

Shelley Klammer

(<https://intuitivecreativity.typepad.com/expressiveartinspirations/>)
Expressive Art Inspirations

100 Art Therapy Exercises

"The healthiest form of projection is art"

~ Fritz Perls

Here is a popular internet list of art therapy activities originally posted up in 2011 by the Nursing School Blog. I have researched current links that reflect the most inspiring art therapy directives on the internet today, keeping them as close as possible to the original list.

Enjoy!

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(<http://www.expressiveartworkshops.com/>)

Emotions

Deal with emotions like anger and sadness through these helpful exercises.

1. Draw or paint your emotions

(<http://www.kinderart.com/painting/emotion.shtml>). In this exercise, you'll focus entirely on painting what you're feeling.

2. Create an emotion wheel.



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(<http://www.do2learn.com/organizationtools/EmotionsColorWheel/>). Using color, this activity will have you thinking critically about your emotions.

3. Make a meditative painting. (<http://doodletherapy.blogspot.ca/2011/07/creative-stress-relief-meditative.html>) Looking for a creative way to relax? Have trouble sitting still to meditate? Meditative painting might be just the thing you're looking for. No painting skill or experience necessary - only a desire to relax and become more creative.
4. Put together a journal (<http://artjournaling.blogspot.com/2010/>). Journals don't have to just be based around words. You can make an art journal as well, that lets you visually express your emotions.
5. Explore puppet therapy (http://freedomthroughtherapy.com/puppet_therapy.html). Puppets aren't just for kids. Make your own and have them act out scenes that make you upset.
6. Use line art (<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-healing-arts/201004/cool-art-therapy-intervention-5-show-me-how-you-feel-today>). Line is one of the simplest and most basic aspects of art, but it can also contain a lot of emotion. Use simple line art to demonstrate visually how you're feeling.
7. Design a postcard you will never send (<http://www.postsecret.com/>). Are you still angry or upset with someone in your life? Create a postcard that expresses this, though you don't have to ever send it.
8. Create a family sculpture (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/arts-and-health/201002/cool-art-therapy-intervention-9-family-sculpture>). For this activity, you make a clay representation of each family member-- mother, father, siblings, and any other close or influential family members to explore emotional dynamics and roles within your family.
9. Paint a mountain and a valley (<http://arttherapytechniques.blogspot.com/2010/10/september-and-october-art-therapy-tasks.html>). The mountain can represent a time where you were happy, the valley, when you were sad. Add elements that reflect specific events as well.

10. **Attach a drawing or message to a balloon** (<http://www.wikihow.com/Plan-a-Small-Balloon-Release>). Send away negative emotions or spread positive ones by attaching a note or drawing to a balloon and setting it free.
11. **Draw Your Heart** (<https://www.socialworkhelper.com/2013/10/14/feelings-heart-art-therapy-exercise-kids/>). Draw your feelings in a heart formation.



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Relaxation

Art therapy can be a great way to relax. Consider these exercises if you're looking to feel a little more laid back.

1. **Paint to music** (<https://sugarspiceandglitter.com/how-to-paint-to-music/>). Letting your creativity flow in response to music is a great way to let out feelings and just relax.
2. **Make a scribble drawing** (<http://arttherapyreflections.blogspot.com/2009/03/art-therapy-exercises-scribble-drawings.html>). With this activity, you'll turn a simple scribble into something beautiful, using line, color and your creativity.
3. **Finger paint** (<http://www.wral.com/lifestyles/family/story/2482242>). Finger painting isn't just fun for kids– adults can enjoy it as well. Get your hands messy and really have fun spreading the paint around.
4. **Make a mandala** (<http://www.arttherapyblog.com/art-therapy-activities/making-mandala-art-for-self-discovery-and-healing>). Whether you use the traditional sand or draw one on your own, this meditative symbol can easily help you to loosen up.
5. **Draw with your eyes closed** (<http://www.pikaland.com/2013/12/03/creative-exercise-close-your-eyes-to-draw-better/>). Not being able to see what you are drawing intensifies fluidity, intuition, touch and sensitivity.
6. **Draw something HUGE** (<https://theartofeducation.edu/2017/06/09/let-students-draw-large/>). Getting your body involved and moving around can help release emotion as you're drawing.
7. **Use color blocks** (<http://www.brokeandhealthy.com/50-fun-things-to-do-with-paint-chip-samples>). Colors often come with a lot of emotions attached. Choose several paint chips to work with and collage, paint and glue until you've created a colorful masterpiece.
8. **Let yourself be free** (http://painting.about.com/cs/paintingknowhow/a/tips_loosen.htm). Don't allow yourself to judge your work. If you think your paintings are too tight and controlled, this collection of tips and techniques to try should help you work in a looser style.
9. **Only use colors that calm you** (<http://www.arttherapyblog.com/online/color-therapy-healing-an-introduction/#.XFszzc9Kgcg>). Create a drawing or a painting using only colors that you find calming.
10. **Draw in sand** (<https://www.wikihow.com/Create-a-Zen-Garden>). Like a Zen garden, this activity will have you drawing shapes and scenes in the sand, which can be immensely relaxing and a great way to clear your mind.
11. **Make a zentangle** (http://www.zentangle.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7&Itemid=117). These fun little drawings are a great tool for letting go and helping reduce stress.

12. **Color in a design** (<https://www.color-meanings.com/benefits-coloring-mandalas/>). Sometimes, the simple act of coloring can be a great way to relax. Find a coloring book or use this mandala for coloring.
13. **Draw outside** (http://painting.about.com/od/landscapes/a/plein_air_paint.htm). Working *en plein air* can be a fun way to relax and get in touch with nature while you're working on art.

Happiness

Art can not only help you deal with the bad stuff, but also help you appreciate and focus on the good. Check out these activities all about reflecting on your personal happiness.



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1. **Collage your vision of a perfect day** (<http://www.oprah.com/spirit/How-to-Make-a-Vision-Board-Find-Your-Life-Ambition-Martha-Beck>). Think about what constitutes a perfect day to you and collage it. What about this collage can you make happen today?
2. **Take photographs of things you think are beautiful** (<http://abeautifulmess.com/2012/03/photography-10-things-not-to-do-html>). No one else has to like them but you. Print and frame them to have constant reminders of the beautiful things in life.
3. **Make a collage related to a quote you like** (<http://www.collageyourworld.com/blog/?p=6079>). Take the words of wisdom from someone else and turn them into something visually inspiring.
4. **Create a drawing that represents freedom** (<http://makegreatstuff.com/automatic-drawing-what-is-it/>). The Surrealists embraced automatic drawing as way to incorporate randomness and the subconscious into their drawings, and to free themselves from artistic conventions and everyday thinking.
5. **Document a spiritual experience** (http://ericmaisel.com/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2011/07/ten_tips_for_intuitive_painting.pdf). Have you ever had a spiritual experience in your life? Paint what it felt like intuitively.
6. **Make a stuffed animal** (<https://www.sheknows.com/parenting/articles/1025355/adorable-stuffed-animals-you-can-make-for-your-kids/>). Soft, cuddly objects can be very comforting. This project could be used to create an imaginary animal from your intuitive drawings.
7. **Work on a softness project.** (<http://www.explorefiber.com/anthony-stevens-textile-art-as-therapy-self-expression/>) Using only soft or comforting objects, create a work of art.
8. **Build a "home."** (<http://www.realsimple.com/magazine-more/inside-magazine/your-words/home-meaning-00000000020706/index.html>) What does home mean to you? This activity will have you create a safe, warm place that feels like home to you.
9. **Document an experience where you did something you didn't think you could do.** (<http://www.thechangeblog.com/facing-the-thing-that-scars-you/>). We all have to do things that we're scared or unsure of sometimes. Use this activity as a chance to commemorate one instance in your life.
10. **Think up a wild invention** (<http://www.wackyinventions.com/>). This invention should do something that can help make you happier– no matter what that is.
11. **Make a prayer flag** (<http://arttherapyreflections.blogspot.com/2010/04/reflecting-on-prayer-flags.html>). Send your prayers for yourself or those around you out into the universe with this project.



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Portraits

Often, a great way to get to know yourself and your relationships with others is through portraits.

1. **Create a past, present and future self-portrait.** (<http://www.arttherapyblog.com/art-therapy-activities/transformational-self-portrait/#.UutYuM1mUao>) This drawing or painting should reflect where you have been, who you are today, and how you see yourself in the future.
2. **Draw a bag self-portrait** (<http://www.arttherapyblog.com/art-therapy-activities/bag-self-portrait-art-therapy-activity-2/>). On the outside of a paper bag, you'll create a self-portrait. On the inside, you'll fill it with things that represent who you are.
3. **Choose the people who matter most to you in life and create unique art for each** (<http://www.arttherapyblog.com/art-therapy-activities/focus-energy-easy-art-activity/#more-31>). This is a great way to acknowledge what really matters to you and express your gratitude.
4. **"I am" Collage.** (<https://kaleidosoul.com/soulcollage-cards-interpreting.html>) Create an intuitive collage and discover more about yourself.
5. **Create an expressive self-portrait** (<https://www.deepspacesparkle.com/sketchbook-project-6-expressive-self-portraits/>). Paint in expressive colors. Select colors for emotional impact.
6. **Draw yourself as a warrior.** (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3042297/>) Start thinking about yourself as a strong, capable person by drawing yourself as a warrior in this activity.
7. **Create a transformational portrait series** (<https://www.incredibleart.org/lessons/elem/selfport.htm#value>). Transform your perceptions about yourself with this list of self-portrait ideas.
8. **Imitate Giuseppe Arcimboldo** (<https://kinderart.com/art-lessons/drawing/fruit-and-vegetable-portraits/>). Using objects that have meaning to you, create a portrait of yourself.
9. **Create a body image sketch.** (<http://arttherapydirectives.blogspot.com/2012/07/standing-body-image-drawing-art.html>) Practice life drawing to fall in love with all of the varieties of the human body, including your own.
10. **Draw a mirror self-portrait** (<https://www.pre-kpages.com/drawing-mirrors-self-portraits/>). This activity is based around a Piet Mondrian quote: "The purer the artist's mirror is, the more true reality reflects in it."
11. **Draw yourself as a superhero.** (<https://lovinartclass.weebly.com/superhero-self-portraits.html>) Many people like superhero stories. We resonate with the themes in the stories, with the dilemmas and problems that superheroes face, and we aspire to their noble impulses and heroic acts.



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Trauma and Loss

These activities will ask you to face some unpleasant aspects of life, but with the goal of overcoming them.

1. **Draw a place where you feel safe.** (<http://creativityintherapy.com/2017/09/create-safe-place/>) An art therapy directive for finding your safe place.
2. **Create a mini-diorama** (<https://www.thesprucecrafts.com/easy-ways-to-make-school-dioramas-2366269>). A diorama can showcase an important moment in your life or something from your imagination.
3. **Collage Your Worries Away** (<https://moynihangallery.com/blogs/artsy-shopkeeper/5-tips-on-how-to-collage-your-worries-away>). Toss your worries away and begin tearing, cutting, shredding and layering.
4. **Draw something that scares you** (<https://www.npr.org/sections/pictureshow/2013/08/15/209019104/how-to-draw-out-your-worst-fears>). Everyone is frightened of something and in this project you'll get a chance to bring that fear to light and hopefully work towards facing it.
5. **Turn your illness into art** (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/arts-and-health/201206/using-art-therapy-re-author-the-dominant-narrative-illness>). Struggling with a potentially terminal illness? Process your feelings about your illness.
6. **Art journal through a loss in your life.** (<https://whatsyourgrief.com/grief-art-journal-activity-for-grievors/>) If you've lost someone you love, process it in your art journal.
7. **Make art that is ephemeral** (<https://www.mericherry.com/2016/03/08/sand-painting-process-art/>). (<http://ephemeral-art.ufare.wikispaces.net/Lesson+2+-+Tibetan+Buddhist+Sand+Painting>) Sand painting is practiced in many cultures, usually for healing purposes. Create beautiful patterns with sand on canvas.

Collaging

If you prefer to cut and paste rather than draw or paint, these projects are for you.

1. **Create a motivational collage** (<https://artfulparent.com/make-vision-board-works-10-steps/>). Collage a vision board. Fill it with images you find motivating.
2. **Create a face collage on a mask** (<http://arttherapyreflections.blogspot.com/2010/11/art-therapy-exercises-using-face.html>). We all wear masks of some sort. This project lets you showcase what's in your mask and the face you put on for the world.
3. **Create a clutter collage** (<http://www.clutterclarity.com/collage.php>). Are there things cluttering up your life? In this project, use words and pictures to show the clutter in your way.
4. **Create a calming collage.** (<http://kidsrelaxation.com/all-relaxation-activities/relaxation-collage/>) Choose images that you find soothing, calming or even meditative and combine them to create a collage to help you to relax.
5. **Collage a painting** (<https://saltworkstudio.com/2011/11/14/5-tips-for-painting-with-collage/>). Incorporate collage symbolism in a painting.



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Self

Examine aspects of who you are and how you see the world through these art projects.

1. **Draw images of your good traits.** (<http://www.creativeaffirmations.com/positive-character-traits.html>) Creating drawings of your good traits will help you to become more positive and build a better self-image.
2. **Draw yourself as an animal.** (<http://vector.tutsplus.com/tutorials/cartoon-fundamentals-the-secrets-in-drawing-animals/>) Is there an animal that you have a special interest in or feel like is a kindred spirit? Draw yourself as that animal.
3. **Create a timeline journal.** (<https://www.createwritenow.com/journal-writing-blog/bid/94651/writing-therapy-exercise-make-a-life-timeline>) Timeline the most important moments of your life through this writing therapy exercise.
4. **Put together a jungle animal collage** (<http://www.arttherapyblog.com/art-therapy-activities/creating-a-jungle-animal-collage>). Choose jungle animals that you find the most interesting, draw them, and then reflect on why you've chosen these specific animals.
5. **Sculpt your ideal self.** (<http://www.bradyates.net/MichelangeloProcess.pdf>) If you could make yourself into the perfect person, what would you look like?
6. **Paint different sides of yourself.** (<https://design.tutsplus.com/tutorials/art-therapy-paint-what-you-feel--cms-29956>) Explore your many emotions through painting.
7. **Make art with your fingerprints.** (<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2234831/Judith-Ann-Braun-Artist-uses-just-fingerprints-create-huge-murals-charcoal.html>) Your fingerprints are as unique as you are. Use ink and paint to make art that uses your fingerprints.
8. **Draw yourself as a tree.** (<http://arttherapy365.com/2012/02/07/drawing-yourself-as-a-tree/>) Your roots will be loaded with descriptions of things that give you strength and your good qualities, while your leaves can be the things that you're trying to change.
9. **Design a fragments box** (<http://gretchenmiller.wordpress.com/2010/02/28/what-ought-to-be-on-untangling-and-putting-fragments-back-together-through-art>). In this project, you'll put fragments of yourself into a box, helping construct a whole and happier you.
10. **Paint an important childhood memory.** (<http://tribune.com.pk/story/456897/memories-of-childhood-artist-relearns-how-to-draw-like-a-child/>) What was a pivotal memory in your childhood? This activity asks you to document it and try to understand why it was so important to you.
11. **Write and illustrate a fairy tale about yourself** (http://www.ehow.com/how_5578729_write-very-own-fairy-tale.html). If you could put yourself into a happily ever after situation, what role would you play and how would the story go? Create a book that tells the tale.
12. **Design a visual autobiography** (<https://mskuksclass.weebly.com/all-about-me-visual-autobiography-unit.html>). This creative project asks you to make a visual representation of your life.
13. **Create your own coat of arms** (<https://www.wikihow.com/Create-Your-Own-Coat-of-Arms>). Choose symbols that represent your strengths to build your own special coat of arms.
14. **Draw a comic strip.** (<https://www.imagineforest.com/blog/how-to-create-a-comic-strip/>) Enjoy a moment of levity with this exercise that will focus in on a comical event that happened to you.
15. **Build your own website.** (<https://www.websitebuilderexpert.com/building-websites/what-you-need-to-build-a-website-checklist/>) Websites are very versatile ways to express yourself. Build your own to express what's most important about you.

16. **Create a box of values** (<http://arttherapytechniques.blogspot.com/2010/07/june-art-therapy-techniques.html>). First, collage or paint a box that represents you. Then, place items inside the box that represent the things you value the most.



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Gratitude

Here you'll find a collection of projects that will help you be happy about what you have and express your gratitude for it.

1. **Document your gratitude visually** (<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/your-musical-self/201011/how-be-creatively-thankful>). What things are you grateful for in your life? Paint or collage a work that represents these things.
2. **Create a family tree of strength** (http://genealogy.loveto know.com/Draw_a_Family_Tree). This exercise honors those around you who support you. Paint those close to you who offer you the strength you need.
3. **Make something for someone else** (<http://www.getrichslowly.org/blog/2008/11/13/a-do-it-yourself-christmas-34-great-gifts-you-can-make-yourself>). Making something for someone else can be a great way to feel good and help someone else do so as well.
4. **Make anchor art** (<http://arttherapytechniques.blogspot.com/2010/09/august-art-therapy-techniques.html>). Who are the anchors in your life? In this project, you'll make an anchor and decorate it with the people and things that provide you stability and strength.
5. **Draw all the positive things in your life** (<http://tinybuddha.com/blog/on-creating-positive-energy-for-positive-change/>). Everyone has at least one good thing in life, so sit down and figure out what makes you happy— then draw it.
6. **Sculpt your hand in plaster** (<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ811582.pdf>). Explore the symbolism of hand casting.
7. **Paint a rock** (<https://colormadehappy.com/best-painting-rocks-supplies-guide/>). Paint rocks for relaxation and fun.
8. **Create a gratitude tree** (<https://rhythmsofplay.com/how-to-make-a-thankful-tree-with-clay-gratitude-leaves/>). What are you grateful for? This clay project asks you to write those things on leaves to construct a tree.
9. **Create a life map** (<https://www.oprah.com/spirit/create-your-own-life-map/all>). A Life Map helps you discover what you want for yourself and your life.
10. **Create a snowflake out of paper** (<https://www.instructables.com/id/How-to-Make-6-Pointed-Paper-Snowflakes/>). Write ideas about how you are unique on the snowflake.
11. **Build a personal altar** (<http://fengshui.about.com/od/childrenfamily/qt/Feng-Shui-Home-Altar.htm>). This is a highly personal project that will help connect you with your spiritual side and honor your resilience.

Inside the Mind

Take a look inside your mind to see what's going on with these projects.

1. **Create blot art** (http://www.ehow.com/how_2090619_create-rorschach-tests.html). Like a classic Rorschach test, fold paper in half with paint or ink in the middle and describe what you see.
2. **Mind Mapping** (<http://www.mindmapinspiration.com/tag/100-reasons-to-mind-map/>). Make a visual representation of your thoughts to figure out how your mind works.
3. **Make a dreamcatcher** (<http://www.nativetech.org/dreamcat/dreminst.html>). Having bad dreams? Create this age-old tool for catching your dreams with a few simple tools.
4. **Draw your dreams** (<http://arttherapyreflections.blogspot.ca/2009/04/reflecting-on-dreams.html>). You can learn a lot from what goes on in your dreams, so keep a dream journal and use it for inspiration to draw or paint.



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Miscellaneous

If you're still looking for something to empower, help or soothe you, these projects may fit the bill.

1. **Use natural materials** (<http://www.art-is-fun.com/art-from-nature.html>). Leaves, sticks, dirt, clay and other natural materials can help you get in touch with the natural world and the more primal side of yourself.
2. **Explore archetypes** (<https://www.archetypes.com/>). Study the archetypes to help you explore how you see and create your world.
3. **Use your body as a canvas** (<http://www.ilovebodyart.com/body-paint-artists/>). You don't need paper when you have your body. Paint on your hands and feet or anywhere else to feel more in touch with yourself.
4. **Sculpt spirit figures** (<http://joyfularttherapy.blogspot.com/2010/03/one-way-there-are-many-to-create-spirit.html>). Connect with those that have passed on or your own spiritual essence using these sculpted figures.
5. **Make art out of recycled items**. (<http://www.upcyclethat.com/>) You can reuse old items that have meaning to you or just re-purpose something you have laying around. Either way, you'll get insights into how you can reshape and reevaluate your own life.
6. **Collage with old photographs**. (<http://laraberdchdesigns.com/mixed-media-collage/>) If you're uncomfortable using old photos you can make copies. Explore these mixed media techniques with your old photos.
7. **Create your own interpretation of a famous work of art** (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/nightf3v3r/sets/532828>). How would you have painted the Mona Lisa? Using a famous work as your inspiration, create your own work. It could help reveal more about your lens on the world.
8. **Work collaboratively**. (<http://www.pinterest.com/hpmartin/collaborative-projects-for-school/>) Art can be better when two work at it together, so find a partner and collaborate on just about anything.
9. **Use a found or made object as a paintbrush** (<http://www.readingconfetti.com/2013/08/12-ways-to-paint-without-paintbrush.html>). Whether it's something sharp or something soft, make your own artistic tool and use it to express what you're feeling.
10. **Make crayon stained glass**. (<http://littlefingersbigart.com/2013/01/11/crayon-shaving-stained-glass/>) Reflect upon your spiritual side with this project that lets you create your own stained glass window.
11. **Paint a window**. (<http://handsonaswegrow.com/art-window-paint-creations/>) Windows let you see in and see out. Paint yours with things you want to hide or show to the world.



<http://madmimi.com/signups/142a446e82db49e193e97c5a4cbebe4e/join>

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