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Art-Based Learning of Heritage Languages through Didactic Innovation

Fold, Snip, Paste! – The Art of Polish Paper Cuts

Paper cuts are a long-standing tradition of Polish peasant culture. The best-known, from Kurpie and Łowicz, were cut with sheep shears. They range from simple to intricate designs, from single-colour cuts to collages and illustrated stories and have been used to decorate walls and windows. This makes them a perfect means to combine a creative activity with heritage language learning.

Fold, Snip, Paste! – The Art of Polish Paper Cuts **ENG**

Participants' Profile : age 7 or above

Maximum Number of Participants: 20 participants

Total Duration: 60–120 min (for introduction and a single activity)

Materials: small and large scissors, construction paper, glue, pencils, erasors, rulers, cutting knives and mats for more intricate designs, designs, hole puncher, written instructions, equipment for video projection (optional)

Language Skills: vocabulary, oral expression, reading, listening.

Other Skills: Polish folk art, fine motor skills, collage, storytelling, peer learning.

Levels: all levels

Developed by / Origin / Original language: Rupert Hasterok, Comparative Research Network e. V. – English

WYCINANKI – THE ART OF POLISH PAPER CUTS

Time required: 15- 25 min

Materials: vocabulary list, illustrated handouts or online videos on wycinanki (optional)

# Wycinanki – the Art of Polish Paper Cuts

Activity 1 Step-by-Step

1. Prepare handouts with illustrated texts or set up the equipment for an online video projection.

2. Welcome the participants

Welcome everyone to the workshop and explain its nature and purpose. If the participants don't know each other yet, you may want to organise a short icebreaker during which they have an opportunity to present themselves and get to know each other. Use for example a Polish counting-out rhyme, where the designated persons presents himself or herself.

3. Tell the story of traditional Polish paper cuts (wycinanki)

Briefly introduce the participants to the Polish folk tradition of paper cuts by using the sources listed below. Explain the two most widely known main styles as practised in Kurpie and Łowicz, and how wycinanki were traditionally cut with sheep shears and used for decorating rooms during festive seasons, such as Christmas, and even entire house walls. You can also show participants one longer or two shorter videos or add examples of paper cuts from other countries (e.g. Ukraine, Belarus or, in a different style, Japan). Clarify why you have chosen a particular style for your workshop (activities 2, 3 or 4).

Wycinanka kurpiowska.
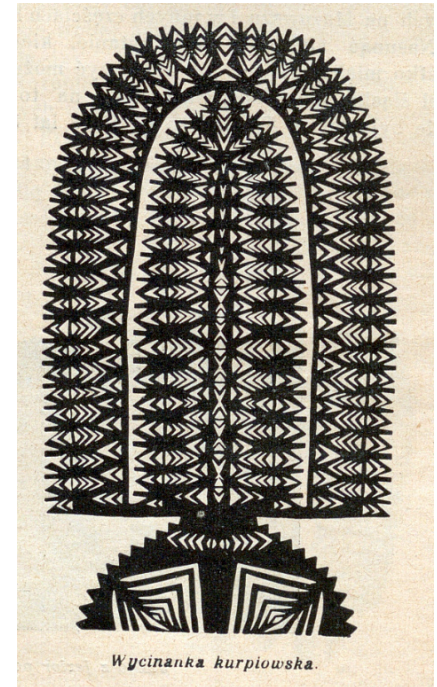
Paper cut in the Kurpie style (1937)

Online Resources

- There exist countless webpages dedicated to Polish paper cuts from a technical or ethnographic point of view. A good short introduction in English, Polish and other languages is provided by Arlene Aniskiewicz's article 'Folk Art at Home: A DIY Guide to Polish Paper Cut-Outs' here. If you want to delve deeper into the matter you may want to consult the website edited by Sheldon Brown and Arlene Eskilson here and the linked pages at the bottom. If you prefer to use an illustrated printed book, there is, for example Józef Grabowski's Wycinanka ludowa.

- Wycinanki can be created by free-cutting or by using a design prepared by yourself or downloaded from the internet and then drawn or fixed on the coloured paper for cutting. For beginners the latter technique is recommended. Those lacking inspiration are advised to consult online reproductions of paper cuts or download templates – type, for example, 'wycinanki szablony do druko' into the field of a search engine. Examples from the Ethnographic Museum in Warsaw can be found here.

- Videos are a good way to learn more about wycinanki and how to create them. The Museum Kultury Kurpiowskiej w Ostrołęce has an online lecture (in Polish with auto-generated subtitles in other languages) on traditional Polish paper cuts here. More importantly in this context, video tutorials are an excellent source of information for techniques, materials and utensils. Here are some examples: The YouTube Kanał Stowarzyszenia "Pracownia Etnograficzna" has a short introductory tutorial in English and Polish here. Tutorials for children of primary school age can be found here, here and here. An interesting mixture of Polish and Jewish traditions can be found in this video by the Museum Glogow.
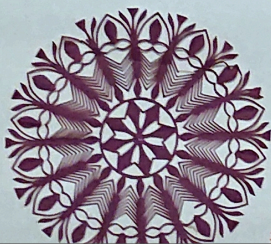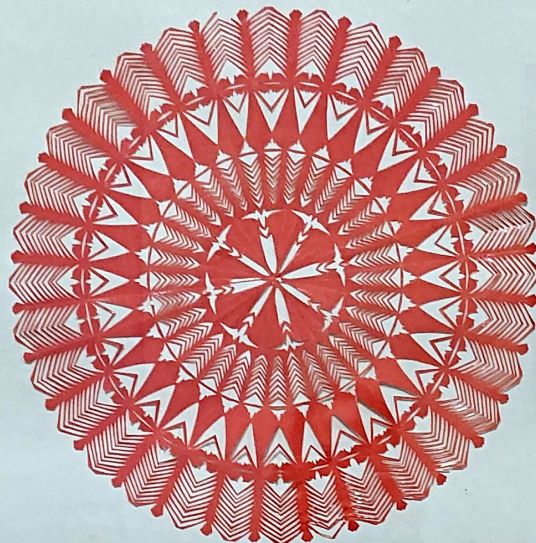
CREATE YOUR OWN PAPER CUT
IN THE KURPIE STYLE

Time required: 60-90 min

Materials: small and large scissors, construction paper, glue, pencils, erasors, rulers, cutting knives and mats for more intricate designs, designs, hole puncher, written instructions, cardboard (optional)

Create your own paper cut in the Kurpie style

Activity 2 Step-by-Step

### 1. The story of the Kurpie paper cuts

Kurpie paper cuts are among the most popular in Poland. They appeared in the middle of the 19th century in the Kurpie Green Forest (Puszcza Zielona) of Mazovia, north of Warsaw, after the first Polish paper mill in Jeziorna, Warsaw, brought glossy coloured papers on the market. Early cut-outs were single-coloured and shaped in the form of stars, or circles, and trees of life (leluja), lilies, potted plants (zielona) and monstrances (hostia). The custom disappeared around 1930 but was revived after the Second World War thanks to a competition and exhibition held in Kadzidło in 1948. During this later period, human figures were added to the star shape and a new single-colour rectangular shape with a theme, called 'forest' (las), made its appearance. In 2020, the Kurpie paper cuts were entered in the National List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Poland. More about Kurpie paper cuts, with numerous examples by local folk artists, can be found in a digital brochure published in Polish and English by the Kurpie Culture Museum in Ostrołęka available here.

2. Practising simple cut-outs

Learners without previous experience or young children best start practising with simple rectangular or circular designs before trying their hand at more intricate ones. Begin, for example, with arrow heads or chevrons. For a rectangular symmetrical design, fold a piece of paper in the middle of its short side (1) and then draw near the fold half of a plant or human figure (2) before starting to cut. Always turn the paper while cutting and not the scissors. To cut out a pointed angle, cut towards it from both sides (3) before trimming off the superfluous paper triangle. Finally, unfold the design (4). Templates for an easier and a more difficult design in the Kurpie style can, for example, be found here and here.
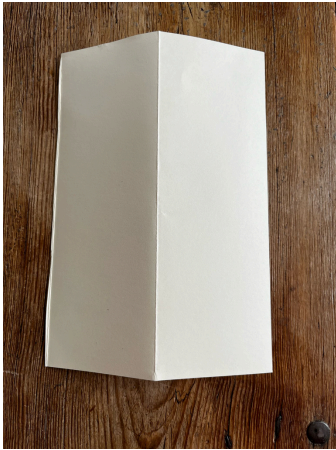
1. *Fold a rectangular paper in the middle of its short side.*

2. *With a pencil slightly draw the pattern on the side of the fold.*

3. Always turn the paper and not the scissors and cut from both sides towards a sharp angle.

4. Finally, unfold the paper.

For a circular design, create a round piece of paper with the help of circles (1), fold it in half (2) and then once or twice more (3) to obtain a shape in the form of an ice cone (4). Then design with a pencil and cut out patterns along the folds and the rounded top (5) before unfolding the paper (6). The same designs can be obtained with free-cutting but may be less regular.
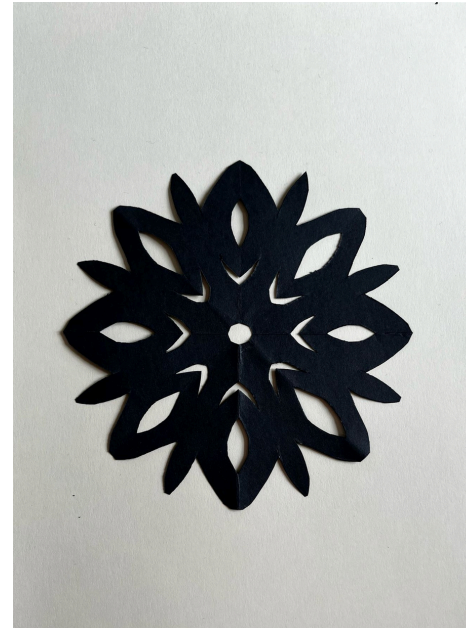

(1)

(2)

(3)

(4)

(5)

(6)

3. Creating your own Kurpie design

Once participants have understood the principles of creating paper cuts, ask them to invent a more complex design of their own or to copy – or adapt – a traditional one chosen from a sample selected by you by proceeding as follows: Choose a rectangular or square coloured paper and fold it as described above either by folding it once in the centre of its long side in the case of a rectangle or several times for a star-shaped design. Then sketch with a pencil the patterns you want to create. Finally start cutting along the drawn lines with the help of the scissors and unfold the design. Alternatively the design can be obtained through free-cutting.

The finished design can then be used to decorate a window pane by fixing a thread at its top centre, on one end, and let it hang down from the window frame or wall above the window. It also possible to glue the design on a cardboard of a different colour or place it into a frame.

COMPOSE A PAPER CUT IN THE ŁOWICZ STYLE

Compose a paper cut in the Łowicz style
Activity 3 Step-by-Step

1. Paper cuts in the Lowicz style: multilayered and colourful

Wycinanka in the Łowicz region, west of Warsaw, have taken a very different form from those of the Kurpie. Instead of producing paper cuts from a single piece of paper, the folk artists of Lowicz use small coloured elements superposed on each other and combine them in a kind of collage that historically consists of floral motifs, often together with animal figures, such as roosters. This is best illustrated by a video tutorial available on Dorota Skrobisz's YouTube channel:

2. Create a simple design to practise

It is best to begin with a small design, before plotting an entire composition. Here we suggest two templates of a flower and a rooster which can be downloaded <u>here</u>. Then select the coloured papers you want to use. For each single element, fold the coloured paper once and draw the contours of the element to the right side of the fold. Cut the paper along the drawn lines. Proceed in the same manner for the other elements. Finally, put your design together as indicated in the template by superposing or juxtaposing the coloured elements with glue on a cardboard to obtain the desired flower or rooster. Now you are ready to go further.
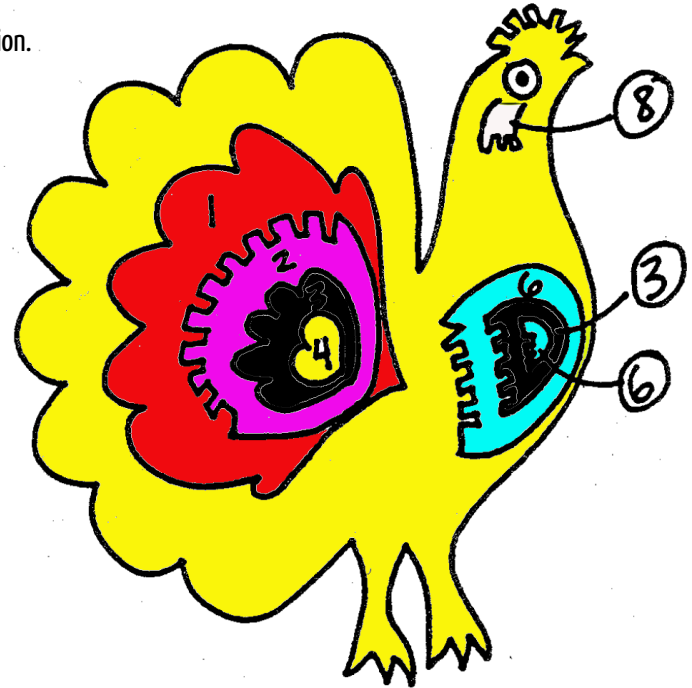
3. Plan and implement your Łowicz-style composition

Unless you want to imitate an existing design or feel confident enough to improvise, start with a sketch of your planned composition. In any case, define its central theme, such as a flower, an animal or a human being, and work your way towards the more peripheral areas. Think of the colour scheme you would like to use. For a traditional Łowicz design, choose bright and contrasting colours. To save time, consider dressing up a rough list of the elements you will need.

Start out with the base shapes: circular, like a medallion, for a floral rosette, rectangular for animals or human figures, or a horizontal strip, like a belt pattern, for a decorative element. Fold the coloured paper in half or more times, draw half (or part) of the symmetrical design and then carefully cut it out while folded. Proceed in the same way for the other elements of the layers. Keep them thin so that the final result will not seem bulky.

Place and fix the base shapes on the cardboard. When superposing the coloured layers, use the glue sparsely to avoid warping and wrinkles. The layers will add contrast and depth and convey a three-dimensional impression.

Finally add tiny details, such as dots, small flowers and leaves to complete the composition. You can also draw them with a fine pen. Let the paper cut dry completely before handling it.

Above all, be patient! Creating wycinanki is a meticulous craft that requires precision.

TELL A STORY WITH A PAPER CUT

Time required: 50-60 min

Materials: scissors, glue, construction paper in different colours, cardboard.

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Tell a Story with a Paper Cut
Activity 4 Step-by-Step

1. Introduction to the activity

Another type of paper cuts practised in the Kurpie region is the so-called kodry-style.
Traditionally these single-colour rectangular or square-shaped wycinanki depict scenes
from rural life (weddings, harvest, going to the market, etc.), folk tales or religious themes,
as in the two AI-generated examples reproduced to the right and on the previous page,
and usually include animals (roosters, birds, deer) and human figures. When these figures
seem to be interacting they give the impression of a story being told. The intricate,
lace-lake designs require, however, much dexterity and experience to create.

Over time, the kodry-style paper cuts have considerably evolved and today often portray
urban scenes and add coloured layers, as in the Łowicz style. They have also inspired other
folk artists, craftspeople and amateurs elsewhere in Poland and even beyond.
Kodry-type patterns are now found in clothing, wallpaper and furniture design. Moreover,
workshops in Polish paper cutting have become a common in other European countries
and North America and have helped spread the practice by adapting it for beginners
and children.

2. Imagining and sketching a story or scene

Ask participants to think of a story they would like to tell with a paper cut. Suggest some examples, such as a fairy tale, an outing or a birthday party for younger children but generally emphasise that all subjects are appropriate, including the use of urban or abstract motifs. Another choice to make is whether to create a single-layer or multi-layered wycinanka. It is also possible to include gradient or textured paper or divide the paper cut into several panels as in a comic. Suggest to those who still seem uncertain to start with a pencil sketch.

3. Realising the paper cut

Briefly explain the basic techniques used for the Kurpie and Łowicz styles as described above. If necessary, begin by encouraging participants to try their hand at a simple design. Once familiar, tell them to start working on their paper cut and indicate a time frame for it cut to be finished. Provide practical support to those who need it by demonstrating how to cut or, in the case of smaller children, by temporarily taking over the cutting. Engage hesitant participants in a discussion about their project to help them to better define it.

$. Presenting and discussing the paper cuts

Gather the participants and walk from table to table and ask the paper cut artists in turn to describe their work and the others for their comments. Remember that paper cuts that use glue should not be moved before the glue has dried.

Don't forget to demand some feedback from the participants on the workshop. Think of exhibiting the wycinanki if you are going to use the same room in future.

RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR EDUCATORS AND TEACHERS

Recommendations for educators and teachers

Preparation:

- Make yourself familiar with the online resources you are going to use.
- Assemble a sample of wycinanki that participants can consult for inspiration.
- Create or download templates that can be used by less adept or younger participants.
- Consider creating paper cuts ahead of the workshop to get a better understanding and to efficiently support participants or ask a more experienced person to assist you.
- Ensure that all necessary materials will be available.

Expected output:

- Learners will increase their vocabulary and have a better grasp of a specific kind of language, i.e. that of instructions for a practical activity.
- New vocabulary is better memorised through the accompanying creative activities and communicative practice.
- Participants learn more about the art of Polish paper cuts and its history.
- Enhanced creativity, fine motor and soft skills such as team work, peer learning and communication skills.

Adaptation/Application of the method

- **a group with varied language proficiency**

The workshop can be held in the heritage or the majority language with elements of the former, depending on proficiency levels. If these vary considerably, consider letting participants work in tandems or small groups (incl. children and their parents). If appropriate, paraphrase difficult words or sentences in easy language or give translations.

- **other languages**

Similar activities associatred with folk art can be conducted for other languages by using this learning module as a template, but this will require considerably more preparation, such as for identifying appropriate online resources and creating a lesson plan.

- **bilingual/multilingual options**

Generally, the activities described here can be used in a bilingual or multlingual workshop to acquaint particpants with folk art traditions and techniques in other countries. Paper cuts have been and are widely practised in many countries and the respective traditions can be contrasted during explanations given to the participants.

- **cultural context**

Paper cut traditions exist in many countries (Belarus, Ukraine, Switzerland, China, Japan, etc.) but are no longer confined to them. If appropriate, you can also choose another folk art tradition and adapt this learning module.

- **other age groups**

The workshop has been designed for young people and adults who enjoy practical or artistic activities. It can be adapted for younger children by simplifying the tasks and using easy language. Wycinanki of an intricate design require tools, such as a pen knife or disposable scalpels, that may create health hazards for younger children. Ensure participation and motivation by adapting the module to your target group. Cut short, for example, explanations of the history of the wycinanki when working with very young children.

- **outdoor version**

The workshop can be conducted outdoors, at tables in a garden or park, under favourable weather conditions.

- **distance-learning option**

- Online or blended settings are possible but will require adaptation and produce less interaction between participants.
- To avoid lengthy online sessions, activities should be split and some of the tasks be conceived as individual homework. Participants would only meet online for presentations by the facilitator and to discuss individual results in a plenary session.
- Be aware that it will be difficult to offer practical support during the cutting, although a smartphone camera can be used as a mobile recording device.
- Distance-learning needs more self-discipline and autonomous learning, which limit participation to older children and adults.

- **challenges**

- Although the art of paper cutting is accessible for all members of the target group, that is children of age 6 or above, young people and even adults, motivation and application are required to enjoy creating wycinanki. The facilitator, too, needs to be interested in them, but it is also possible to cooperate with a more experienced person able to provide practical advice and to help with the designing and cutting.
- To avoid difficulties of comprehension of less advanced learners in a group with different language proficiency levels, stick to easy language or provide a list of words with explanations or translations that you share with your participants, if you don't want to use the majority language..
- Complex designs require tools that are not as common as scissors and glue.

- **options for parents**

- Parents interested in wycinanki can easily create them together with their child or children or, better, participate in the course of an intergenerational workshop. As mentioned above, printed and video tutorials are available in great numbers.

Tags:

reading, spelling, writing, **speaking, pronunciation, listening, vocabulary**, syntax, **creativity, artistic skills**, organisation, orientation, n**on-verbal expression, cultural skills, self-confidence, intergenerational,** science-related, body movements, **drawing,** painting, singing, theatre, **collage, 1 kid activity, 2 and + kids activity**

Lesen, Rechtschreibung, Schreiben, Sprechen, Aussprache, Zuhören, Wortschatz, Syntax, Kreativität, künstlerische Fähigkeiten, Organisation, Orientierung, nonverbaler Ausdruck, kulturelle, interkulturelle, digitale Fähigkeiten, Selbstvertrauen, generationsübergreifend, wissenschaftsbezogen, Körperbewegungen, Malerei, Gesang, Theater, Collage,

lecture, orthographe, écriture, expression orale, prononciation, écoute, vocabulaire, syntaxe, créativité, compétences artistiques, organisation, orientation, expression non verbale, culturelle, interculturelle, numérique, confiance en soi, intergénérationnel, scientifique, gestuelle, peinture, chant, théâtre, collage

czytanie, ortografia, pisanie, mówienie, wymowa, słuchanie, słownictwo, składnia, kreatywność, zdolności artystyczne, organizacja, orientacja, ekspresja niewerbalna, kulturowe, międzykulturowe, umiejętności cyfrowe, pewność siebie, międzypokoleniowe, związane z nauką, ruchy ciała, malarstwo, śpiew, teatr, kolaż,

citire, ortografie, scris, vorbire, pronunție, ascultare, vocabular, sintaxă, creativitate, abilități artistice, organizare, orientare, exprimare non-verbală, culturale, interculturale, abilități digitale, încredere în sine, intergenerationale, legate de știință, mișcări ale corpului, pictură, cânt, teatru, colaj,

olvasás, helyesírás, írás, beszéd, kiejtés, hallgatás, szókincs, szintaxis, kreativitás, művészi készségek, szervezés, tájékozódás, non-verbális kifejezés, kulturális, interkulturális, digitális készségek, önbizalom, generációk közötti, tudományhoz kapcsolódó, testmozgások, festészet, éneklés, színház, kollázs,

القراءة، التهجئة، الكتابة، التحدث، النطق، الاستماع، المفردات، بناء الجملة، الإبداع، المهارات الفنية، التنظيم، التوجيه، التعبير غير اللفظي، الثقافية، بين الثقافات، المهارات الرقمية، الثقة بالنفس، بين الأجيال، المتعلقة بالعلم، حركات الجسم، الرسم، الغناء، المسرح، الكولاج،

читання, правопис, письмо, говоріння, вимова, аудіювання, словниковий запас, синтаксис, креативність, художні навички, організація, орієнтація, невербальне вираження, культурні, міжкультурні, цифрові навички, впевненість у собі, між поколіннями, пов'язані з наукою, рухи тіла, живопис, спів, театр, колаж

Credits

Photos illustrating the techniques of folding and cutting on pages 8, 9 and 10:
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