



SONOMA VALLEY MUSEUM OF ART

Art Rewards The Student

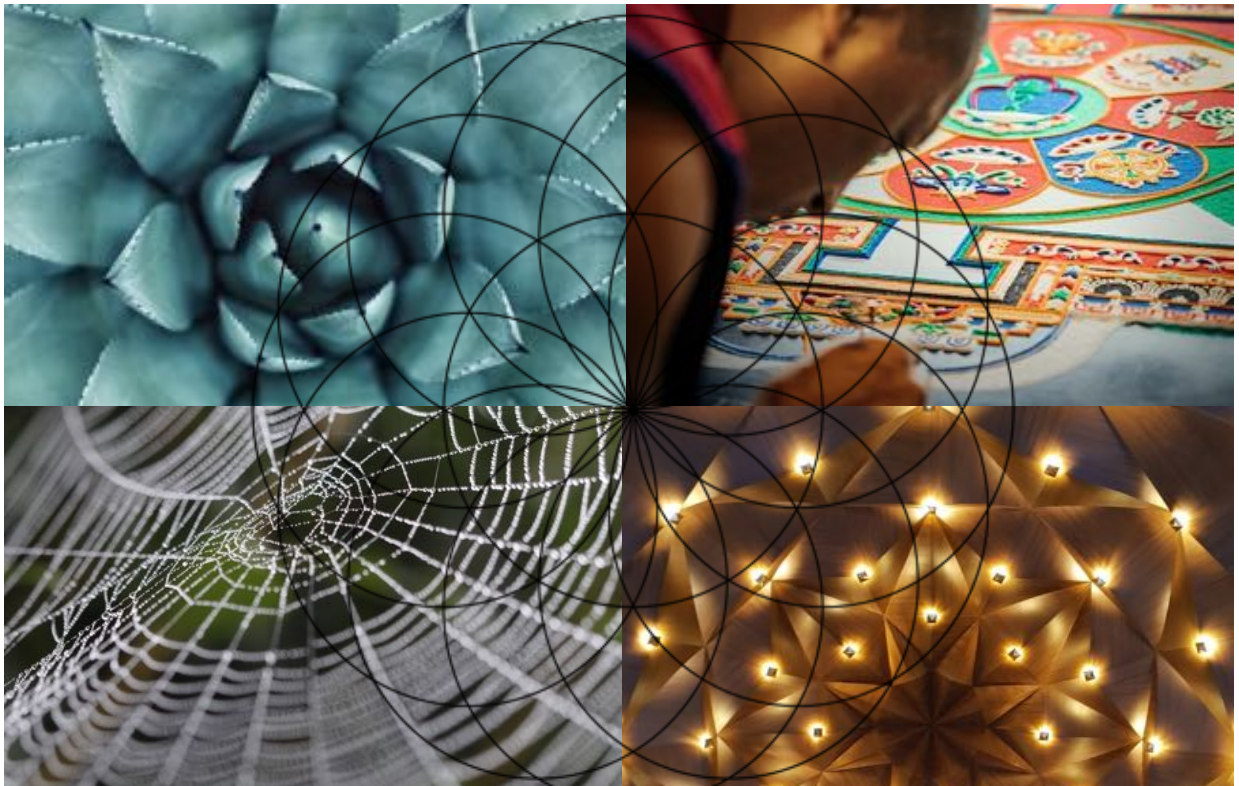
ARTS@Home

## The Art of Mindfulness:

5 ways to practice mindfulness through art  
*(no supplies required, for children **and** adults)*

Practicing mindfulness means learning to give your full attention to the present moment. Immersing yourself in these visual tasks can help you turn down worries about the past or future (like a radio in the background) and focus in on something right now that is beautiful, calming, and peaceful. When you are finished, take a moment to be still and reflect on what you noticed or created. Results are not what matters here.

### 1. Explore Radial Symmetry



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Circular patterns that show **radial symmetry** can be found in cultures and religions all over the world, from stained glass windows in old cathedrals, to Navajo Sand Paintings or Buddhist and Hindu mandalas. Creating a circular pattern of your own is a beautiful way to explore the feeling of balance.

First, collect a few interesting objects from around your home or out in nature. Find something there is only one of, something you have a few of, and something you have lots of. Start by laying the most special thing down in the middle and slowly move outwards. Remember, the larger your circle grows, the more things you will need.



When your pattern is finished, take a moment to sit and enjoy the balance you have created. Take a deep breath, smile if you wish, and take a picture of it with your memory.

**Radial Symmetry:** *when things are arranged in a regular, predictable pattern all around a central point or axis.*

## 2. Spirals: find them, move like them, make them

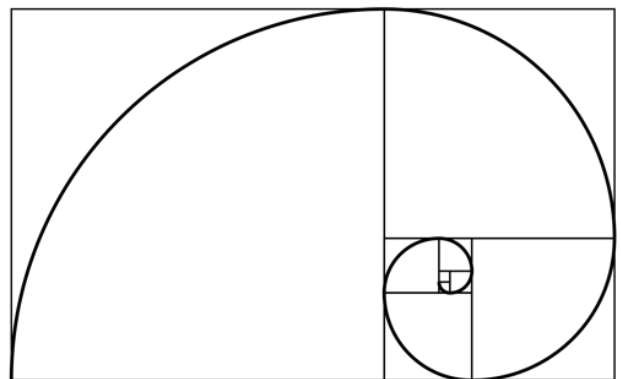
Did you know that there are spirals everywhere in nature . . . from the way your strands of DNA are twisted to how the Milky Way Galaxy moves? The more you look for them, the more spirals you will find. Mathematicians like to study them, and artists like to capture them! Here are some activities you can do to explore, discover, and create spirals.

**Discover as many spirals as you can.** Can you see a spiral in the way a leaf



unfurls or a flower opens? Are there spirals in a metal gate? In the way the clouds move? Look closer and closer at your hand (or a family member's hand) and see how many spirals you can find in their fingerprints. Breathe deep and trace the spirals you find with your eyes or with your finger.

**Use your body to make your own spirals.** Draw spirals with your fingers or toes in the dirt, swirl them in the water of your bathtub, twist them into the fabric of your clothes or blankets, make them with the movements of your arms or your body, or even watch them spin by gently stirring your cup of tea or bowl of soup with a spoon.



**Arrange things in a spiral.** You can arrange things you find at home or in nature into spirals that are large or small, tight or loose, coiled or expanding. You can also take rocks or pinecones or twigs and make a spiral path that you can walk. As you run your finger or move your body along your spiral, try to bring your thoughts and your focus in closer and closer as the spiral narrows and grows smaller and smaller.

### 3. Use your senses to understand the Elements of Art

The Basic Elements of Art are *Line, Shape, Form, Space, Color, and Texture*. You can watch a video at the end of this lesson to discover more about them. Here are some activities you can use to be mindful and engage your senses while you learn:

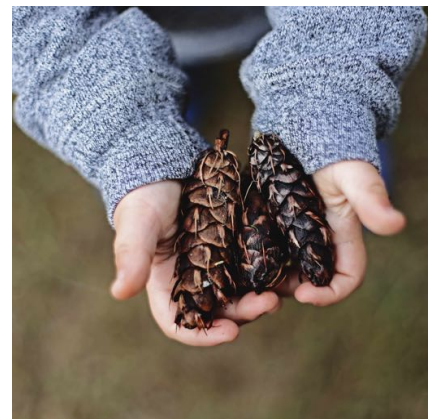


**Find a *Line* and follow it for a while.** Find a line and use your finger or your eye to trace it all the way to the very end. If you jump over a little when you reach the end of your line, can you find another line and keep going? Does your line change from straight to curved to jagged? Does it spin or twirl or loop? Does it stay thin or does it get thick or bumpy or change its angle or color?

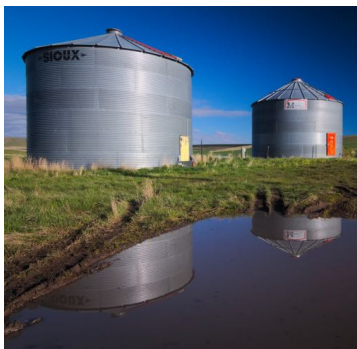
**Explore *Texture*.** Close your eyes or put on a blindfold and have a friend lead you around a safe place. Reach out your hand and feel all of the different textures. You don't have to name things or identify them, just experience it. Have your friend hand you something smooth and run your fingers over it. Then



take the object and run it along the back of your hand, between your fingers, up your arm, or along your cheek. Do you notice how different it feels? If you're alone, find a quiet moment and pick up an interesting object nearby. Close your eyes and slow down for a few moments while you explore it. Let the rest of the world fall away and allow the textures you find to become your whole world.



**Discover *Forms*.** Can you find a sphere, a cylinder, a cube, a pyramid, a cone, and



a prism? Is it small enough to fit in your hand or large like a building? If it's large, can you walk around it? If it's small, can you run your hand around it and look at it from all the different sides? Imagine what your form would look like to an ant. What about an elephant? From outer space?

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## 4. Pay attention to Dark and Light

You can't have one without the other, and the cycle of day and night shapes our lives no matter who we are or where we live. Here are some ways to be mindful while paying attention to Dark and Light.

**Pay attention to shadows.** Watching and exploring shadows can be a fascinating way to learn more about light. How long and how dark a shadow is can tell you the time of day, the direction and brightness of the light, and how far away something is from the light. You can learn a lot if you will just stop and pay attention.



Notice a shadow near you on a wall, on a ceiling, or on the ground. Without peeking, try to see if you can tell which direction the light is coming from. Is the light high in the sky or low to the ground? Is the light strong and bright? Soft and far away? Filtered through trees or curtains? Is there only one source of light or are there several? If you notice multiple shadows, that's a clue that there may be more than one source of light.

### **Rearrange objects to create interesting shadows.**

Have you ever been startled by a shadow? Maybe it looked like a scary creature or made you feel like you weren't alone. Sometimes, multiple things can come together to create interesting shadows, so why not try doing it on purpose? Find a strong light or notice an interesting shadow and then think of ways to interact with it or add to it. Can you become a part of the shadow or dance in and around it? Can you move more objects in front of the light and create a picture out of just shadows?



**Watch the light and the shadows change.** Find an interesting object that is casting a shadow and sit quietly near it. You can set it on a piece of paper if you like and outline the shadow, or you can just use your eyes. Sit for a while and see if you can notice your shadow (and the earth) moving. When you come back later in the day, check in on your shadow. How has it changed? Ancient people used sundials and rock formations to tell time and the movement of the earth. What do you notice as you watch the shadows and the light change?



## 5. Practice looking at things differently

Sometimes it can help to learn to look at things differently. Artists do it all of the time! Here are some mindful ways to slow down and practice seeing:

**Notice the Negative Space.** We look at things all day long, but do you ever stop to notice the shape of the space AROUND and BETWEEN things? Is this a picture of a snake-like sky? Is it a picture of two cliffs? Or is it a picture of something else?



Sometimes, the space BETWEEN and AROUND things is even more important than the things themselves.

Sometimes, emptiness can be the most interesting and important thing in the world.

**Change your focus.** Find a calm place to sit or lie down and let your eyes relax a little. Stare at something in the far distance like the sky, and then at something up close like your hand. Can you see both at the same time? What happens to the sky when you focus on your hand? What happens to your hand when you focus on the sky? Try looking at both near and far at the same time. Can you? Try focusing on something that lies in between. What do you notice?



**Change your perspective.** Find something (or someone) interesting to look at. Relax the muscles of your face and take a deep breath. Look quietly for a moment with both of your eyes open. Now close each eye, one by one, and notice how your view changes. Notice the difference when you open your eyes wider, or narrow them. Close your eyes again and when you open them, try looking at the object (or person) sideways, from below, or from up above. Try getting as far away as you can and then get closer and closer. Now close your eyes one more time and open them. Do things look the same now, or just a little bit different?



## **Additional links and resources:**

Stop-motion Elements of Art (less than 2 minutes):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1rCBFV6ttjo>

UC Berkeley's *Greater Good Magazine* section on Mindfulness:

<https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/mindfulness/definition>

Instructions for Box Breathing/Square Breathing:

<https://www.healthline.com/health/box-breathing>

Audio Mindfulness Exercises from *Sitting Still Like a Frog: Teaching*

*Mindfulness to Kids*: <https://www.shambhala.com/sittingstilllikeafrog/>

Beautiful Images, created and curated by Artists:

<https://unsplash.com>

## Elements of Art

The elements of art are the building blocks used by artists to create a work of art.



**Line** is a mark with greater length than width. Lines can be horizontal, vertical, or diagonal; straight or curved; thick or thin.



**Shape** is a closed line. Shapes can be geometric, like squares and circles; or organic, like free-form or natural shapes. Shapes are flat and can express length and width.



**Forms** are three-dimensional shapes expressing length, width, and depth. Balls, cylinders, boxes, and pyramids are forms.



**Space** is the area between and around objects. The space around objects is often called negative space; negative space has shape. Space can also refer to the feeling of depth. Real space is three-dimensional; in visual art, when we create the feeling or illusion of depth, we call it space.



**Color** is light reflected off of objects. Color has three main characteristics: *hue* (the name of the color, such as red, green, blue, etc.), *value* (how light or dark it is), and *intensity* (how bright or dull it is).

- White is pure light; black is the absence of light.
- Primary colors are the only true colors (red, blue, and yellow). All other colors are mixes of primary colors.
- Secondary colors are two primary colors mixed together (green, orange, violet).
- Intermediate colors, sometimes called tertiary colors, are made by mixing a primary and secondary color together. Some examples of intermediate colors are yellow green, blue green, and blue violet.
- Complementary colors are located directly across from each other on the *color wheel* (an arrangement of colors along a circular diagram to show how they are related to one another). Complementary pairs contrast because they share no common colors. For example, red and green are complements, because green is made of blue and yellow. When complementary colors are mixed together, they neutralize each other to make brown.



**Texture** is the surface quality that can be seen and felt. Textures can be rough or smooth, soft or hard. Textures do not always feel the way they look; for example, a drawing of a porcupine may look prickly, but if you touch the drawing, the paper is still smooth.