



MINDFUL MARK-MAKING

Our inner worlds are vast and dynamic, extending beyond realms of words and language. Mindful mark-making brings attention to what an individual is thinking and feeling in a particular moment. It is also an invitation to explore mark-making and abstraction.

Directions

Outline several drawing areas to fill. The exact size doesn't matter, just make several 'frames' on a page (approx. 3" x 2"). This can be on a single sheet of paper or in one area of a journal.

Start with mindfulness (Lynda Barry's 1-minute Spirals Routine can be a good way to begin). Bring attention to the present moment. Notice how you feel in this moment. Begin to observe your thoughts.

Make marks inside one drawing area for a designated period of time (5-10 minutes). You are invited to take risks as you respond to your inner world. Let go of recognizable symbols and see what happens when you explore a variety of lines, shapes, and textures. These drawings don't have to make sense. It is natural for them to be abstract.

Here are some prompts and approaches to consider. The same prompt can be repeated over several mindful mark-making sessions, or try a different one each time.

- Pause at some point in your day and draw the thoughts you naturally have in that moment. Examples: the quality of your thinking (ie. scattered, optimistic, distracted...) or specific thoughts (ie. thinking about your best friend, dinner, a conversation...)
- Pause at some point in your day and represent the way you are feeling in that moment.
- Represent the pattern of your breath.
- Represent sounds in your surroundings, music, or patterns of conversation (without using words)
- Reflect on the arc of your emotions over the course of a day; draw the progression
- Draw the texture of your thoughts / emotions.
- Draw the color of your thoughts / emotions.

Reflect after completing a singular drawing. Also, encourage individuals to observe their collection after they have several drawings.

Reflection Questions

Is there a word that comes up for you, related to the marks you made? If so, write it near the drawing. What do you notice about the relationship between your marks and your thinking?

Did you notice any shifts in your thinking or feeling?

What surprised you?

What risks did you take? Did you try something new?

What do you notice about your collection of drawings as a whole?

Can you detect any patterns or progression across the drawings?



Tips & Extensions

- Messaging is important in the set-up of this routine. Try approaching it as an experiment: “Let’s see what happens...”; “We’re experimenting with making marks...”; “This isn’t about making a ‘good’ drawing or recognizable images...”; “This is just for you, and you won’t be asked to share it or explain it.”
- Because giving attention to thinking & feeling--and aiming to make it visible--can be sensitive for students, let them know that their work can remain private, that it won’t be shared with other students or exhibited. If any of the work is shared, ask permission and/or make it anonymous.
- Abstraction can be challenging for people of any age. If you encounter resistance or confusion at first, that is evidence that this is a way of thinking that can grow with practice. Repetition is important.
- Begin with 1-minute ‘Spiral’ routine as an entry-point for mindful attention.
- What if you use your non-dominant hand?
- Try modeling thoughts / emotions using found objects or mixed media.
- Try adding an element of collage or color (single colored pencil/marker, watercolors, etc.).
- After students are familiar with the general idea, they can respond in this way to content-specific prompts. This can be especially powerful with topics or issues that naturally elicit an emotional response: historical events, social justice issues, health-related topics, a character or event in a work of literature, etc.
- Consider the effect of doing this routine using a white board and full-body movements. Try it!

WHICH CREATIVE RESOURCES ARE WE GROWING? Aware, Open, Curious, Flexible, Committed, Experimental, Disciplined, Abstract, Visual, Innovative, Tolerance for ambiguity, Reflective, Alert, Observant, Metacognitive...

WHEN AND WHERE CAN IT BE USED? This routine can be used to help students check in with themselves and identify the sensations they are experiencing. It can be used as priming for a focused task, especially those that require close observation, visual thinking, mind-body awareness, note-taking, or reflective response.