



# Felting in three hours

*Working with children at Hendreds Primary School in Oxfordshire, Rowan Jones, art teacher at King Alfred's Academy explains how she planned, prepped and pulled-off a felting workshop in three hours*

Working with primary students always throws up a fresh set of challenges for a secondary school teacher. Some of the basic skills we take for granted with our older students may have yet to be mastered by the younger ones. On top of that, access to art and design provision in primary schools can vary greatly, so planning a workshop for one needs careful consideration. It needs to be accommodating, challenging and rewarding in a fairly short space of time, without compromising on the creative journey or cutting corners in the process.

At Hendreds Primary School I worked with a mixture of year 2 and year 3 students (ages 6-8) who were studying India as a topic. Given the rich cultural heritage of the country I was immediately inspired, whilst trying to find an original way to approach the subject matter. I knew from previous years that the work would be put on sale to raise funds for the PTA so it was essential that every child had a successful outcome.

Inspired by my current year 7 (ages 11-12) project on animals, I decided we would look at Indian birds. An image-rich presentation led to a wonderful discussion with about colour, pattern and shape and I decided I wanted to work in felt, although this is a time-consuming process. The project also needed to provide just enough structure to support learning whilst ensuring that students had creative freedom over their work.

To save time, and overcome the trickiest element of cutting the felt bird shape, I pre-cut some ready-made felt into different bird shapes in a variety of rich colours. Then, after a demonstration on the process of felting, the students were keen and ready to go.

As felting can get the table very wet, students worked from laminated bird images and selected the one they liked best. From this image they decided which colours and patterns they would use on their felted bird shape. The students were brilliant at paying attention to the ideas and skills needed for the piece and got started on the task with great enthusiasm.

They began by building up the colours gradually and some were even able to blend the colours of felt together to create new ones. Once the bird was covered I showed them how to manipulate the felt into smaller shapes such as rings, spots and stripes.

We discussed the key words for the project, based on adjectives such as pulling, stretching, twisting, rolling and blending. Many students let their creativity take hold and copied the pattern but not the colours, or vice versa. Some stayed true to their bird image and carefully observed the colours and patterns within their own piece of work.

Initially I had been concerned that with the pre-cut templates they might all come out looking a bit too similar, but I was quickly proved wrong. Each bird had its unique character, further enhanced by an array of colourful canvases to mount them on for the PTA exhibition.

Felting is such a wonderful technique that can achieve high quality results at low cost. It seems that it is growing in popularity in primary schools and it's something I will definitely be doing again, both at primary and secondary level. ■

## A how-to guide to felting

**The felting process itself is quite simple. Using a pre-made felt template is great for primary years as it provides a base to add layers and colours on to.**

**1** Everyone will need two pieces of bubble wrap and some hot soapy water – the water should be as hot as is safe to have in the classroom. Pull small clumps or strands off the wool tops and begin layering onto the felt template. Once one or two layers are built up, sprinkle on some hot soapy water (washing-up liquid or hand soap works well for lather).

**2** Place the work between the bubble wrap pieces and roll over it a few times using a rolling pin. Then add some more dry felt strands and repeat the rolling process. Gradually the layers will build up and more specific shapes and colours can be added.

**3** The final roll, or 'big-roll', is when the felt is rolled for a solid 10-15 minutes. The combination of hot water, soap and friction binds the layers of felt together into one piece of felt. As the bubble wrap makes indents in the felt, roll the outside of the bubble wrap right at the end, which will flatten the felt out. To test whether the layers are merged, bend the felt backwards and see if any of the layers look like they are coming off.

