

Women's League for Conservative Judaism

Song of Songs

Papercut designs

Created by Debra Band

These papercut projects have been designed for adults and children, but we strongly encourage you to be adventurous and develop your own original designs! These guidelines will assist you in your creative efforts. We do include a ready-made design for the less adventuresome and a very simple design and teaching guidelines for children, six to twelve.

Papercutting in the Jewish Arts

There are examples of Jewish papercuts going back to the 14th century, and it is likely that the medium was practiced even earlier than that. While today's practitioners of the art like to claim that it is a 'Jewish' medium, it most likely originated in China, as did almost everything else to do with paper. Jewish traders, who dominated trade between to the Far East from the 5th to the 13th centuries, probably brought it back to Europe. Among Asian cultures, papercutting is used for short-lived items such as window decorations and embroidery patterns. There are folk traditions of papercutting across Europe and related bark-cutting in Mexico. What *is* unique is the Jewish incorporation of papercutting into the fine arts, such as illuminated *ketubot* (Jewish marriage documents) and ephemeral folk-art such as window and *sukkah* decorations. Medieval Jewish scribes and illuminators regularly worked with pens and knives on parchment and vellum, so it would have been easy to incorporate cut designs into their work. Papercutting experienced a resurgence of popularity in early 20th century Israel, and is now practiced by Jewish artists around the world. The Yiddish term is *papierschnitten*.

Papercut Projects for Adults

Participants will get the most pleasure from creating their own papercut designs, exercising their imaginations and creativity.

Materials (per student)

- 2-3 sheets of a large sturdy, white or light colored paper for the papercut
- Sheet of a contrasting color paper for backing
Canson-mi-Teintes is an excellent line of papers, available at art supply stores. Handmade papers with bits of flowers or gold thread embedded in them or marbled and embossed add beautiful texture to the project. Papers may be ordered from www.DanielSmith.com or from any mail-order art supplier.
- Scratch paper and/or graph paper
- Rulers (preferably metal) 12-15" and 24-36"
- Pencils, erasers and sharpeners
- X-acto knife fitted with #11 blades
Blades may be purchased in boxes of 100 from www.Micromark.com. Each student will need to change blades every 10-15 minutes. Fresh, sharp blades are safe if handled carefully; dull blades are dangerous and cut inaccurately. Have containers around the workroom for discarded blades.
- Cutting surface other than the table top

“Self-healing” plastic cutting boards available in art supply stores are optimal and may be re-used for years, but a *thick* sheet of cardboard (not corrugated) is a less-expensive option.

- Quality colored pencils for those who wish to color their projects (to be shared)
- White glue for fixing small mistakes (to be shared)
- 3M Super 77 spray adhesive (to be shared)

Tips for Original Projects

- Show examples, such as Debra Band’s *The Song of Songs: The Honeybee in the Garden*
- Begin by sketching out designs on scratch paper. Think about the ideas you wish to express
- Consider including a border of text, drawing or painting
- Participants should be encouraged to be strong and of good courage, and to worry less about the perfection of their finished piece than about how much they enjoy the process.
- Draw design on reverse side of finished project so that no pencil marks show
- Every element of the design needs to be supported or connected to the rest so that areas of cut paper don’t flop around. Beginners should keep each element of the design large and simple.
- Change blades whenever a point has dulled or chipped off. Old blades *must* be dropped into the nearest container.
- Cutting mistakes can be re-designed around. You can perform micro-surgery with a dot of glue and tiny bandage of scrap paper on the back of the paper.
- Once completed, back with colored paper or handmade Asian paper. Spray the back of the design lightly with spray adhesive over newspaper in a well-ventilated area to attach.

Ready-made adult/teen design

“I am my beloved and my beloved is mine”

Song of Songs, chapter 6

The design is intended for students of different skill-levels or ambitions; it includes large shapes as well as very small details. The more ambitious can attempt all the details, while the less confident may leave some uncut.

The design has two parts

- Text border which may be colored or decorated with colored pencils
- Papercut depicting a stalk of lilies against a grassy background

Materials

- Copy of design for each student and extras in case of mistakes
- #11 X-acto blades (Follow guidelines above for handling the knives)
- Colored paper backing
- 3M Super 77 spray adhesive (Spray the back of the design lightly with spray adhesive, over newspaper in a well-ventilated area to attach)

Children’s Ready-made Design

Picture of a dove surrounded by blossoms, following *Song of Songs 2:11-12*:

For now the winter is past,

The rains are over and gone.

*The blossoms have appeared in the land,
The time of pruning has come;
The song of the turtledove
Is heard in our land.
The green figs form on the fig tree,
The vines in blossom give off fragrance.*

The first verse is included in both Hebrew and English. You can read the whole passage with the children and discuss the excitement of the coming of springtime.

This design is intended to be done with child-sized scissors and crayons or colored pencils, and perhaps glitter. Have a bottle of white glue available for repairing mistakes, and colored paper for backing the finished papercuts.

To begin, the children should make a small cut in the negative space (which will be cut away) and then cut over to a line, but not through the lines. Micro-surgery can be performed with a bit of glue and tiny scrap paper bandages on the back. We are most concerned with the children having fun than with the perfection of the final project.

After finishing the cutting, students may color the words and decorate the pictures. Adults should then mount the work over a piece of colored paper by spraying the back with 3M Super 77 spray adhesive over newspaper in a well-ventilated area.

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Papercut design for children/beginners

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