



## AWE IS ALL AROUND US

*"Art is an expression of joy and awe. It is not an attempt to share one's virtues and accomplishments with the audience, but an act of selfless spirit."*

—David Mamet

### OVERVIEW

Students learn about and create mandalas as a way to experience the awe of visual design.

### PLANNING FOR IT

#### WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- At the beginning of the school year, to set up and decorate your classroom
- To build community
- As a brain break, stress-reduction, or well-being exercise

#### TIME REQUIRED

- ≤ 30 minutes

#### LEVEL

- Lower Elementary
- Upper Elementary
- Middle School

#### MATERIALS

- Coloring materials (pencil crayons, crayons, felt pens)
- Print-outs of [coloring sheets](#) or plain paper

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Explore the benefits of appreciating and being surrounded by visual design

- Color or create their own visual design piece
- Contribute to creating classroom community and visual design in the classroom

## ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making a Practice Trauma-Informed](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

## CHARACTER STRENGTHS

- Appreciation of beauty and excellence
- Spirituality
- Transcendence

## SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-awareness
- Social awareness

## MINDFULNESS COMPONENTS

- Open awareness

## HOW TO DO IT

### REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- One elicitor of [awe](#) that we don't always think about is human-made visual design—like art and grand buildings (e.g., Taj Mahal, cathedrals).
- Do you recall seeing a piece of art or visiting an extraordinary building or place that elicited a moment of awe for you?
- One beautiful recurring piece of awe-inspiring art throughout many cultures is the mandala. Take a moment to review the history and culture of mandalas below.
- Next, try creating or coloring your own mandala—as your own contemplative, mindful practice before bringing this activity to your students. Take a moment to notice how you feel after this practice.

## INSTRUCTIONS

### OVERVIEW

**The Practice** (can be spread over a couple days)

**Tell students:** *Today we are going to create some visual designs for our classroom in the form of mandalas. Art has always inspired and connected humans. Science and history have shown us that creating art and being surrounded by beautiful visual designs can make us feel positive emotions like wonder and [awe](#)—and it is good for our well-being!*

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## STEP 1: THE HISTORY AND CULTURE OF MANDALAS

Share some of this history with your students:

- The word *mandala* is a [Sanskrit](#) word that means “circle.”
- Mandalas are circular images of patterns that can be drawn, built in nature, painted, or even danced.
- Many cultures around the world create or use mandalas. Here are some examples of mandalas from different cultures.
  - [“Inuit Mandala”](#) by Marjorie Esa
  - [Aztec Sunstone + history](#)
  - [Australian Aboriginal dot art](#) and [Tjuringa stone](#) + [history](#)
  - [Celtic art](#) and [knots \(mandalas\)](#) + [history](#) (video)
  - [Navajo sand mandalas](#)
  - [Tibetan mandala + history](#)
  - A [rangoli](#), often used during Diwali
- Mandalas can represent many things, such as time, our spiritual beliefs, or nature. They’re often used in sacred ceremonies. (If appropriate, here is a short [video](#) (3:26) about the making of a Tibetan sand mandala.) People also use or make mandalas to help them concentrate or to relax and lower their stress levels.
- Researchers have shown that the **repetitive patterns** and **light/dark contrast** that you often see in mandalas can inspire [awe](#)—that feeling when you are amazed at how beautiful or wondrous something is—which can help us feel better and also more connected to each other and to the whole world. So, creating mandalas is a good stress-relieving activity!



- **Discussion question:**

- *Let's look at these examples of [mandalas](#). What do you notice about them?*
- *What is similar across all of these? What features are different? What patterns do you see repeating in each one? Which ones are both light and dark?*
- *Have you noticed mandala designs anywhere else? In nature? Science? (For example, think about a molecule or patterns in a tree stump!)*

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## STEP 2: STUDENTS COLOR OR CREATE THEIR OWN MANDALAS THROUGH ONE OF THESE OPTIONS

1. Select [one pattern of mandala](#) for students to color today.
  2. Present students with [options of mandalas](#) and have them choose a design to color.
  3. Invite students to create their own mandala designs in other ways:
    - Draw their own mandalas: Here is an [optional set of instructions](#) for guiding students through creating their own mandalas.
    - Create [nature-based mandalas](#).
- It is nice to play relaxing music while students color or create their mandalas.

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## STEP 3: POST THEIR ART AROUND THE CLASSROOM!

- Or, if students created mandalas out in the world (for example, with sticks, sand, or leaves), try taking photos of their creations and sharing a slideshow or printing them out (if that is available to you).

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## STEP 4: ART WALK (THIS STEP CAN HAPPEN ON ANOTHER DAY, AFTER YOU HAVE A CHANCE TO POST THEIR ART)

- Invite students to do an *awe art gallery walk* to view their classmates' mandalas.
- Have them reflect on features of visual design that elicit awe (patterns and light/dark contrast) and other emotions. Invite them to note anything else they think or feel while they view their classmates' art.

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## CLOSURE

**Tell students:** *Let's take a moment to reflect on our creations of art and our art walk.*

- *Can you share an **emotion word** for how you felt while **creating** your own visual design piece? What feelings or thoughts did you notice when you did the art walk?*
- *What features of your classmates' art stood out for you? Prompts: Choice of colors, patterns, dark/light contrast*
- *Have you ever seen any visual designs in your neighbourhood or out in the world that made you stop and say "Wow!" This doesn't have to be a mandala—it could be any art or grand structure.*
- *Have you seen mandalas used in your own families or cultural communities? How are they used?*

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## EXTENSIONS

- If there is an opportunity, consider using this as a school-wide project and post the art around the school!
- As an optional extension and discussion, you can use [Google Art & Culture](#) site to share some famous works of art and have students reflect on the feeling(s) the image evokes, whether awe or otherwise.

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## REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- What emotion words did students use to describe their feelings after the awe gallery walk?

- Did students come up with unique stories of mandalas or art they have seen out in the world? Did any students share anything from their individual cultures around these designs?
- Did you notice any shifts in students' moods or stress levels after this practice?
- Was this challenging for any students? Did it particularly resonate with others? Did anything surprise you about students' reactions?

## THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

### EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Visual design has always provoked a sense of awe and wonder for human beings, from ancient drawings on cave walls to the elaborate painting in European cathedrals, connecting us socially, and making us feel part of something bigger than ourselves.

In a [study](#) of 132 adults who visited two art museums in London, UK, almost all participants (87%) reported feeling awe by viewing and being surrounded by art, as well as other positive emotions such as joy and inspiration.

Scientists have also discovered that the act of coloring itself can help people [manage their emotions](#) and even reduce [test anxiety](#).

### WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Students experience a lot of [stress at school](#), from pressures to succeed to daily social challenges and conflict. Incorporating [art and beauty](#) into the classroom has a dual benefit of improving well-being on its own and [eliciting awe](#), a positive emotion which, too, leads to [greater well-being](#).

Both creating and experiencing art, and even being surrounded by an [aesthetically beautiful classroom](#), can also foster [children and adolescents'](#) resilience and well-being, as well as increase their motivation and success in school.

## SOURCE

Practice inspired by works of [Dr. Keltner and colleagues](#)