

Suggested Materials

Art materials can be expensive and we are living in straitened times so I have tried as far as possible to keep this list fairly basic. Some things are essential but others are optional extras and I will try and suggest substitutes for these where possible. If you're buying new, Ryman's do some student ranges that are reasonably affordable. WHSmith (or whatever they're calling themselves these days) have some decent own-brand stuff. The Works have a big range and are quite cheap. Not bad for regular sketchpads but steer clear of their watercolour paper which is rubbish and the quality of their paints is also not great. That said, here goes with the essentials:

Sketchbook

I'd recommend A4 or A3, with paper at least 130gsm (150 gsm if possible so it will take paint and glue). GSM means the weight per square metre. The higher the number, the heavier the weight. Bring your sketchpad with you every week. You'll need it for ideas, testing things out and general playing. Don't be precious about it - it's the place where you try things to see what you like so it will have hits and misses in it!

Pencils

Drawing pencils range from 'B' to 9B. The 'B' stands for black and the higher the number the softer, and blacker, the pencil. I'd recommend a 2B, 4B and a 6B to start with. You'll also need a decent sharpener or a craft knife to keep them sharp. I can demonstrate how to sharpen with a craft knife if necessary.

Eraser

I'm very strict about not rubbing out 'mistakes'. Where possible, overdraw more firmly and the bit you don't want will recede as the drawing develops. The main reason for an eraser is to lift out highlights as you're working and to clean up grubby areas once the drawing is finished. Get a putty rubber as well as a standard eraser as this can be used with charcoal as well. (blu-tac or similar works as a putty rubber) Old School artists use bread, but this seems a waste of good bread.

Paints

These can be either acrylics or watercolours - I will adapt our projects to suit either. Get the best you can afford. A student set from Ryman's is probably the best value. Watercolours come in tubes or pans. Tubes can be easier for large areas but tend to get used up more quickly! Pans give good practice in getting the right consistency and it's easier to see the colours without having to squeeze them out. Gouache is an opaque form of watercolour and, like watercolour, can be reactivated with water once it has dried. This is not the case with acrylic so it can be wasteful if you put too much out. They also tend to dry out quite quickly as you're using them. That said, they can be used thickly like oil paints for some lovely effects and you can paint one colour over another once it's dried which doesn't generally end well with watercolours. For projects like dendritic printing, cheap ranges are good enough - don't use up your best stuff!

Brushes	Get the best you can afford - a few good ones that you look after well are better than lots of cheap ones. Acrylics need stiffer bristle brushes whilst watercolour brushes are much softer. Sizes 4, 6 and 8 round brushes will give you a decent range to start with and you can add to them later.
Palette knives	These are useful for many things! You can usually buy a cheap set of plastic ones from the Works.
Palettes and waterpots	These can be makeshift - plastic trays and yoghurt pots, though The Works have some decent size, inexpensive palettes if you prefer. If you're using acrylics then lidded plastic takeaway containers make great palettes as the lid helps to keep the paint fresh.
Pens	Pens are very nice for drawing with and useful for pen and wash techniques. They can be either permanent or non-permanent (ie. they will run in water) If described as 'washable' they are non-permanent. Standard biros are fairly permanent. I find Berol Handwriting pens from Rymans nice to draw with and they are non-permanent. Gel pens are good for drawing. Test them out for permanence by running some water over them.
Glue	A Pritt-type stick is quick and convenient, or you can use PVA, sometimes sold as 'School Glue'. The absolute best all-round glue though, is my homemade flour and water paste. Ask me for the recipe! You'll also need a glue spreader or an old paintbrush