

## Art Experiences

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### Important! This is not art therapy!

I introduce art experiences in class with the following message to students:

*In this class, you will be invited to create art for fun, reflection, and discussion (or, English language conversation) on how the arts can be used for health and wellbeing. Although some of these activities come from the field of creative arts therapies, I am not an art therapist or a mental health professional. This is a safe space. Feel free to participate or pass on these activities to the extent you wish. If you or someone you know needs mental health support, please reach out:*

MA [Behavioral Health Hotline](#), 833-773-2445

Mass [Mental Health Hotline](#), 866-903-3787

Suicide and Crisis Hotline: Dial 988

### General Instructions for Facilitators

- The pictures provided here are examples for the facilitator only. Do not share these with the students!
- You don't want the students to have expectations about producing an "artistic" outcome. There should never be any judgement or commentary on whether someone's art is "good" - *It's not about the product; it's about the process!*
- Always offer choices: some students don't like certain materials (e.g., texture of clay or finger paint), so consider bringing an alternative. Also most of the prompts offer options – be sure students always have the right to pass, keep the prompt open enough to provide choice and level of depth/sharing.
- Keep it positive! You know your students. Don't pick an art experience that might bring up difficult or sensitive topics. The art experience can be reflective, but more than anything it should be relaxing and fun and a medium for using language.

### The Art Experiences

1. **Scribble.** With a single marker or pen, make a scribble. Now look for figures (things, people, animals) in the scribble. Try adding eyes, tails, horns, wings, hands, etc. to the scribble shapes to create fantastical creatures. As you go, rotate the paper to find more! Reflection: How did it feel to make the scribble? What things/creatures did you discover? Does anyone want to share? [Language connections: Shapes, colors, animals, verbs of change, being, becoming, "looks like"](#). [Vocab related to imaginary/mythical creatures.](#) (example below)



2. **Something new.** Draw something new you want to try (an activity, food, place to go, etc.), **using only your non-dominant hand.** Reflection: How did it feel to draw with your non-dominant hand? Does anyone want to share, or tell us what new thing you want to try? **Language connections:** Hobbies, foods, action verbs, “Do you like...?”, future tense, present purpose (“Have you ever...?”).

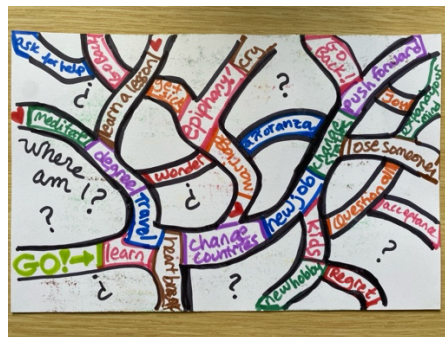


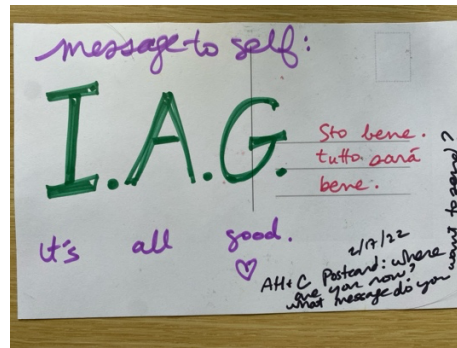
3. **Gratitude sculpture.** Using air-drying clay, make a mini sculpture that represents something you are grateful for. It could be the thing itself, or a shape or symbol representing that thing. Reflection: Does anyone want to share? How did it feel to work with clay? How did it feel to reflect on what you are grateful for? What do our gratitude sculptures have in common? **Language connections:** family, pets, home, “Do you have... (siblings, children, pets)?”
4. **Ikigai.** Reflect on the [Ikigai diagram](#). Draw “your purpose”, or fill in the diagram with symbols that represent possibilities of the different areas for you. It’s ok if it’s incomplete. Ikigai is a journey of discovery. Reflection: Does anyone want to share? What did you learn about yourself? What do we have in common? **Language connections:** hobbies, work, fields/professions, action verbs, “If I could... I would...”, conditional/future tense.

5. **Happy place.** Draw your happy place (or something that symbolizes it). Use only one color. Reflection: Does anyone want to share? Why did you choose the color you selected? How did it feel to only have access to one color? How did it feel to think about your happy place? **Language connections:** places, colors, why/when questions, past tense.
6. **Transitions.** What does change mean to you? How do you respond to change or transitions? With watercolors (watercolors are important here because they are in constant motion), create a representation of “change”. Reflection: How did you like using the watercolors? What was easy/hard about it? How do the paints remind you of change or transition? **Language connections:** abstract concepts, past/future tense (“A big change for me was/will be when...”)

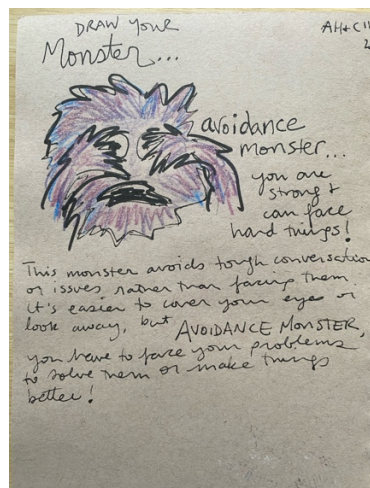


7. **Postcard.** Create a postcard – on one side, where are you right now? On the other, what is your message to the world (or to a specific person)? Reflection: What do our messages have in common? **Language connections:** Feelings, goals, future tense





8. **Mini greeting card.** Create a miniature greeting card for yourself (e.g., with a 3x5 card). Send yourself the message you need right now. Reflection: What do you need to accomplish your message to self? How will you feel when you get there? **Language connections:** dreams, goals, conditional tense, future tense, if/then statements, hypothetical – if I could, I would...”
9. **Draw your monster.** Think of a trait or behavior you do that you don't love. Draw it as a comic monster (cute, fuzzy, cuddly?). Write a brief description of your monster. Next, think of a positive affirmation, value, or mantra that can keep your monster in check. Draw/write that message to your monster. Reflection: What do our monsters have in common? How did it feel to challenge your monster with a positive affirmation? Challenging/caring for your monster is really caring for yourself. **Language connections:** character traits, behaviors, habits, goals, conditional tense, future tense.



10. **Community garden.** Use finger paint (or markers - some people don't like to touch the paint!) to create a "community garden" (literal or symbolic) with your small group. As you are doing this, reflect on the resources available in your

garden, and what your group needs to cultivate for it to continue to grow.

Reflection: How did it feel to use finger paints? What showed up in your garden?

Language connections: Words about collaborating, teamwork, strengths, shared goals.

**11. Good vibes.** Using colors, draw a positive feeling. Just use lines and shapes.

Focus on the feeling as you draw it. Reflection: How do your colors reflect the feeling?

Why did you choose this feeling? How did it feel to focus on the positive feeling?

Anyone want to share? Language connections: Feeling words,

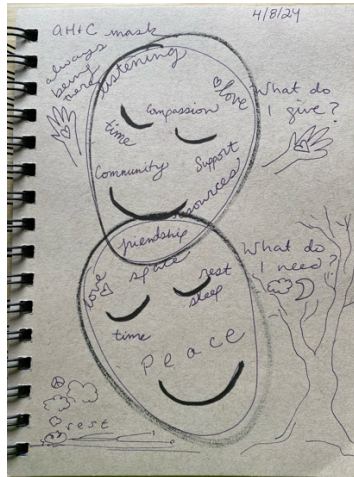
describing how things, places, experiences make us feel, "When/where do you feel...?"



- 12. Reframing.** 1. On half the paper, draw a frame. 2. Inside, put a challenge, obstacle, or stress you are facing. It can be a simple comic, symbols, or words. 3. On the other half of the paper, draw another frame. 4. Redraw your challenge, shifting your perspective (how can I look at this differently?) or adding a tool/strategy/support to get you through. Reflection: How did it feel to reframe your challenge? Language connections: Challenges, goals, adverbial clauses (if this, then that... when XX happens... Y results).



13. **Masks.** (you can use a cut-out of a basic mask or just draw them): On the outside, who are you to others? On the inside, who are you really? On the outside, what do you give? On the inside, what do you need? **Language connections:** character traits, feelings, adjectives, abstract nouns, present tense (“I am, I give... I need...”).



14. **Puppets!** Use small paper bags and markers to make simple puppets ([here's a how-to video](#) -shows where to draw different parts of the face). The prompt/theme could be you as a kid, you in the future, someone you admire, or someone important to you. Tell the students they will have the puppets introduce themselves and tell the class about themselves. **Language connections:** Student speaks through the puppet. Greetings, introductions, describing people - character traits and states of being - “I was... I am... she is/was...” Basic conversation skills.



15. **Found poetry.** Cut out and distribute pages from magazines, newspapers, etc. or make copies of pages of books. Any topic works, but look for something with interesting content – a good story! Each student needs just one page. Using black sharpies or just pens, the students “black out” words and lines of text to leave only the words/phrases they want to keep for a poem. Afterwards, students read their poems and discuss. Reflection: How did you create your poem? Did

you have an idea in mind, or did the poem just “become”? What new words did you hear in the poems? How did the poems make you feel? [Language connections: vocabulary!](#) After each poem is read, the student or tutor can read it again, having students identify unknown words or phrases.

### **References and Acknowledgements**

I have used all of these art experiences in my course, CD240 *Arts, Health & Community* at Emerson College, where I am a professor in Communication Sciences & Disorders. Some of them I came up with myself. Others come from web resources or are adaptations of activities I saw on websites and blogs (see References below). Some (found poetry, puppets) I learned from my students. Drawing on my experience as a language teacher and linguist, I added the [Language Connections](#) feature for folks working in adult literacy/ESL contexts.

### **Resources (Free!)**

- Ideas X Lab (2020) [Belonging through creative arts activity book](#)
- Klammer, S. (2023), Expressive art inspirations (Blog), [100 art therapy exercises](#)
- LA County Arts Ed Collective (2022), [Creative wellbeing curriculum guide](#)