

Holistic Art Exercises

Art Heals

Many know that viewing and creating art can be therapeutic and calming. The art exercises, activities, and resources found below are designed by our expert museum educators to help navigate difficult conversations, create a peaceful environment, and calm the mind. These activities can be adapted for use by K-12 educators, home schools, and lifelong learners. The practices are helpful for team-building exercises, connecting with student groups, addressing issues, as well as many other uses.

> Drawing to Express Emotion

Inspired by Janet Sobel

This activity combines music and art and is a great way to relax. The process matters more than the end result, as there is no right or wrong. Music has always been a powerful tool to connect us to our emotions. For centuries artists have used music to inspire their creations.

Materials: Pen / Pencil (or other handheld art medium) / Piece of paper

1. Pick a song that amplifies the way you're feeling or the way you want to feel
2. Next, use lines and shapes to process and release those feelings on paper.
3. Depending on the group, have participants create a verbal or written reflection that focuses on the exercise itself or the specific piece they created. Educators should be ready to facilitate a conversation and encourage, but not force, participation.

> Drawing as Meditation

Inspired by East Asian Tapestries

Creating *mandalas* can be a way to concentrate or meditate. The word *mandala* means "circle" in Sanskrit, an ancient language from India. *Mandalas* represent all of creation and symbolize how everything is connected. This is a good time to discuss themes of connectivity and unity. Ask participants about the ways they feel connected to the world around them. Is there a place that makes them feel peaceful and calm? Encourage them to imagine that place in their minds as they draw.

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> Drawing as Meditation, Continued

Materials: Paper / Pencil / 3 circular objects of different sizes to trace / A coloring tool like crayon, colored pencil, or marker (*optional*)

1. Center the largest object and trace the circle onto your paper with pencil.
2. Take the medium object, center it within the large circle, and trace it.
3. Take the smallest object, center it in the middle of the medium circle, and trace it.
4. Within each circle, create a design of repeating shapes, starting with large shapes and then filling in smaller ones.
5. Color in the shapes with soothing colors.



> Drawing to Ground the Body

Inspired by Joan Miró

When we tune into our senses we ground the body. It helps relieve stress and anxiety. Artists use the senses in creative ways to connect to their art. In this activity we will attempt to create without the use of sight. This activity can also be used as an empathy-building tool. Participants are encouraged to use their imagination to create their pieces. What other senses can we pay attention to?

Materials: Pencil / Coloring tool like crayon, colored pencil, marker (*optional*) / Piece of paper

1. Imagine an animal.
2. With your eyes closed, draw the animal on your paper. Hear the sound of your pencil and feel the texture of your paper.
3. Now draw a friend for your animal.
4. Open your eyes and admire your creation. Add color if you like.
5. What would the place your animal and friend live in smell like? What would it taste like? Can you use your imagination to feel those senses?

Above: *Mandala* (Shambala) (detail), Tibet, 18th century, Gouache on cloth. Museum purchase with funds provided by The Asiatic Arts Committee of the Fine Arts Society, 1963, 1963.19.

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> Recommended Links

Below are links to resources that help create positive and supportive classroom culture, which in turn cultivates a safe space for students to express themselves creatively.

Tools, professional development, and research on restorative practices in the K-12 setting:

<https://www.iirp.edu/resources/restorative-practices-in-schools-k-12-education>

A guide to leading community circles that can deepen connection with students and provides a model for a safe space encouraging deeper levels of engagement:

https://www.sandi.net/staff/sites/default/files/_link/staff/docs/restorative-practices/toolkit/circles/Ice-Breaker-List.pdf

Guides and tools for restorative justice practices in the classroom:

<https://www.sandiegounified.org/restorative-justice-practices>

Four different simple strategies to engage students in mindfulness behavior and set the tone for creative exploration:

<https://www.edutopia.org/blog/integrating-mindfulness-in-classroom-curriculum-giselle-shardlow>

A tool kit designed to develop awareness of trauma response behaviors and trauma informed care practices for educators:

https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources//child_trauma_toolkit_educators.pdf