

## GREAT ART IDEAS FOR TEACHERS

# AUSTRALIAN FLORA PRINT: INSPIRED BY PRINTMAKER AND PAINTER MARGARET PRESTON

YEAR 5–8

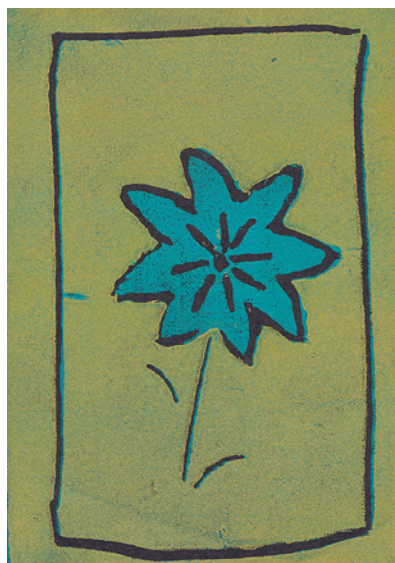
### OVERVIEW

In this activity students explore depictions of native Australian flora in the prints of Australian printmaker and painter, Margaret Preston. Taking inspiration from Preston's prints, students consider the symbolic qualities of Australian flora and create their own multi-layer print.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Examine the ways in which Margaret Preston utilises colour, shape and pattern to communicate her own perceptions of Australian flora.
- Examine the key physical characteristics and properties of species of Australian flora.
- Print a multi-layer image of a native Australian flower or plant using one printing plate.
- Reflect upon and communicate the artistic process followed throughout the activity.

### STUDENT EXAMPLES





**RELATED  
ARTWORKS**



(clockwise from top right)  
**Margaret PRESTON**  
*Fuchsia* 1928  
 hand-coloured woodcut  
 27.0 x 26.7 cm (image) 38.0 x 33.6 cm (sheet)  
 Butler 125  
 National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
 Purchased, 1966  
 © Margaret Preston/Licensed by Copyright  
 Agency, Australia

**Margaret PRESTON**  
*Wheelflower* (c. 1929)  
 hand-coloured woodcut on brown  
 hand-made paper  
 44.2 x 44.7 cm irreg. (block) 48.4 x 47.1 cm  
 irreg. (sheet)  
 Butler 140  
 proof  
 National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
 Purchased, 1979  
 © Margaret Preston/Licensed by Copyright  
 Agency, Australia

**Margaret PRESTON**  
*Bird of paradise* (1925)  
 hand-coloured woodcut on brown paper  
 39.7 x 42.9 cm (block) 56.8 x 45.6 cm irreg.  
 (sheet)  
 Butler 85  
 National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
 Purchased, 1942  
 © Margaret Preston/Licensed by Copyright  
 Agency, Australia

## DISCUSS

Margaret Rose Preston (1875–1963) was an Australian painter and printmaker. Regarded as one of Australia's most significant modernist artists, Preston aimed to produce a modern national art based on the principles and motifs of Asian, modernist and Aboriginal art. She was largely interested in still life, and often featured Australian flora and wildflowers in her paintings and colour woodblock prints. The images are characterised by vibrant colours, bold geometric shapes and black outlines, such as in *Fuchsia*, 1928, *Wheelflower*, c. 1929, and *Bird of Paradise*, 1925.

## VISUAL ANALYSIS OF THE SUGGESTED WORKS

Look at the related artworks and use the following discussion prompts with your class:

- Look carefully at these three artworks by Margaret Preston. Identify how they are similar, and how each one is unique. Try to be specific with your observations.
- Consider how Margaret Preston has used colour in her works:
  - Which colours are predominant, and where are they used?
  - How does her use of colour draw your eyes to the floral arrangements?
  - Do you think Margaret Preston has used colour in a realistic way, or do you think she has exaggerated or enhanced the colours of the flowers? Explain your answer.
- Describe the lines of Margaret Preston's artworks.
  - Why do you think she chose to use such bold lines and borders? How does this affect the way we view the subject matter?
- Pattern is created with a repetition of shape and/or line. Choose one of Margaret Preston's artworks and find an area where she has created a pattern with lines or shapes.
  - Why do you think she chose to create this area of pattern? How does it enhance the artwork?

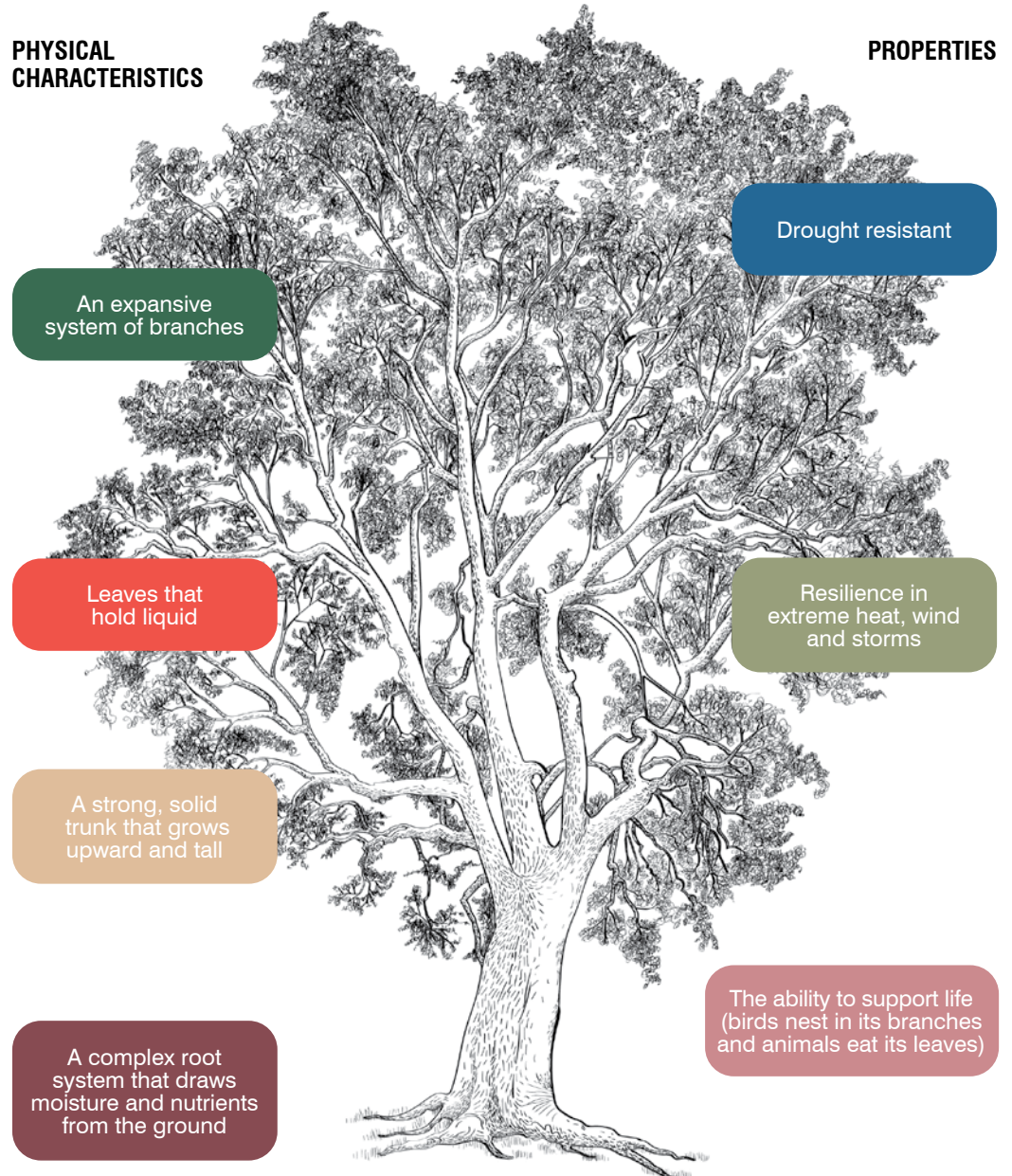


## DEVELOPING IDEAS FOR THE CREATIVE TASK

Flora can be used in art as a symbol to express emotions and ideas. What can we learn about Margaret Preston's feelings about Australian flora by looking at her artworks? Explain your answer.

Like Margaret Preston, we are going to consider how we, as artists, can use native Australian flora to communicate meaning. This will require some research into the physical characteristics and properties of flora species native to Australia and what these attributes can mean and symbolise. Take the example of a eucalyptus tree.

### EUCALYPTUS TREE



- What might these characteristics and properties symbolise?
- Make a list of adjectives which describe the symbols associated with the eucalyptus tree. For example: *strong, stoic, dependable, reliable, resilient, determined, ever-lasting, supportive etc.*

## RESOURCES & MATERIALS

- Access to the internet or books about Australian flora
- Sketching paper and pencils
- Tracing paper
- A5 paper
- A5 printing foam
- Black paper
- Coloured block inks (or poster paint mixed with block ink medium)
- Printing baren
- Hard rollers

## CREATE

Students design and create a print of a symbolic native Australian flower through the following steps:

1. Research species of Australian native flora. What are the key physical characteristics and properties of the species?  
*Find out what the plant looks like, its components, where it grows in Australia, the environmental conditions it requires, which flowers or fruit it produces, which animals, birds or insects depend upon it.*
2. With reference to the example of the eucalyptus tree, consider what you discovered about the species of flora during your research. What might the plant you have chosen symbolise?
3. Sketch potential compositions for your print.  
*Stick to no more than two large floral elements (such as leaves, stems or petals) and keep detail to a minimum.*
4. Select your preferred sketch and refine your design on an A5 sheet of paper, integrating a thick line for your border, bold lines, simple shapes and two or three coloured elements. For example, one coloured element might be the leaves and the other might be petals. The size should fill the whole A5 page.  
*Remember that images print in reverse. You can see what the reverse will look like by holding your design backwards up to the light or by placing it back-to-front on a window or light box.*
5. Transfer the design to the printing foam using carbon or tracing paper.
6. Using the end of a pencil, gently press into the sections of your design which will become the black lines.  
*Don't press all the details just yet, just the main outlines and the border.*
7. Start by printing the main colour in your design. Spread coloured printing ink evenly onto a smooth surface with a hard roller and then roll the ink onto the printing foam.  
*Make sure you cover the entire foam plate with ink.*
8. Place the printing foam face down onto a piece of black paper and rub it with a baren.  
*Try to place your foam in the middle of the page at a 90-degree angle.*
9. Gently peel away the foam to reveal the first layer of your print.
10. Wash and dry your printing foam, and allow the first layer of your print to dry.
11. To print the second colour element, press down into the area of the first layer of colour on your printing foam so it won't print again in the second layer.

12. Repeat steps 7 to 10 with your second colour to print the second layer of your work on top of the first.  
*Take care to place the foam upon your first layer accurately so that both layers line up evenly.*
13. To print the final layer for your background, press down into the area of the second layer of colour on your printing foam so that none of the floral detail prints again.
14. Repeat steps 7 to 10 using your third colour ink to complete your layered floral print.

## PRESENT & REFLECT

Students show their print to a partner and answer the following questions:

- What species of flora did you choose?
- What did you find out about it during your research?
- What symbolic characteristics did you assign to your chosen plant and why?
- Describe the steps you followed when creating your print.
- Which part of the process did you find the most challenging, and which was the most rewarding? Why?

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