

Talking Points: What is Letterpress?

A collection of imagery and sources designed to introduce children to the process of letterpress.

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Letterpress

Teachers Notes

Letterpress is a relief printing technique. For hundreds of years letterpress was the only way to create reproductions of text. The invention of the letterpress in the mid 15th Century meant that information could be more accessible to the masses. Traditionally, the letters are arranged, a roll is inked and the raised surface of the letters are pressed against sheets or a continuous roll of paper.

Take a online tour of [Robert Smail's Printing Works in Scotland](#). Founded in 1866 and now part of the Scottish National Trust, the tour walks you through the rooms, different jobs and the machinery used in the victorian era.

A modern day letterpress process.



Alan Kitching, Letterpress artist, talking about his process and inspirations whilst working on a commission for English Heritage

Farewell Etain Shrdlu, a 30 minute documentary on the last day of typesetting at The New York Times in 1978, before the switch to computers.

Features interviews for and against the incoming technology, plus a look at the end showing the contrast between the old typesetting methods and the new computerised version.

Talking Points

What sort of things was letterpress traditionally

used for?

What do people still use letterpress?

What differences are there between designing on a computer nowadays and using old methods such as letterpress?

Why do you think there is still an interest in using old technology today?

Can you think of any other old techniques used to make art that are still being used?

Why is (or is?) it important to understand old techniques and ways of making things?

How have computers changed how we make art?

What do you think is next for printing techniques?
What comes after computers?