MAKING STAMPS

NOTE TO TEACHER
Stamps have been used throughout the Americas since ancient times for creating patterns on textiles, in plaster, etc. Stamps were fashioned out of many different types of materials including stone, clay, wood, bone, and even gourds. The majority of those that have survived, however, were made of fired clay. They were made from molds as well as fashioned by hand and come in all sorts of shapes and sizes. The two most popular types were simple blocks or cylinders which could be rolled to create a continuous band or repeating pattern. Stamps were often made for mass consumption and in some cases were used as articles of trade. In spite of the ease with which they were made, their imagery is often quite complex. They were not simply used for decoration but can reveal much about the symbolic domain of ancient Americans.

DESIGNING THE STAMPS
Draw several designs on paper or use the sheet of Mesoamerican samples before making the stamps. Designs may be derived from objects in the slides, from nature, or they may be symbolic renderings of abstract concepts—the possibilities are vast. The finished design will be used as a guide or template in making the stamp and choosing the technique.

MAKING THE STAMPS
Using an exacto knife, special cutting tool, or any available instrument, cut into one of the following: pink pearl eraser, heavy cardboard, soft wood, linoleum, potato, or apple halves. The aim is to create a varied surface, with a lower and an upper layer to create contrast when inked.

Another way to make a stamp is to attach three-dimensional shapes to a two-dimensional surface. Taking small wood blocks or empty thread spools, glue and attach pieces of sponge, rubber, linoleum, other wood scraps, string, felt, cardboard, etc. The design can also be drawn onto wood or heavy cardboard with glue. When the glue dries, raised ridges are formed.

"INKING" THE STAMPS
Dip your stamp into tempera paint, standard drawing ink, special thick printing ink, or textile paints and press the stamp onto paper, being sure to place a "blotter" of some kind underneath the paper depending on the thickness of paint application. Paint or ink can also be applied with a brush for more detail and color. Stamps can be arranged in rows, blocks, columns, or scattered. Consider the many possibilities in variations in size, shape, color, and spacing.

OPTIONS
Using textured or patterned paper, fabric, stone, clay, metal, wood, etc. can create many different kinds of prints. The stamp can be re-inked with each use, rotated, overlapped, printed in different colors, etc. Once the design has dried, you may re-work it with pencil, paint, and any additions of your choice. Experiment!