

Name:  
Class:

# **LITERAL PAPER CUTS**

## **Inspired by folk art in China and Poland**

**Paper** was invented in China during the first century and has been a popular media choice for artists ever since. Because paper is fairly fragile, we have no way of knowing how long **papercutting** has been a part of Chinese culture. Archaeologists have found evidence dating it back as far as the 6<sup>th</sup> century, but it is believed to have begun a few centuries earlier. Either way, it is clear that papercutting is an art with strong roots in the art of China.



Papercutting was originally used for **religious** reasons, as well as for **decoration** and as **patterns** for embroidery work. Today it is used almost solely for decoration, especially during different holidays or festivals. Papercuts are hung on walls, windows, doors, and lanterns. They can be given as gifts, or used to decorate packages.



Artists make papercuts by hand using **scissors** or **knives**. Traditionally, **rural girls and women** make Papercuts. There

was a time when girls were expected to learn the craft and they were judged on their papercutting abilities to become brides. In urban areas of China, **professional papercutters** are usually groups of men who work together in workshops.

In the 1600's, the art of papercutting spread to many areas of Europe. By the mid-1800's it became a popular folk art created by Polish peasants. In Poland, the art of papercutting is called **wycinanki**. Like the traditional papercuts of China, wycinanki were made mostly in **rural** areas, and served as **decorations** for walls, furniture, and cupboards.



In Poland there were **regional** variations, or types, of wycinanki. In some areas, single color papercuts were made. In other areas, layers of multi-colored papers characterized the designs. Subject matter included flowers, birds, or **symmetrical patterns**. Scenes of daily activities or special occasions like holidays and weddings were also common. Today wycinanki are used mostly for gift giving or are made by Polish Americans in celebration of their heritage. They do not hold the same popularity they once did.

### Vocabulary

**Symmetry:** type of balance where two halves of a design are identical

**Asymmetry:** type of balance with equal visual weight

**Geometric Shapes:** shapes with regular contours and straight edges, like circles, triangles, squares, etc.

**Organic Shapes:** free-form shapes resembling objects in nature

**Folk Art:** art usually made by the common people of a nation reflecting the traditional culture of the region

**Wycinanki:** paper cutting folk art of Poland; pronounced “vy-chee-nan-kee”

**Pattern:** a repeated design

**Literal:** “of, relating to, or expressed in letters” also “adhering to the primary meaning of a term or expression” (www.webster.com)

### Literal Art

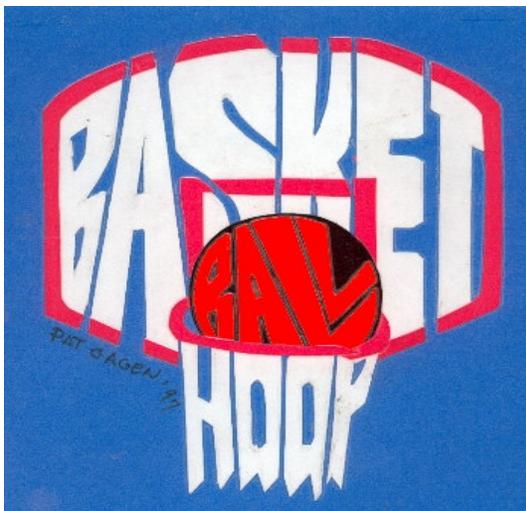
For this project you will be creating 2 **literal** papercuts based on wycinanki and Chinese papercuts. Your designs will be words that **visually** show their meaning. In other words, the letters of the word(s) you choose will be arranged to reflect the meaning of the word(s). For example, how could you assemble the letters of “paintbrush” to make the shape of a paintbrush? How will the letters need to be **distorted**? What creative **details** could you add to add interest?



1. In the box below, brainstorm 6 or more words that would make attention-grabbing “literal” art.

2. Next, choose four of your ideas to make **thumbnail sketches**. Be sure to use eye-catching **shapes** and fonts. You will have to distort, stretch, and squish letters to create your design! Concentrate on creating **balanced** designs. Will **organic** or **geometric shapes** be best?


3. Circle a design that you would like to work on and get it approved by a teacher. Once approved, you can begin cutting paper using **scissors** and **Exacto knives**. **Do NOT glue** any pieces down until you have everything cut and arranged. Check with a teacher to make sure you are finished!



These pictures are examples of student work from Los Cerros MS in California. Visit them: [http://lc\\_art\\_gallery.lcms.srvusd.net](http://lc_art_gallery.lcms.srvusd.net)