

Designing and creating vinyl stickers with Cricut cutters



Grade level(s) I use with: I've used the Cricuts with students as young as 3rd grade, but find that for independent design work, 5th is usually my best starting grade level, and use the machines with every class for some work through 8th grade.

Lesson Overview: - I find the Cricut Makers to be the most dependable, versatile, and economical tool in our entire Makerspace. Continually I'll be asked by a new group - "do we get to make stickers again this year" and that rarely happens with the other tools or projects, the point being that engagement with using this is always surprisingly high. The other element is that even with 5th graders, it can be almost completely independent. We have 4 Cricut cutters in



the Creation Studio that have been used constantly for the past 3 years, making thousands of stickers, and they just continue to work well. The only maintenance they really require is replacing the \$5 sticky Cricut mats when they lose their stick and replacing the 50-cent cutting blades every month.

- Unfortunately, using Cricut is not (at least as of Jan 2024) a Chromebook-friendly process since it requires access to the proprietary Cricut Design Space to drive the machines and modify the designs. We are really fortunate to have access

to a set of 20 iPads in our studio so that students can do the design work on the iPads 1:1 and then, by saving to the cloud within our school account, run our Cricuts using the laptop computer that we have at each Cricut station. A classroom could run by just using a laptop or iPad for each Cricut but it would be difficult to engage an entire classroom simultaneously with that process. Our only complication is the student who will occasionally try to run the actual machines by Bluetooth from their iPad, that can make for a bit of a bottleneck since it requires breaking that connection for things to get back to normal - so I definitely overemphasize that step in the process when we begin.

The vinyl can be a pretty expensive and a not-so-sustainable part of the cost of using Cricuts, so I've found that buying big 24-inch rolls or 12 x 12 collections of multiple colors and then precutting down into 3-inch by 6-inch pieces keeps both my cost and waste to a minimum.

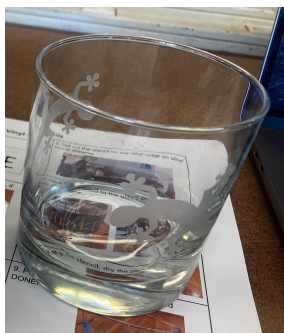
Everyone's mandatory first project is creating a simple sticker using their name and an image, something that is perfect for a Chromebook cover or water bottle, and this quickly teaches



everyone the concept of scaling their design on the iPad. This past year out of over 1000 stickers, I've only had a handful of students who really wanted and needed to make anything bigger, and for them, I keep a collection of 6 x 6 inch blocks in my back store room ready for that situation. I also pre-cut matching 3 x 6-inch transfer paper sheets and find that by emphasizing the re-useability of these students are really good about not using and throwing away a good piece, also keeping the cost down significantly.

I typically use Cricut as an "anchor" project in the midst of something bigger - meaning that it is designed to engage that student who might be waiting to get to a certain tool or for my help. For example when students are making a wood project, very often they want to add a sticker to their candy jar or put a label on the side of their tic tac toe board. Once they have been introduced or reminded of the Cricut process, if I see a student who is a bit ahead of everyone else, I can simply ask, "Have you thought about a sticker for that" and they'll quickly grab an iPad rather than sitting around.

Once a student understands the basics of Cricut Design Space and running the machines, we can easily apply that skill to a bunch of other projects, including:



- Creating vinyl stencils that can be applied to glasses - applying a coat of glass etching acid does a fantastic job of putting that name or logo permanently etched into the glass
- Creating labels and graphics for classroom projects such as a poster explaining photosynthesis or an explanation of the causes of the American Revolution - I'm always amazed how adding quality to one aspect of a product seems to spread that focus on high quality to the rest of it (ie. if I put extra energy into the title, rather than just sharpie scribbling, then every aspect of the layout gets a further focus on improvement too)

- Putting in a pen and shifting your design to a drawn image to create cardstock drawings and great birthday or thank you cards for teachers and classmates
- Learning to mirror images design and cutting heat transfer vinyl to apply to t-shirts, bandanas, or hats - you do need a heat press or at least an iron for this, but the process is not overly complicated, and the outcome is great. This is how our Lego Robotics Team t-shirts get designed and created every year - a great teambuilding project.
- Cutting the thin pieces of foam to create simple "woodblock" style stamps
- Learning to use the engraving tool which we use with 2 mm acrylic (that is the thickest acrylic that can fit inside the machine) as part of an edge-lit LED acrylic light.

Materials and equipment I use:

This is the Cricut Machine that we use - I've heard that the Cricut Maker 3 is also a great machine; we just purchased these all before the 3 was even released:

https://www.amazon.com/Cricut-PC2004195-Maker-Champagne/dp/B07KWBLNHM/ref=sr_1_8?keywords=cricut%2Bmaker&qid=1703776266&sr=8-8&th=1

Cricut cutting mats - especially if you do any dusty woodshop work in your makerspace, these are the big consumable, I haven't had much luck with the knock-off mats, but at almost \$10 apiece at Michaels, I keep trying to find ones that will last - this is my latest try:

https://www.amazon.com/Gwybkq-Standard-Adhesive-Replacement-Accessories/dp/B08XYXX69T/ref=sr_1_2_sspa?keywords=cricut%2Bmaker&qid=1703776436&sr=8-2-spons&sp_csd=d2lkZ2V0TmFtZT1zcF9hdGY&th=1

Cricut replaceable cutting blades: I find these cutting knives to work great - and do replace them about every 6 weeks since nothing is more frustrating to weed than incomplete cuts:

https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B07ZVBKH56/ref=ppx_yo_dt_b_search_asin_title?ie=UTF8&th=1

Vinyl - I do have big 24-inch wide rolls of the basic colors, but love these mixed sets of 12 x 12 since it allows me to quickly cut a collection of 20+ different colors in my standard 3 x 6 blocks and have enough for over 700 stickers - not back for \$30

https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B098792557/ref=ppx_yo_dt_b_search_asin_title?ie=UTF8&th=1

Heat Transfer vinyl - I find this VinylRus brand to be really dependable and comes in a pretty wide variety of colors in 12 inch rolls. For most designs, I'll precut into 12 x 12 inch blocks for the backside of shirts and 6 x 6 inch blocks for the front - so a 20 foot roll can do 15-16 shirts

https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B0B7HVKTHC/ref=ppx_yo_dt_b_search_asin_title?ie=UTF8&th=1

Related links:

There are tons of resources available online for other creative uses of the Cricut machine as they are pretty ubiquitous in the Etsy, pinterist world of crafting. Fabric and leather cutting, scoring paper designs for creative folding, and mixing mediums are just a few of the options waiting to be explored.

Ongoing questions and ideas for the future:

We experimented this year with having students design logos in Google Draw, canva and adobe express to then import into Cricut design space - the goal being to have them do some design work in their art cycle with a teacher who has some great background in graphic design and then learning to use the Creation Studio tools to bring that design to life. A related project continues in their Family and Consumer Science classes to then use that same logo to use a glowforge laser cutter to engrave that logo as part of a personal business card highlighting their career choice as part of a career exploration project. At this point, our biggest challenge is time and the complication of navigating the various platforms and image storage options (ie. .svg, .png, .jpg), which is another great lesson and learning but not always a highly successful process with many of our middle school students - definitely an exploration in process. But we continue to want to be sure that we help students both understand the intellectual property concerns of just copying the Nike logo as well as start to gain the skills to actually create something unique that they like.