

# MANDALA NOW!



## Origins of Mandala

Mandalas are structurally a geometric configuration of symbols and use radial symmetry where the design radiates from a central point outwardly. In nature, many examples of radial symmetry are found in snowflake, star fish, sunflowers, fruits and plant structure among others.

The word 'mandala' comes from the Sanskrit word literally meaning circle and denoting essence. Mandalas are ancient and have been used throughout history within many different cultures and religions. In Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Shintoism, mandalas are used as a map representing deities. In Shintoism, it depicts paradises, kami or actual shrines. Thus, indigenous cultures use mandalas as symbols for teaching, healing and transformation.

Mandalas have also been used to establish a sacred space and can be trance-like and meditative.

In 1916, psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Carl Jung, who founded analytical psychology, created his first mandala, unknowingly of the Eastern tradition. He then introduced these images to the Western world. Jung used mandala drawing as a way of making sense of his experience. He also used mandalas as an important component of his work with patients.

Jung wrote "it became increasingly plain to me that the mandala is the centre. It is the exponent of all paths. It is the path to the centre, to individuation<sup>1</sup>."

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1 Jung C.G. (1989). *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. Vintage Books. p.196



## Benefits

### **Stillness**

Mandala drawing is a creative, self-soothing and reflective practice that slows down your thoughts. It allows you to meditate your own way and to create space within.

### **Repetition**

It helps manage your stress, calming your nervous system. It draws you in a relaxing state and helps to center yourself.

### **Connection - Awareness**

It slows your heart rate, promoting connection between the mind, body & soul.

### **Emergence**

Tapping into your own wisdom, symbols will emerge within the process without engaging the mind.

### **Processed focus**

Drawing a mandala supports self-expression and by looking at it, you can investigate your own emotions.

### **Relief**

This creative process can have a transformative quality.

## Mandala drawing to overcome eco-anxiety

The process of drawing a mandala is a self reflective tool, connecting with our own thoughts, emotions and feelings. We know that the act of creative repetition helps regulate our vagal system. With mandala drawing, when creating the same shape over and over within a circle, we give ourselves the opportunity to drop into a calm state.

With each shape, line or dot we translate our anxiety and turn these emotions outward in a safe and nurturing space. Rituals and drawing out what is within support our acceptance of the world around us, and our ways to cope.

### **Accepting imperfections**

Our emotions are our response to the outside world, and when the trigger comes from an unknown place (i.e. facing an event for the first time), our emotions might seem irrational. Drawing within a mandala grants us connections to our pre-verbal knowings - our world before our use of words. The doing and creating gives us a platform to express our emotions without words. This provides a further avenue to support our acceptance of the world.

When we step back to view the finished mandalas, the imperfect marks are no longer relevant as they instead become part of this silent journey. By becoming a kind observer and not being so judgmental to our own life and drawing abilities, we can let go of any negativity that might fester inside. Once again, just notice what is there, without judgement.

Interestingly, often at the end of a session, what at first we perceived as flaws has become a feature which makes the mandala special.

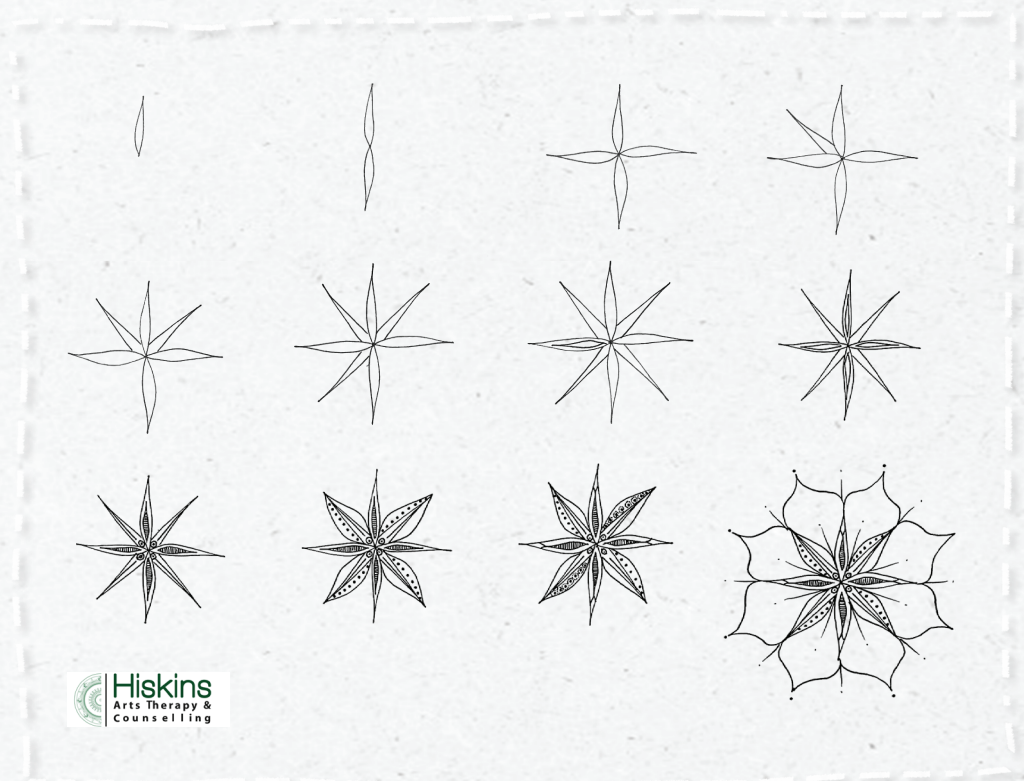


# Mandala Drawing

Materials needed:  
a compass and pencil, a pen, your journal

Start your mandala by drawing a large circle with a compass<sup>1</sup>. Keep the sharp end in the paper, and move the pencil end of the compass to make a few more random circles within the larger circle.

Work from the inside out and intuitively place a few lines, dots, shapes. There is no need to measure or sketch out the design.



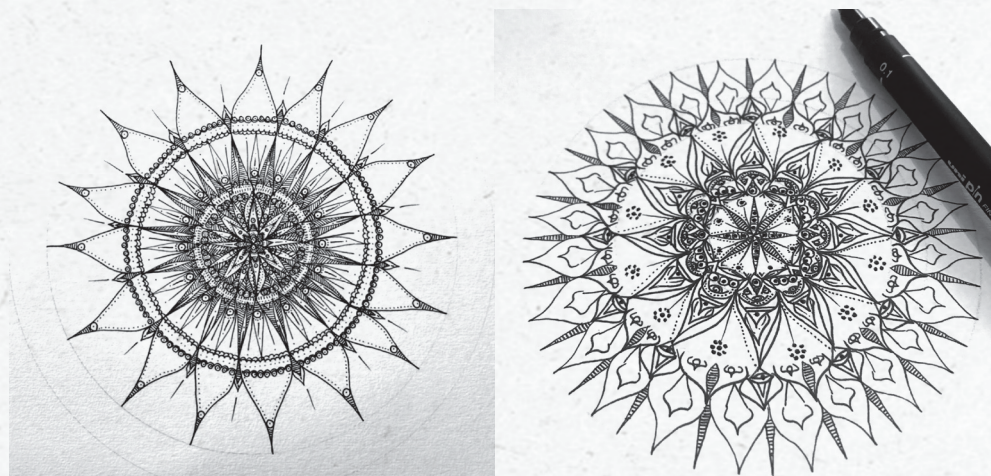
<sup>1</sup> This activity is from Hiskins Arts Therapy



Simply repeat one shape until it meets its starting point, make another shape and repeat. Using the previous shape connects them or not. As a result, you will become immersed in the drawing process.

Remain open to the awareness of your body and endeavour to stay present. Bracket in and out your thoughts: become aware of memories, thoughts, emotions or feelings that arise. Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings, notice how they dissipate in a vacuum of nothingness.

If you feel the need, write a few key words as you create your mandala. These will become useful when you enter the observation and reflection stage of the activity.



### Tips while drawing

- Use different size pens. Leave some space or gaps between your marks. Move the piece of paper around whilst drawing to avoid smudging.
- Take breaks, pop the image at a distance, reflect what should come next.
- The lines might not be straight or it looks wrong in your head: this is the opportunity to practice kindness towards yourself, drop any attempt to judge yourself and your abilities

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1 Credit: process drawings by Rachel Hiskins. Printed with the authorisation of the artist



# Journaling

Once you finish the mandala, pause for a moment and look at it. Does aspect of the design remind you of anything? In your journal, next to your drawing, write down your observations, be descriptive. Use the keywords you wrote during the creative process to deepen your observation.

Write emotions that the mandala provokes and how it felt creating it. Reflect on its meaning. Is there a message the mandala is saying right now in this moment in your life?

If this creative process is useful to you, it might be to others! Think how you could share this activity with members of your family. Can you also think of ways to make it part of your recovery journey?

Here are a few pointers:

- Consider sharing pictures with your loved one or groups you are part of. Draw attention on what you found beneficial, be specific (being in the flow, exploring your subconscious, discovering aspects of yourself, becoming present, etc.)
- Invite others to make radial drawings or compositions when you go out on a walk, or with pencils and bit and pieces you find at work, in your drawers. The options are infinite.

# Activity for Children

Materials needed:  
A quiet place in the bush.

## Activity

### **Mandala and forest bathing**

We can see mandala patterns in natural elements such as tree rings, spider webs, seashells, or crystals... the list goes on! Producing such patterns allows us to connect with ourselves and the world around us. When walking in the bush, slow down, look around you and search for naturally formed mandalas.

Shinrin-Yoku (or forest bathing once translated from Japanese), has proved to significantly reduce blood pressure and stress levels. It is also beneficial for the cardiac and pulmonary systems. Walking in the bush can (and should!) be part of children's physical and mental self-care habits. Invite them to combine mandala discovering, radial composition making and bush bathing to tap into their healing creativity.

### **Nature as inspiration**

Before starting, ask Nature permission to enter its realm and to let you borrow from it. Ask this from a meaningful place. Encourage children to look around, pause, and be grateful for the many gifts nature is offering.

Slowly, gather what you find around you: a few rocks, some leaves and fallen branches.

Demonstrate how to organise each element following a radial symmetry pattern and let the children take it from there.





*Sea Treasures* by artist Shona Wilson<sup>1</sup>

Each step counts, emphasise on the importance of appreciating this journey rather than focusing on the end result. Children will naturally leave their thoughts aside and enter the creative flow.

Give the radial composition as a gift back to Nature. If they wish, the children can document their installation from many angles with a camera. The pictures will be used as a tool for curiosity to ignite their next creative session. Before leaving, as a thoughtful and reciprocal act, they may like to disassemble the artwork's pieces to leave no footprint behind.

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<sup>1</sup> @shonawilsonartist (IG). [www.shonawilson.com](http://www.shonawilson.com)  
Printed with the authorisation of the artist.