
- The first layer you carve away is anything in your design where you want the paper to show through, just as with mono block carving. Once that layer is printed, you wipe the block clean with a damp paper towel, dry, then carve away whatever parts of your design you want to keep as the first printed color. This can be especially tricky to keep in mind, and using the colored pencil technique is really helpful.
- You'll need to plan for a longer project time with this technique; you'll be cleaning up your print area and carving the block in multiple sessions. Each printed layer needs to dry before another layer of ink can be printed. Plan accordingly!

IMPORTANT: It is worth mentioning twice: lino block carving tools are **VERY, VERY SHARP!** Please handle with extreme caution, and keep your fingers and hand away from blade area when carving!

1. As with the mono block printing, you'll carve away any areas from your design where you want the paper to show through. Then, clean up your work area and place your cards to soak in water.



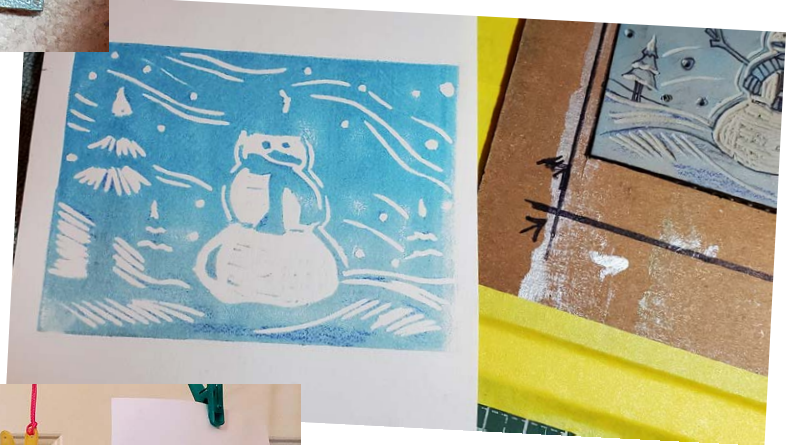
2. Next you'll prep your first color for printing. Generally, working light to dark colorwise is best. For my first layer, I made an icy, light blue by combining: 320 Sky Blue, 330 Silver Lace and a bit of 329 White. I also made a slightly darker version (with less white). I thoroughly mixed both colors before laying printing beads to roll with the brayer.



3. Load your brayer roller with ink, as in the mono block printing instructions, and roll the ink onto your carved block. I went with a blended roll with both blues, with the darker blue on top and the lighter blue on bottom. Ensure the flat areas all have a light coat of ink (do not overload your block with ink).



4. Print your first layer, as outlined in the mono block printing instructions, and lay cards flat or hang to dry until ink is dry to touch.

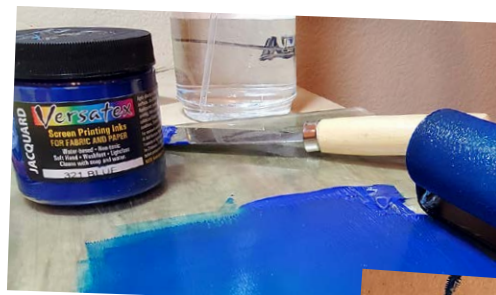


5. While the cards dry, clean up your print area. Wipe your block off with a damp paper towel (do not saturate your block with water). Dry with paper towel and retrieve your carving tools.

6. You're ready to carve your next layer... remember, you want to carve away anything you want to stay the color of your first ink (in this case, I carved away any areas I wanted to remain icy blue). When finished carving, clean the work area and prep for printing.



7. Printing your second layer: NOTE: These are water-based inks - do NOT soak your cards in water after the initial soak. Simply prep your second ink on your Plexi-glass sheet for rolling.



For this demo, I used 321 Blue straight from the jar as my final dark layer. Spread your ink bead, load your brayer roller and roll ink onto your carved block, as before.



8. It is VERY important you lay down your paper on the block in the same position each layer (to avoid misregistration, which makes images look fuzzy). The trick is to line up your paper in the same spot every time; I used the bottom left corner tick marks, and kept my hand on the block once my paper was laid down, to keep it from shifting while imprinting with the caster wheel.



Make sure ink is dry before printing new layers, and dry cards thoroughly overnight before finish work.

HELPFUL TIPS

Always cap your block carving tools when not in use, and keep them away from young artists.

Avoid unhappy fingerprints or splotches by making sure you keep your hands tidy with a clean, damp paper towel whenever handling cards (especially true while printing!).

Never set your brayer roller-side down; set down on the metal bar/backside, so that the rubber roller is always up. This keeps the roller from becoming warped (which makes rolling out inks more frustrating).

Too much ink on the roller or block makes for blotchy, messy prints... you want to work with the ink in thin layers (listen for the roller "hiss" when rolling).

Your first couple prints are the rougher ones - print the same rough prints first when switching between colors/layers and printing, so that the rest are your best work.

FINISHING YOUR CARDS



1. Once printing and drying is complete, flatten the cards by placing printed side down between two clean paper towels and ironing on high heat/cotton setting.



2. Create a clean, finished fold by lightly rolling card end over and lining up card edges. While holding in place, use a bone tool to press from the center fold out to the sides.

3. Initial your printed card at bottom left or right corner.



OPTIONAL FINISHING IDEA: Mix Pearl Ex, Gum Arabic and water to create calligraphy ink and use to write outer/inner card greetings, or dip a brush in the ink to paint on shimmering effects... here's a step-by-step on creating calligraphy inks with Pearl Ex, Gum Arabic and water:

<https://youtu.be/7EmEmd7daGs>

FINISHED CARDS



ABOUT THE ARTIST: Hello, my name is Tanya Alexander. I am a Graphic / Web Designer at Jacquard Products. I'm also a lifelong fine artist working in a variety of mediums, including: traditional acrylic canvas work, pen and ink, ceramics, textile art, face/body painting, large format muraling and artistic neo-traditional tattooing. I've enjoyed experimenting with a wide variety of new mediums while working at Jacquard, including Silk Colors, Piñata Alcohol Inks, Textile Color, Lumiere, Neopaque, Pearl Ex Powdered Pigments, Cyanotype, Indigo, Procion MX, Versatex and more! You can find me and my work on Instagram: @artbytanyaalexander. —

See last page for a surprise...

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A GIFT FOR YOU!

If you liked the snowman card, below is a template of the design that you are most welcome to use. Enjoy! :-)



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