



REDUCING TEST ANXIETY THROUGH ART

"The best use of imagination is creativity. The worst use of imagination is anxiety."

— Deepak Chopra

OVERVIEW

Students lessen their anxiety prior to a taking a test or other kind of stressful academic task by coloring a mandala or plaid design, or through free-drawing.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Before students take a test or engage in some other kind of stressful academic task
- Any time students need to calm themselves and focus

TIME REQUIRED

- 15 minutes

LEVEL

- Upper Elementary
- Middle School
- High School
- University

MATERIALS

- Mandala coloring worksheet for each student (do a Google search for "printable mandala for kids") OR
- Plaid coloring worksheet for each student (do a Google search for "printable plaid coloring worksheet")
OR
- Plain drawing paper for each student

- Coloring materials, such as colored pencils, markers, or crayons

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Reduce their test anxiety by participating in a coloring activity prior to taking a test

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

Prior to starting the day or before a stressful situation, try coloring a mandala or a plaid worksheet, or do free drawing, if you prefer. Spend at least 10 to 15 minutes on the activity. Notice how you feel afterwards. Are you more focused? Do you feel calmer?

INSTRUCTIONS

- Before beginning, hold a brief discussion with students about different techniques they use to calm and focus themselves, such as talking to a friend or parent, running around outside, deep breathing, listening to music, or a specific mindfulness practice.
- Tell them that today the class is going to try a new method that scientists have found helps lower students' stress levels: coloring.
- Start by having students rate their stress levels on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest.
- Give students a choice between a mandala worksheet, a plaid worksheet, or plain paper for free drawing.
- Using whatever coloring materials are on hand, students color their worksheet for ten to fifteen minutes.

CLOSURE

- Have students check in with themselves and rate their stress levels again. Do they feel calmer and/or more focused? Was this exercise helpful? Would they change anything or do it again?

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

How did students respond to this practice? Did students prefer one kind of drawing to another? Did the practice help calm and focus the students? Are students asking to do this kind of practice again, or is there another kind of mindfulness practice they prefer to do?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Several studies have found that coloring mandalas or plaid designs, or free drawing helps to calm and focus [upper elementary](#), [middle school](#), and [university-level students](#) prior to taking a test.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Taking a test is one of the greatest fears experienced by students, and one that [increases with age](#). Researchers suggest that structured coloring in particular—such as that of mandalas and plaid designs—helps students to experience a focused state, which can then help them calm their anxiety.

Interestingly, scientists have also discovered that the effectiveness of the different types of coloring may vary by age and gender. For example, free drawing was more effective in [upper elementary boys](#) than in girls, possibly because boys' fine motor skills develop later than those of girls. However, [mandala and plaid coloring](#) rather than free drawing reduced anxiety in university-level students. Researchers suggested this might be because a structured form rather than a blank pallet allowed students to organize the "inner chaos" of anxiety.