

Butterfly Painting

Explore symmetry by painting butterfly patterns!



Materials Needed:

Butterfly Template printable (or draw your own), scissors, tempera paint, paintbrushes.

Instructions:

Step 1: Cut out the butterfly template. Fold it in half, with one wing on each side. Unfold the butterfly, then fold it the other way, so only one wing is visible.

Step 2: Paint the visible wing. Cover all of the wing with colors. The paint should be thick enough to not dry out. Make your butterfly look realistic, or use your imagination. Experiment with different colors and patterns!

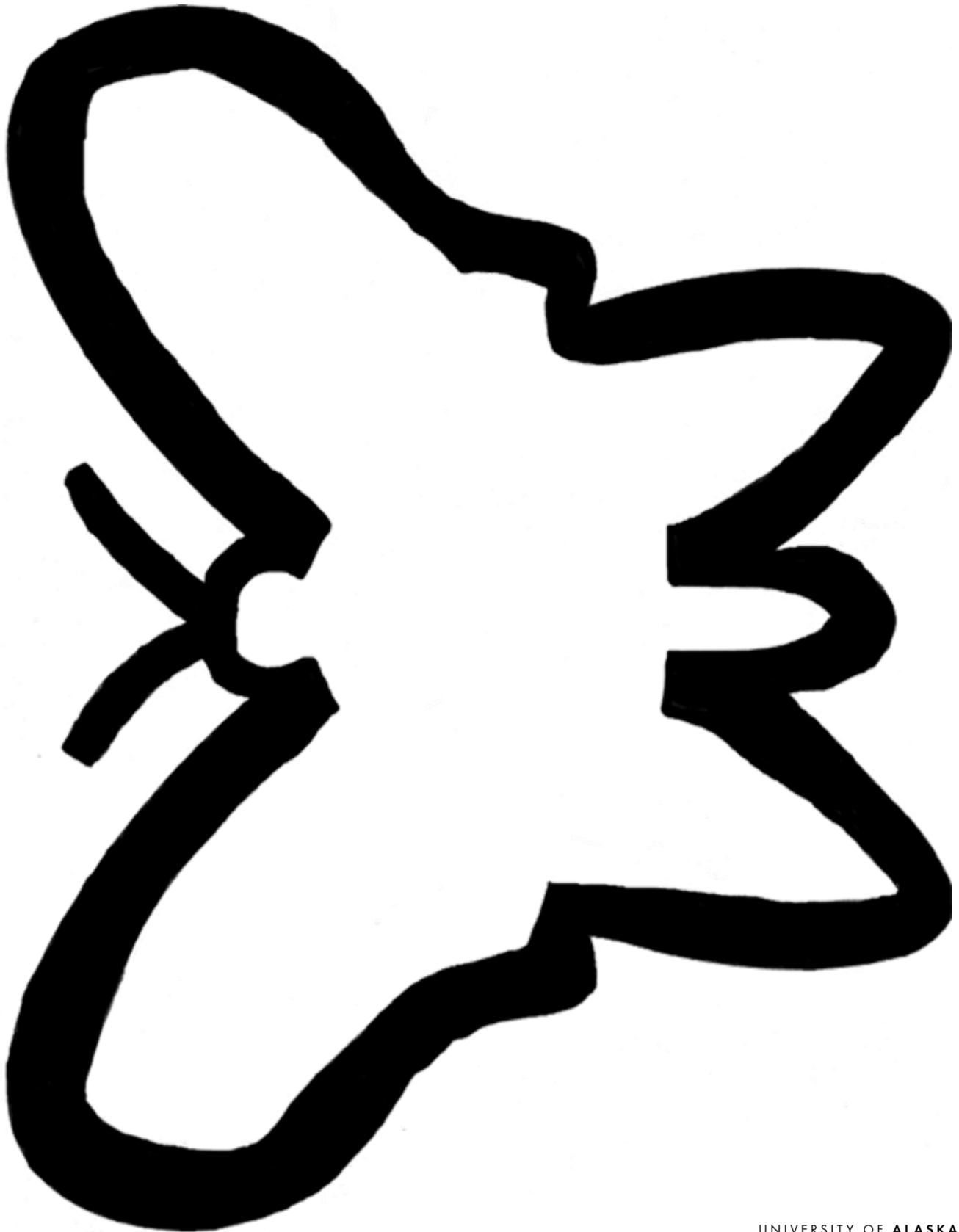
Step 3: Unfold the butterfly so it is flat, then fold the blank wing over onto the painted wing. Rub your fingers over the back of the wing to transfer the paint.

Step 4: Unfold to reveal your butterfly! Notice how the pattern is the same on both sides. This is called *symmetry*. Real butterflies also have symmetry!



Adaptation: For younger children, paint on both butterfly wings. Fold to transfer the paint from one side to the other. Explore how this changes the patterns.

Butterfly Template Printable



Butterfly Colors

There are about 80 species of butterflies in Alaska. They come in many different colors and patterns, from the black-and-yellow Mourning Cloak to the blue shades of the Alaskan Blue and the tan-and-brown Tanana Arctic.

There are many reasons for butterflies to have specific colors and patterns:

Camouflage: Colors help butterflies blend into their environment and avoid predators. Alaska butterflies live in many different habitats, including boreal forests, tundra, bogs, fields, and meadows. Their colors and patterns help them match the colors of their surroundings.



Common Branded Skipper (*Hesperia comma borealis*). [Image: Ken Philip.](#)



Warmth: Butterflies need to absorb sunlight to stay warm. Darker colors absorb more sunlight, so some Arctic species have dark wing patterns.

Left: Tiger Swallowtail (*Papilio canadensis*) basking in the sun. *UAMN photo.*

Warning and Mimicry: Although there are no poisonous butterflies in Alaska, in other regions some species are brightly colored to warn predators that they are poisonous. Other non-poisonous butterflies have patterns that imitate poisonous species to fool predators.

Discover more about Alaska butterflies and see photos of the Kenelm Philip Collection: kenphilipcollection.alaska.edu

Did You Know? Blue Morpho butterflies, which live in Central and South America, appear to have bright blue wings. But they don't have any blue pigment! They have tiny scales covering their wings. Light waves bouncing off the scales interfere with each other, and only blue wavelengths reach your eyes, making the wings look blue. This is called *structural color*: color produced by the interaction of light waves with an object's structure.



Blue Morpho. [Image: NISEnet.](#)