

# Beautiful Batiks

## Shari Fox

I first developed a batik lesson after I spent a summer in Bali learning art from local artists. While some students find it difficult to control the wax, most find it very exciting to try something new and different and appreciate the vibrant results.

I begin each year by creating a display of the batiks I've created, a few I've bought, and some copies of student batiks. In order to help explain the process, which is difficult to understand at first, I make small samples that show the same design during each step of the process.

### Starting with a Sketch

Students start by creating a sketch of their designs. I always encourage them to make it very colorful, which can mean using abstract colors and designs. Sometimes their sketches don't lend themselves to the process because they don't have enough color or design, so students often have to do a second draft before they start the batik.

### Stretching the Fabric

The next step is stretching the fabric. We use regular stretcher bars used for stretching canvases, and students bring in white cotton sheets or pillowcases. I always stretch one myself to demonstrate and allow students to use it to practice applying wax.

### Transferring the Design

I used to have students draw directly onto the fabric with a pencil, but the pencil lines showed through in the end. We came up with the idea of drawing the design onto a separate piece of paper and going over it in permanent marker. That way, students are able to tape it to the back of the fabric and see through to the design. If it is hard to see, students can apply pressure behind the drawing.



*Leah Levine, grade eleven, Phoenix.*

### Applying Hot Wax

The main tool to apply the wax is called a *tjanting* (pronounced "chanting") and it is difficult to use at first. The *tjanting* is dipped into a pot of hot wax, filled up, then touched to the fabric to create thin white lines. I have students outline everything in white to prevent dye colors from bleeding into each other.

My students have the most success when they angle their fabric so that if the *tjanting* drips, it drips onto the table and not their artwork. If the table is covered in newspapers, it makes clean-up much easier. It is virtually impossible to create a batik without any drips. I tell students that, when they get a drip, they should improvise and make it look like part



Julie Lebeaux, grade eleven, Parrots.

of the design. Trying to iron off a drip has never worked because the wax has already penetrated the fabric enough that the dye won't adhere.

### Applying Dye

I have students paint the dye on with a paintbrush, which is one of two processes that can be used for batik. The other process is dipping the whole batik into a bucket of dye. Although I learned both methods in Bali, I think the painting method works better in the classroom.

Students should start with their lightest color and, when the dye is completely dry, cover it with wax to protect it from other colors. There are

**I first developed a batik lesson after I spent a summer in Bali learning art from local artists.**

usually breaks in the white outlines, so it is important to work from light to dark and to cover each color to keep bleeding to a minimum. Within a closed area, students can intentionally let one color bleed into another. This adds beautiful shading if the two colors are analogous. If they are

complementary, however, it can turn to brown. After all the dye colors have been applied, I have students cover the last color in wax.

### Removing the Wax

To remove all the wax, the batik is placed between sheets of newsprint (not newspaper as I found it left residue from the ink on the batik). The



Gianna Padavano, grade eleven, Surprise.

### Materials

- batik wax
- tjantings
- paintbrushes
- fabric dye
- white cotton fabric
- stretcher bars
- staple guns and staples
- white drawing paper
- permanent markers
- newsprint
- irons

newsprint is ironed from the top, causing the wax to melt through the newsprint. The newsprint needs to be removed quickly above and below the batik, otherwise it will start to dry and stick. This process is repeated until no more wax comes off on the paper. The final result will feel a little stiffer than the original fabric did because the wax is never completely removed.

I find that a number of students want to do a second batik after they have finished their first one. After truly understanding the process, they often get better results the second time. ☺

Shari Fox is an art teacher at Shrewsbury High School in Shrewsbury, Massachusetts. [sharilynnfox@yahoo.com](mailto:sharilynnfox@yahoo.com)

### NATIONAL STANDARD

*Students apply media, techniques, and processes with sufficient skill, confidence, and sensitivity that their intentions are carried out in their artworks.*

### WEB LINKS

[www.sharifox.com](http://www.sharifox.com)  
[www.expat.or.id/info/batik.html](http://www.expat.or.id/info/batik.html)  
[www.pburch.net/dyeing/howtobatik.shtml](http://www.pburch.net/dyeing/howtobatik.shtml)