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Art Activities for Youth Mental Health

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Art Activities for Youth Mental Health

Content

Introduction	4
1. Film production	6
2. Storytelling workshop: from comic to painting	17
3. Animation workshop: your story in motion	28
4. Linocut workshop: personal symbols in print	40
5. Journaling 101: through creativity to well-being	49
6. My emotions through body	60
7. Musical painting: go with the flow	68
8. Clay: touching the ground	74
9. Dance your emotion	81
10. Design on canvas	89
11. Writing without a map	95
12. Threading emotions	103
13. Colours of emotions	110
14. From feeling to shape	118
15. The secret map of inner worlds	125
16. Speaking through fairytale	132
About Art Well	139
Partners	140
References	141

Introduction

Around 1 in 6 people in the World Health Organisation (WHO) European Region live with a mental health condition.

1 in 7 children and adolescents are affected, with suicide now being the leading cause of death among those aged 15–29.

Despite this scale, access to care remains insufficient – up to 1/3 of people receive no treatment at all, reflecting overstretched systems, long waiting times, and high financial barriers. (WHO, 2023a)

At the same time, stigma continues to shape public perception: mental health conditions are still widely misunderstood, trivialised, or hidden, discouraging people – especially young people – from seeking help. (WHO, 2023b)

Art Well emerges in response to this dual crisis: a lack of accessible care and a culture that still struggles to take mental health seriously.

If professional support is unavailable, unaffordable, or socially difficult to access, people are without tools to regulate their inner world.

What is left, is to support mental well-being through everyday practices that build resilience, emotional awareness, and self-expression.

Art-based activities offer exactly this: a low-threshold, stigma-free, and accessible way to care for mental health at home.

This book presents a collection of art-based practices for youth well-being and self-care, bringing together best national experiences from Austria, Czechia, Hungary, and Ukraine.

It is designed to support educators, youth workers, trainers, artists, and civil society organisations who work with young people and are seeking meaningful, accessible ways to address emotional well-being through non-formal education.

The activities included in this booklet were developed and tested in workshops aimed at providing marginalised young people with opportunities for self-expression and emotional exploration through art.

They introduce practical self-care tools grounded in creative processes and offer alternatives to social media-induced isolation by encouraging real-life connection, embodied experience, and shared creative spaces.

At the core of each activity is the intention to create a safe and inclusive environment where young people can express themselves freely, explore their inner world, and develop self-help strategies that can be carried into everyday life.

This booklet is developed as a result of the Art Well project, implemented with the support of the Erasmus+ programme.

1 ACTIVITY

Film production

Artistic methods applied
collaborative film / video production

Well-being areas supported

social well-being
connection & belonging
emotional well-being
self-efficacy
solution-oriented

Scientific evidence

- Collaborative filmmaking and participatory video have been shown to support empowerment, voice, and agency, particularly among young people, by enabling them to actively shape and share their own narratives (Claudia Mitchell & Naydene de Lange, 2011).
- Participatory video practices enhance self-efficacy and critical reflection, as individuals move from passive consumers to active creators, strengthening confidence and a sense of competence (Shirley White, 2003).
- Collaborative media production fosters social connection, teamwork, and a sense of belonging, which are key protective factors against adverse mental health (WHO, 2022).
- Engagement in film and digital storytelling supports emotional expression and meaning-making, allowing participants to process experiences through narrative and creative structure (Joe Lambert, 2013).
- Creative media work involving performance (e.g. being on camera) can function as a form of supported exposure, helping reduce anxiety related to being seen and evaluated in a safe environment (aligned with principles of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy) (Beck, 2011).

- Problem-solving during the production process (e.g. technical or storytelling challenges) strengthens adaptive coping, creativity, and resilience, as participants learn to reframe obstacles into solutions (McNiff, 2004).

Materials

- Cameras, tripods, laptops/computers, projector
- Printed challenge cards (shot types, light, framing, movement, cutting)
- Film vocabulary worksheet, paper/blocks, pens
- *Software:* CapCut or WeVideo, Audacity, Stop Motion app
- microphones/phones used for audio (*optional*)

Estimated preparation time

~2 hours: creating film technique challenge cards and a vocabulary worksheet

Recommended group size

10–16 participants, working in pairs or trios

Space

- One central room for input, discussion, and editing.
- Access to different rooms/corridors and outdoor areas to film without disturbing others.

Main steps of the activity

45' – INTRODUCTION

Introduction to film language

Facilitator opens a group discussion of shot types, composition, style and examples, using a worksheet (at the end of the chapter).

60' – TECHNIQUE PRACTICE WITH CHALLENGE CARDS

Participants receive cards (at the end of chapter) and shoot short clips around the building, individually, or in small groups.

40' – REVIEW & FEEDBACK ON EXERCISES

Through projector, screen all the clips created.

The group is naming techniques used, and groups are offering each other **Empowering Feedback**: 3 compliments & 1 tip per group.

60' – CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

Brainstorming

Small groups choose topics and design short film concepts, including any needed disclaimers. They choose a type first (e.g. reportage, mockumentary).

120' – FILMING

Groups shoot their films. The facilitator supports both technical and social dynamics.

120' – EDITING & POST-PRODUCTION

Groups are editing in *CapCut/WeVideo*, adding sound, subtitles, disclaimers. Facilitator moves from table to table as a coach.

60' – SCREENING

Group screening with applause and comments. Verbal reflection on what participants learned, how they felt, and how it connects to real-life “being seen”.

30' – REFLECTION

- How did you feel at the beginning vs. the end of the workshop?
- What emotions came up while being on camera or watching yourself on screen?
- Did anything surprise you about your own reactions?
- How did your group work together? What helped your team collaborate well?
- What new skills or techniques did you learn today?
- What was the most challenging part—and how did you deal with it?

- What are you most proud of in your film?
- What helped you move forward when you were unsure?
- Is there something you would do differently next time?
- How could you use what you learned in other areas of your life?

Worksheet

1. Shot Types. Match or note examples:

- Close-Up (CU): What is it used for?
- Medium Shot (MS): When would you use it?
- Wide Shot (WS): What does it show?
- Example you've seen (film / series / TikTok / YouTube)

2. Camera Angles. How does the angle change meaning?

- High angle (looking down). Effect: _____
- Low angle (looking up). Effect: _____
- Eye-level. Effect: _____

3. Camera Movement. What happens when the camera moves?

- Pan (left/right): _____
- Tilt (up/down): _____
- Moving with subject (tracking): _____
- When would movement be useful?

4. Composition. What's inside the frame?

- Where is your subject placed? (center/side/background)
Why?
- What is in the background? Does it add meaning?
- Rule of thirds (*optional*). Try to describe it.

5. Light & Mood

- Bright / natural light → mood: _____
- Dark / shadow → mood: _____
- How can light change a scene?

6. Style & Feeling. Think about a video or film you like:

- What makes its style unique? (camera, color, editing, mood)
- Is it more funny, serious, dramatic, realistic, experimental?

7. Reflection

- What did you find interesting?
- What would you like to try yourself today?
- *Reminder*: There is no "perfect" shot — film is about experimenting, telling a story, and trying ideas.

Challenges cards examples:

- **Close-Up Emotion.** Film a close-up of a person showing a clear emotion (e.g. surprise, confusion, pride). Focus on facial expression and detail.
- **Wide Shot / Establishing Shot.** Capture a wide shot that clearly shows the environment and where the scene takes place. Make the location “tell part of the story.”
- **Camera Movement (Pan or Tilt).** Create a smooth camera movement: Pan (left/right) or Tilt (up/down). Follow a person or reveal something.
- **Dutch Angle (Tilted Frame).** Film a shot where the camera is intentionally tilted. Use it to create tension, unease, or humor.
- **Over-the-Shoulder Shot.** Film a short interaction using an over-the-shoulder perspective. Show a conversation or someone observing something.
- **Point of View (POV) Shot.** Film from a character’s perspective. What do they see? Make the viewer “be” the character.
- **Creative Framing.** Frame your subject through something (e.g. doorway, window, objects). Add depth and make the shot visually interesting.
- **Light Experiment.** Shoot the same subject using two different lighting conditions. Bright / natural light and shadow / low light. Compare the mood.
- **Match Cut / Action Continuity.** Film a simple action (e.g. sitting down, opening a door) from two angles and cut them together smoothly. Make the movement feel continuous.
- **Sound Matters.** Record a short clip where sound is important (dialogue, ambient sound, or effect). Try to make the audio clear and intentional.

Facilitation notes

Approach

- **Emphasis on process over perfection.** The facilitator explicitly frames the workshop as a space for experimentation and creativity, not technical excellence. Success is defined by participation and expression, not production quality.
- **Beginner-friendly entry point.** No prior experience is expected; all techniques are introduced in a simple, accessible way to reduce intimidation and lower barriers to participation.
- **Facilitator as guide, not evaluator.** The facilitator supports and coaches rather than judges, helping participants find their own solutions instead of correcting them.
- **Positive and supportive feedback culture.** Group sharing (e.g. screenings) focuses on applause, strengths, and constructive comments, creating psychological safety.
- **Normalising mistakes and uncertainty.** Challenges and “failures” are framed as a natural and valuable part of the creative process.
- **Safe exposure to visibility.** Being on camera is introduced gradually and supported by the group, allowing participants to engage at their own comfort level.

How to reflect on personal well-being through art

Experiences are linked to real-life situations (e.g. interviews or presentations), helping participants recognise “healthy stress” in a supportive context.

Emphasis is placed on recognising personal growth, building awareness of emotional responses, and reframing challenges as positive learning experiences.

Insights from participants' feedback

Participants described feeling more relaxed, happy, and creative afterwards, highlighting a clear improvement in mood.

Several responses emphasised increased confidence, especially when being on camera, and a sense of freedom in self-expression.

The most appreciated elements were filming and editing, described as fun, engaging, and meaningful.

See the results on

www.czechinspire.eu/artwell

Participants' quotes:

"I felt very good and relaxed, and happy that I could make people laugh."

"I liked that we could make a video because we could freely express our thoughts, and working in small groups supported good teamwork."

"Being in front of the camera helped me because it was my first time, and I felt freely creative."

2 ACTIVITY

**Storytelling workshop:
from comic to painting**

Artistic methods applied
drawing, comics, and painting

Well-being areas supported
emotional well-being
self-confidence
self-awareness
identity development

Scientific evidence

- Engagement in drawing, painting, and visual storytelling has been shown to support emotional expression and processing, enabling individuals to externalize and work through complex feelings in a safe, symbolic form (Cathy Malchiodi, 2012).
- Art-making activities enhance self-efficacy and self-worth by fostering a sense of competence, ownership, and achievement through creating tangible outcomes (Shaun McNiff, 2004).
- Creative practices that emphasise experimentation and non-judgment reduce perfectionism and fear of failure, supporting psychological flexibility and self-compassion (Kristin Neff, 2003).
- Visual narrative methods such as comics and symbolic imagery support identity development and meaning-making, allowing individuals to explore and represent personal experiences in indirect yet powerful ways (Spiegelman, 1991).
- Group-based art activities foster social connection, empathy, and a sense of belonging, which are important protective factors for mental health (World Health Organization, 2022).

- Art-making can support stress reduction and emotional regulation, as focused, hands-on creative activity promotes concentration, relaxation, and a shift away from rumination (American Art Therapy Association, 2017).
- Transforming personal experiences into visual form supports cognitive reframing and resilience, helping individuals reinterpret challenges and integrate them into meaningful narratives (McAdams, 2001).

Materials

- Canvas rolls (unframed, to cut to individual formats; important for letting them choose size/shape)
- Drawing blocks / sketchbooks for each participant
- Acrylic paint
- Watercolor
- Copic markers or similar alcohol-based colour markers (specific comics markers, large selection of colours, very motivating)

Assorted brushes (various sizes and types for different styles)

- Pencils, pens, possibly crayons (implied through comments about crayon background)
- Paper / scrap canvas pieces for testing colours and brushes
- Access to a computer/phone only for image references (if they don't know how to draw something)
- Cleaning materials: water, cloths/paper towels, protection for tables/floors (since “getting messy” is encouraged)

Estimated preparation time

~2 hours: selecting example artworks, preparing a short introductory presentation, and organising materials (canvas, paints, markers, brushes, and workspace setup).

Recommended group size

10–15 participants

Space

- Spacious, flexible room where each participant has their own workspace, allowing them to spread out materials and work without feeling restricted.
- The environment should support messy, hands-on creation, with protected tables/floors and access to water and cleaning materials.
- Access to surfaces for drying artworks and the ability to leave work in progress is also important.

Main steps of the activity

60' – INTRODUCTION

Welcome & frame the goal

Explain that this is a storytelling workshop, but the focus is telling personal stories visually, not “being good at drawing.” Every experience is valid (big or small).

Show example artworks

Present single images that tell a story through light, composition, color, atmosphere. A mix of professional and amateur pieces, including including those that are “not pretty” to de-mystify art.

Short group discussion

- *“What story do you see here?”*
- *“How do colors / lighting / layout change the feeling?”*

Show comics examples

Use examples (e.g., *Batman*, *Calvin & Hobbes*), with emphasis on many different ways to tell a story, with no single “right” style. Show:

- Big, painting-like panels + small supporting panels.
- Different layout styles and minimalist comics where text does a lot of work.

Very short technical intro.

10 minutes max on:

- Materials: canvas, paper, brushes, acrylic, markers.
- Basic “do’s” (which paper for which tool, drying time).

Immediately de-emphasize technique: *“You’ll really understand it by trying, not by listening to me talk.”*

60’ – IDEA FINDING & SELF-EXPRESSION

Individual brainstorming

Participants use their personal sketchbooks with a prompt:
“What important moments or feelings from your life come to mind?”

Trainer encourages all kinds of experiences:

- Significant (migration, separation, moving countries).
- Everyday (roller coaster, cooking with mom, feeling tired).

Narrowing down

Each participant picks around three ideas from their notes.
Trainer goes around asking:

- *“What do you want people to understand about you from this story?”*
- *“How did you feel, and how could we show that?”*

Choosing one main story

Trainer validates even “simple” ideas:
“If it’s what came to your mind first, it has meaning.”

Each participant chooses one experience/emotion to build visual work around.

How the trainer supports self-expression here:

- Avoids suggesting topics.
- Repeats that any experience is good enough.
- Asks about feelings and meaning, not composition quality.

60' – FROM IDEA TO VISUAL CONCEPT

Sketching & planning

Participants make small sketches / thumbnails:

- What elements to show?
- From which angle?
- One big picture or several panels?

Trainer helps by:

- Demonstrating simple forms (e.g., how to draw a table) on the board, not on their paper.
- Suggesting ways to show feelings (size, colours, contrast, empty space).

If participants don't know how to draw something, they may briefly use digital reference (no full digital drawing). Trainer emphasises that using references can be helpful, but they are not the standards to copy perfectly.

60' – WORKING ON THE FINAL PIECE

Move to canvas / final format

After basic concept is clear, participants choose:

- Canvas size and format.
- Medium (markers, paint, or a mix).

Trainer encourages:

- Trying larger formats.
- Accepting that the first marks might feel scary.

Creation process

Participants paint / draw, test colors on scrap canvas, adjust as they go. Trainer:

- Normalizes mistakes: *"This color didn't work? Good, now we try something else."*
- Offers problem-solving questions: *"What could you add/change to show the feeling better?"*
- Encourages experimenting (painting with fingers, changing composition).
- Informal sharing during and after: looking at each other's work, naming what they like (composition, colors, atmosphere).

Trainer introduces some art vocabulary, so they can describe their observations more precisely.

Continuation & refinement

A second session for:

- Outlines, details, corrections.
- Optional scanning and light digital retouch (if someone wants a polished version, e.g., for social media).

How the trainer keeps focus away from pure skill

- Never “fixes” drawings directly on their paper.
- Praises ideas, courage, effort, and emotional clarity more than technical perfection.
- Uses group feedback to highlight meaning and impact, not just neatness or realism.

30' – REFLECTION

- What was hard?
- What changed from your first idea to your final work?
- How did it feel to show a personal story this way?

Facilitation notes

How to reflect on personal well-being through art

Throughout the process, participants are invited to notice changes in their mood, confidence, and level of comfort while creating.

Group sharing and feedback further support reflection, as participants see how others interpret and relate to their stories.

The process emphasises that expressing, adapting, and even struggling with an idea are valuable parts of understanding oneself.

Insights from participants' feedback

There was a clear shift from initial insecurity and fear of judgment to increased confidence, engagement, and pride in their work.

Many participants began with doubts about their artistic ability but gradually became more relaxed, experimental, and willing to take creative risks.

The workshop fostered a strong sense of ownership and personal meaning, with participants valuing their artworks and wanting to continue or refine them.

Peer feedback played a key role in building empathy and reassurance, reducing fear of criticism and supporting a positive group dynamic.

Participants' quotes:

*"At first I was scared to ruin the canvas,
but later I just tried things—and it actually worked."*

*"I thought my drawing looked childish,
but when others liked it, I felt relieved and proud."*

*"It helped me show something about myself
without having to explain everything in words."*

*"I didn't think my idea was important,
but then I realized it actually means something."*

*"In the end I was really proud of my work
—I even wanted to keep working on it."*

3 ACTIVITY

**Animation workshop:
your story in motion**

Artistic methods applied

animation (analog flipbook animation and digital hand-drawn animation)

Well-being areas supported

self-expression
confidence
focus
emotional regulation
social connection
resilience

Scientific evidence

- Engagement in animation and drawing-based practices supports emotional expression and processing, allowing individuals to translate feelings and experiences into visual, time-based narratives (Cathy Malchiodi, 2012).
- Frame-by-frame animation enhances focus, concentration, and emotional regulation, as repetitive, structured creative activity promotes calm engagement and flow states (Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).
- Creative digital art practices strengthen self-efficacy and confidence, as participants experience mastery through building sequences step by step and seeing immediate results (Albert Bandura, 1997).
- Open-ended visual storytelling supports self-awareness and identity exploration, enabling individuals to represent personal experiences, interests, and emotions in symbolic or abstract ways (McAdams, 2001).
- Group-based creative environments foster social connection and peer support, contributing to a sense of belonging and psychological safety (World Health Organization, 2022).

Materials

- Laptop/projector/screen
- Small squared Post-it blocks or small paper pads (for flipbooks)
- Pencils, pens, markers, erasers
- Tablets or iPads
- Sketchbooks or drawing pads for each participant
- Paper (for storyboards)

Reference materials:

- Short presentation on basic animation principles
- Short video clips demonstrating animation techniques
- Examples of different animation styles (traditional, stop-motion, etc)
- Internet access for reference images (optional)

Estimated preparation time

1–2 hours:

- selecting and structuring short videos explaining animation principles;
- preparing a short presentation about animation basics and types of animation;
- installing or testing animation apps on tablets;
- preparing materials for flipbooks and storyboarding.

Most learning materials for the animation principles are freely available online, so preparation mainly involves organising the presentation structure and selecting examples.

Recommended group size

10–15 participants

Space

- Tables arranged so participants can work individually but still see each other.
- Enough space for tablets and drawing materials.
- A screen or projector area for presentations and the final screening.
- A relaxed atmosphere where quiet conversation or music is allowed.

Main steps of the activity

30' – INTRODUCTION

The workshop begins with a short theoretical input introducing several of the **12 principles of animation**, originally developed by Disney animators.

These principles describe how movement becomes believable in animation. For example, “squash and stretch,” demonstrates how objects can change shape while moving but should keep their overall volume consistent.

Short video clips illustrate these ideas. After each clip the trainer briefly discusses what participants have seen, helping them recognise animation techniques in films and media.

The goal is not technical mastery, but rather to **demystify animation** and help participants understand that animated films are created through learnable techniques.

20' – ANALOG WARM-UP – FLIPBOOK ANIMATION

Before working digitally, participants create a simple flipbook animation using small paper blocks.

They draw a sequence of images on successive pages so that flipping the pages creates the illusion of motion.

This stage helps participants:

- Understand animation as frame-by-frame movement.
- Experience animation physically and intuitively.
- Experiment without pressure.

Because flipbooks are quick and informal, they encourage playful experimentation and reduce fear of making mistakes.

20' – THE THEME – “YOUR STORY IN MOTION”

Participants are invited to create an animation that represents something about themselves. The instructions are intentionally open:

- The animation should be about them in some way.
- It can be realistic or completely abstract.
- It may represent a memory, a daily activity, a feeling, or a symbolic idea.

Examples from the workshop included:

- A sunset and moonrise over the sea.
- A dream sequence where a character falls asleep and travels through dream imagery.
- Short looping animations linked to personal interests.

Participants are encouraged to think about:

- what makes them happy
- what is characteristic about them
- moments or symbols connected to their lives

20' – STORYBOARD CREATION

Before beginning the animation, participants create a simple storyboard. The storyboard helps them:

- plan the sequence of events
- visualize how the animation will unfold
- identify technical challenges before starting

At this stage the trainer supports participants by discussing their ideas and suggesting practical ways to animate them.

The storyboard helps participants plan the sequence of images and visualise how their animation will develop.

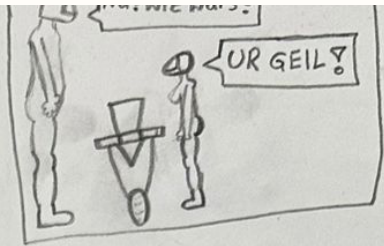
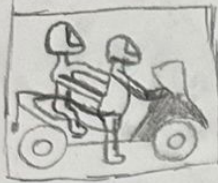
20' – THE THEME – “YOUR STORY IN MOTION”

Participants then move to tablets and begin creating their animations using a simple animation application. Typical activities include:

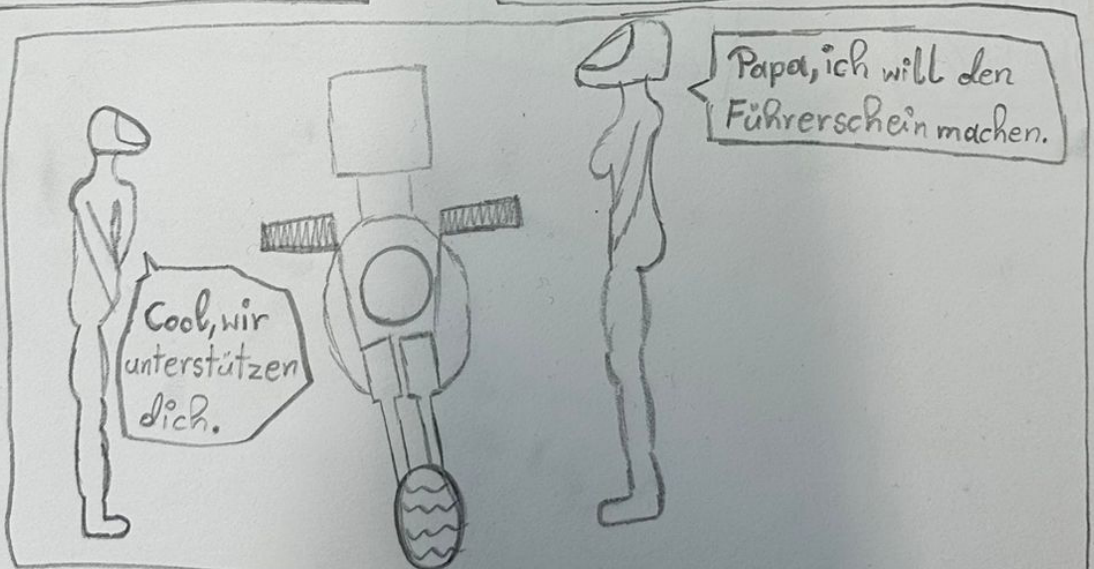
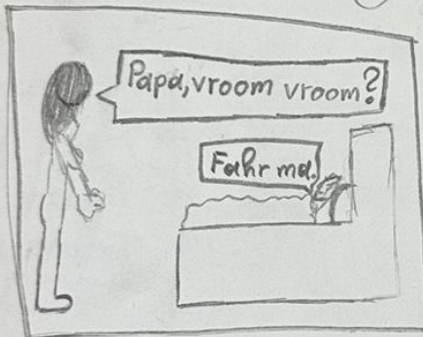
- drawing frames directly on the tablet
- using reference images
- experimenting with geometric shapes
- adjusting drawings frame by frame

Digital tools make the process accessible because participants can easily:

- erase and redraw



5 Jahre später



pic 1. STORYBOARD

- modify frames
- test their animation immediately

Participants can spend several hours gradually building their animations. Some animations can remain as short loops, while others can develop into larger, more detailed ones with hundreds of frames.

Apps used: Stop motion studio, Flipaclip, Wicked.io, Alight motion

20' – SCREENING

At the end of the workshop, the group gathers to view the animations.

Participants can present their finished pieces or their work in progress.

Each animation that is presented to the group is followed by applause and appreciation. This closing moment reinforces feelings of pride, recognition, and a sense of collective achievement.

30' – REFLECTION

- What inspired your animation?
- What part of the process did you enjoy the most?
- What was the most challenging moment?
- Did your idea change while working on the animation?
- What did you learn about yourself through the process?

The 12 principles of animation:

- *squash and stretch*
- *anticipation*
- *staging*
- *straight ahead or pose to pose*
- *follow through and overlap*
- *slow in slow out*
- *arc*
- *secondary action*
- *timing*
- *exaggeration*
- *solid drawing*
- *appeal*

Watch here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uDqjldl4bF4>

4 types of animation

- *traditional animation*
- *stop motion*
- *computer-generated imagery (CGI)*
- *motion graphic*

Facilitation notes

How to reflect on personal well-being through art

Invite participants to base their animation on something meaningful from their own lives, such as a feeling, memory, or everyday experience. The process highlights focus, persistence, and creative expression as forms of self-care.

Insights from participants' feedback

Participant feedback and observations show strong engagement and deep concentration, with many participants entering a focused, almost “flow-like” state during the animation process.

Initial doubts about drawing ability often shifted into **increased confidence and a sense of achievement**, as participants realized they could create meaningful animations step by step. Moments of frustration were common but became opportunities to build patience and resilience, especially with peer and facilitator support.

Participants' quotes:

*"At first I thought I couldn't draw,
but when I saw my animation moving, I was really proud."*

*"It was frustrating sometimes,
but I didn't give up—and in the end it worked."*

*"I liked that I could make something about myself,
even in a simple way."*

*"When I focused on drawing frame by frame,
I forgot everything else."*

*"Seeing my animation on the screen
and people clapping felt really good."*

4

ACTIVITY

**Linocut workshop:
personal symbols in print**

Artistic methods applied
linocut (relief printmaking)

Well-being areas supported
focus & mindfulness
emotional regulation
resilience
sense of achievement

Scientific evidence

- Engagement in printmaking and tactile art practices supports emotional expression and processing, allowing individuals to externalize thoughts and feelings through physical, hands-on creation (Malchiodi, 2012).
- Repetitive, manual processes such as carving promote focus, relaxation, and emotional regulation, as sustained attention to simple movements can induce a calm, meditative state (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).
- Creating tangible artworks enhances self-efficacy and confidence, as participants experience mastery by transforming an idea into a physical print they can keep and share (Bandura, 1997).
- Symbol-based visual creation supports self-awareness and identity exploration, enabling individuals to represent personal experiences and meanings through simplified images and motifs (McAdams, 2001).
- Group-based art environments foster social connection and a sense of belonging, as participants share processes, observe each other's work, and engage in supportive exchange (World Health Organization, 2022).

- Working with material constraints and irreversible processes (such as carving) supports resilience and psychological flexibility, as participants learn to adapt, simplify, and accept unexpected outcomes (McNiff, 2004).
- Transforming personal ideas into printed forms supports meaning-making and cognitive reframing, helping individuals reinterpret imperfections and see value in evolving creative results (Beck, 2011).

Materials

- Medkit
- Sketchbooks/drawing pads/papers
- Pencils/pens
- Linoleum plates
- Linocut carving tools (sets with different carving heads)
- Printing ink
- Rollers (brayers)
- Printing paper (large quantity)
- Ink palette or flat plate for preparing ink
- Palette or flat surface (to pull out the paint because you need to make it sticky before you use it)
- Printing paper
- Japanese hand press

Reference materials:

- Presentation explaining relief printing and linocut
- Examples of linocut prints (images or physical prints)

Estimated preparation time

1–2 hours:

- gathering and preparing carving tools and materials
- preparing a short introduction to the linocut technique
- preparing demonstration plates for testing carving
- setting up printing materials and ink palettes

Because carving tools are sharp, the trainer should also prepare clear safety instructions and supervise participants carefully.

Recommended group size

~10 participants

Space

The workshop works best in a studio or classroom environment with:

- large tables for carving and printing
- good lighting
- surfaces protected from ink
- enough space for printing stations

Participants should have room to work individually while still being able to observe and discuss each other's work.

Main steps of the activity

30' – INTRODUCTION

The trainer introduces the linocut technique and briefly explains how it relates to other printmaking methods.

The introduction focuses on practical understanding rather than extensive theory.

Participants learn:

- how relief printing works;
- that the printed image appears reversed;
- the basic steps of carving and printing

30' – TOOL DEMONSTRATION AND PRACTICE PLATE

Before starting their own designs, participants try carving on a **shared test plate**.

Each participant may carve a simple element, such as the first letter of their name. This allows them to experience the material and tools before working on their final design.

The trainer emphasises that once a drawing is transferred to the plate it cannot easily be corrected, so **practice helps build confidence**. Participants also learn correct hand positioning and safe tool handling.

15' – DEMONSTRATION OF FULL PRINTING PROCESS

The trainer demonstrates how to:

- roll ink onto the plate
- place paper over the plate
- apply pressure using a press or tool
- reveal the print

Showing the entire process early helps participants understand the final goal of their work and how design decisions affect the print.

240' – CARVING THE LINOLEUM PLATE

Participants carve their designs into the linoleum plate. This stage requires **patience and careful attention** to the carving process.

Participants **often adjust their designs as they work** and discover practical challenges, such as the effort required to carve complex patterns.

The trainer provides technical support and **encourages participants to experiment and adapt their ideas**.

45' – DESIGNING THE PRINT

Once carving is complete, participants prepare to print. The printing process includes:

- Rolling ink onto the carved plate
- Placing paper over the plate

- Applying pressure using a hand press or other tool
- Carefully revealing the print

Participants can produce multiple prints from one plate, allowing them to keep some prints and share others.

30' – REFLECTION

- What idea did you choose and why?
- How did your design change during carving?
- What surprised you about the printing process?
- Did the final print look different from what you expected?

Participants may also reflect on the **relationship between planning and adaptation** during creative work.

The workshop highlights that **artistic processes often involve trial and error**, and that unexpected results can be valuable parts of the creative outcome.

Facilitation notes

How to reflect on personal well-being through art

Reflection on personal well-being is guided through the initial mind-mapping activity, where participants explore aspects of their identity, experiences, and what matters to them. The facilitator encourages participants to choose meaningful themes and reflect on why they are important, linking ideas to personal feelings and experiences.

Insights from participants' feedback

Participant highlighted a shift from initial uncertainty and hesitation to increased confidence, relaxation, and pride in the final prints.

Many participants became deeply absorbed in the carving process, experiencing it as calming and almost meditative.

Challenges during carving encouraged adaptation and problem-solving, helping participants become more flexible in their approach.

The moment of printing often brought surprise and satisfaction, especially when results exceeded expectations.

Participants' quotes:

*"At first I was worried I would mess it up,
but once I started carving, it actually felt really calming."*

*"I didn't like my design at first, but when I printed it,
it looked much better than I expected."*

*"Carving took patience,
but in the end I was really proud of what I made."*

5 ACTIVITY

**Journaling 101:
through creativity
to well-being**

Artistic methods applied

collage
painting/drawing
writing

Well-being areas supported

self-awareness
emotional release
resilience
stress regulation

Scientific evidence

- Expressive writing (Pennebaker & Chung, 2011) has been shown to reduce stress, anxiety, and even improve immune function.
- Journaling enhances self-regulation by helping individuals identify and understand their emotions (Baikie & Wilhelm, 2005).
- Writing supports cognitive restructuring – the ability to reframe negative experiences and find meaning in them. (Pennebaker & Chung, 2011)
- Regular reflective writing contributes to resilience and post-traumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).
- Gratitude journaling increases subjective well-being (Emmons & McCullough, 2003).

Materials

- Old notebooks or loose sheets of paper - to recycle old and only partially used notebooks
- Magazines, coloured paper for collage - can be recycled

- Glue, scissors, markers, pens, watercolours
- Frames, lots of different stickers, small photo printer (*optional*), colored paper tapes
- Calm background music (*optional*)

Estimated preparation time

10'

Recommended group size

5–20

Space

- A calm, comfortable space – ideally with access to natural light and enough room for art materials.
- The possibility of sitting by the table is welcomed, though it's not necessary.
- Possible to do some activities outside.

Main steps of the activity

15' – INTRODUCTION

1. Scales in space

To help participants get to know each other and energize them through movement, ask them to stand in different corners of the room based on their answers to the following questions:

- How much do you know about journaling and its benefits on mental health?
- How much are you already practicing journaling regularly?

Ask 2-3 participants to verbally elaborate on their position in the space.

2. Journaling definition

Invite participants to share how they would define journaling, then briefly highlight the scientific evidence behind its benefits.

3. Methods of journaling

Brainstorm different journaling methods together with the participants, and add any that they haven't mentioned.

4. Difficult situations

Ask participants to anonymously write on a Post-it about a difficult situation they are currently dealing with. They should describe it briefly so that another person can understand it.

It doesn't need to go into detail, and they should feel comfortable with others reading it. (We will return to this at the end of the session.)

30' – INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION

1. Free-flow writing

- For **8 minutes**, participants follow the prompt “*Where am I in life?*” using free-flow writing; their pen shouldn't leave the paper.
- Participants form pairs and share how the process was for them. Allow **3 minutes per person** and signal when it's time to switch.
- Encourage **empathetic listening**, without reactions or questions from the listener.

2. Wheel of well-being

Use the Wheel of well-being (see the next page) to map where they are in life through different methods to showcase how diverse journaling can be and that it is okay to do it differently according to what is beneficial for you.

60' – CREATING “MY WELL-BEING JOURNAL”

Using collage, painting, and scrap journaling, participants design a personal journal that reflects their coping strategies, dreams, and values. They may use any available art materials.



pic 2. WHEEL OF WELL-BEING

Source: <https://www.headspace.com/mindfulness/wellness-wheel>

20' – BRAINSTORMING NESTS

Individually, participants reflect on flipchart papers:

- Which journaling habit can I implement in my daily life?
- What are my healthy and unhealthy coping strategies?
- Choose a stressful situation (from the prompt at the beginning) that is not your own, and suggest a healthier way of coping with it.

20' – VISUALISATION + “DEAR PRESENT ME” LETTER

Guide participants through a short visualisation, followed by writing a compassionate letter to their present self.

Invite participants to sit comfortably, close their eyes (or soften their gaze), and take a few slow, deep breaths.

Gently guide them:

“Bring your attention to where you are in your life right now. Notice how you’ve been feeling lately—without judgment. Imagine meeting yourself as you are today. See this version of you with kindness and curiosity. What might this version of you need to hear? What words of understanding, encouragement, or support would feel meaningful right now?”

Pause for a few moments to let them connect with the image.

Then invite participants to open their eyes and **begin writing a letter to their present self.**

Encourage them to write with **compassion, honesty, and care**—as if they were writing to a close friend. The letter can include encouragement, reassurance, appreciation, or gentle advice.



pic 3. JOURNAL

Remind them that this is for themselves, and there is no right or wrong way to write.

20' – PLANNING AND CALENDAR

Invite participants to translate their reflections into action by creating a 4-week plan for journaling or another well-being practice.

20' – FINAL REFLECTION

- What was easy and difficult for you?
- Which part of the activity felt most nourishing?
- What one insight or intention would you like to take into your everyday life?

Facilitation notes

Approach

- Emphasise that there is no “right” way to write or draw.
- Model vulnerability by sharing your own journal entry or page.
- Use phrases like follow your curiosity rather than chasing perfection or your expectation.
- Encourage silence and individual work during the process.

How to reflect on personal well-being through art

Link their written reflections to concrete coping strategies and values. Invite participants to notice how creative expression can serve as an emotional regulator and a mirror for inner needs.

Insights from participants' feedback

Participants often report feeling calmer, more grounded, and emotionally lighter.

On the other hand, **some activities can open up difficult emotions** and it's important to close the activity together with some letting go (e.g. throwing imaginary balls of the things we don't want to carry outside of the session...).

Participants' quotes:

*"I've learned that writing things down
could help me regulate my emotions."*

*"I'll try to do journaling daily bcs
it calms down my mind and frees space in it."*

*"Journaling and planning, it actually showed me
it feels better to put the plans and thoughts on paper,
leaving free space in mind without constantly overthinking."*

6

ACTIVITY

**My emotions
through body**

Artistic methods applied

theatre (pantomime)

dance

body-movement

Well-being areas supported

emotional awareness

embodiment

empathy

differentiation between authentic and false-feelings

emotional openness

Scientific evidence

- Embodied emotional expression supports emotional regulation and empathy (Koch et al., 2019).
- Nonviolent Communication (NVC) distinguishes between true feelings and pseudo-feelings that arise from unmet needs, helping people to build emotional literacy and reduce interpersonal conflict (Rosenberg, 2003).
- Affective neuroscience (Panksepp, 1998) identifies seven primary emotional systems that shape our motivation and behaviour. Awareness of these “emotional circuits” supports integration of emotion and cognition.
- Window of Welcome (Sarah Peyton, 2021) connects neuroscience and compassion, helping people identify whether they are in a receptive (open) or defensive (closed) emotional state.

Materials

- Music playlist (5–6 songs expressing different emotions: calm, sadness, fear, anger, joy)
- Speaker

- Flipchart with circuits of emotions
- A4 paper with 2 feelings (happiness, anger) and 2 false feelings (abandoned, lonely, bullied)

Estimated preparation time

20–30'

Recommended group size

10–20

Space

- Spacious room with good acoustics and an open floor for movement and dancing.
- A possibility to go outside for the pair walk.

Main steps of the activity

15' – FEELINGS VS. NON-FEELINGS (THEATRE GAME)

- Divide the group into two rows facing each other.
- Show the first row a true feeling (e.g. *happy, sad, angry*). Participants express it using only body language and facial expressions. The second row guesses the emotion.
- Then show the second row a false feeling (e.g. *abandoned, lonely, bullied*). They express it physically while the first row guesses.
- Afterwards, invite both rows to reflect: *What was easy or difficult to express or recognise?*
- **Explain the difference:**

Feelings = direct bodily experiences (e.g. *anger, joy, sadness*)

False feelings = interpretations or thoughts about others' behaviour, often linked to unmet needs (e.g. *abandoned, misunderstood*)

30' – HOW DO I EXPERIENCE MY FEELINGS? (DANCE EXPLORATION)

- Prepare 5–6 songs, starting slow and reflective and gradually becoming more joyful and energising.

- Introduce an **ecstatic dance**—inspired movement practice. Give the instruction: *“It doesn’t have to be dance—any movement counts. Stay with your own experience, not others’ expectations.”*
- Invite participants into individual movement exploration.
- After the movement, invite sharing in trios, followed by a whole-group reflection. Ask: *“How was this exercise for you?”*

30' – PAIR REFLECTION (OUTDOOR WALK)

1. Panksepp's circuits of emotion and motivation

Provide a short introduction to Panksepp's Circuits of Emotion and Motivation: SEEKING, FEAR, RAGE, LUST, CARE, PANIC/GRIEF, PLAY, and DISGUST—basic emotional systems shared across all mammals.

2. Window of welcome

Briefly introduce Sarah Peyton's “Window of welcome”. Explain the difference between being emotionally open (regulated, connected) and closed (defensive, overwhelmed).

3. Walk

Invite participants to work in pairs, going for a walk, and discussing:

- Do I recognise this emotion in my life?
- Which emotions feel easy or difficult to welcome?

Encourage them to explore each emotion together.

Optional: Provide participants with cards showing the names of different emotions to support the discussion.

20' – REFLECTION

- What surprised you?
- How might you use this awareness in everyday interactions?

Facilitation notes

How to reflect on personal well-being through art

By highlighting how embodiment increases emotional literacy and helps regulate stress. Encourage participants to notice when they are in their “window of welcome” and how movement or focus can bring them back to openness.

Insights from participants’ feedback

Participants reported feeling more connected to their bodies and emotions, and intrigued by the discussion about how open or close are their bodies to each emotion. Few of them said they will continue thinking or reflecting about it.

Participants' quotes:

"Feelings in motion — they helped me connect more deeply with my emotions and express them freely."

"The activity brought to me more calm, connection with others, self acceptance, feeling more open, relaxation and transforming my emotions into movement resulted in feeling proud of myself afterwards."

7 ACTIVITY

**Musical painting:
go with the flow**

Artistic methods applied
painting/drawing

Well-being areas supported
emotional release
relaxation or activation
self-awareness
connecting with your body
expressing inner emotions/thoughts

Scientific evidence

- Combining music and painting supports emotional expression, stress reduction, and creative flow. Research shows that music can significantly influence the body's stress response by lowering cortisol levels and promoting relaxation (Thoma et al., 2013).
- Engaging in creative activities such as painting can facilitate a flow state—a deeply immersive and rewarding experience linked to increased well-being and intrinsic motivation (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996).
- Interdisciplinary studies also suggest that music can shape artistic creation by influencing mood, imagery, and expressive depth in visual art processes (Kilic et al., 2024).
- From an art therapy perspective, non-verbal creative expression allows individuals to process emotions, enhance self-awareness, and support psychological healing (American Art Therapy Association, 2017).

Materials

- Any kind of papers and art medium (paint, pencils, markers, ...) variation is more than welcomed.

- Brushes, acrylic paints
- Palletes
- Music playlist (about 8–12 songs, optional: more time is needed if you want the music to follow a gradation or specific emotion, especially when creating playlists with smooth transitions that do not disrupt participants' experience)
- Speaker

Estimated preparation time

30–120'

- 30–90' creating music playlist (about 8–12 songs; if you want your songs to have gradation or specific emotion, more time needed, especially for playlists with smooth transitions that does not disturb the participators)
- 20–30' preparing the room space—art supplies, papers, audio check

Recommended group size

5–20

Space

- A safe space allowing free expression
- Spacious room or outdoor space (but calm and safe environment)

Main steps of the activity

15' – INTRODUCTION

Introduce participants to basic emotions and feelings (optional: draw inspiration from NVC). Then present the art materials and mediums they can use.

60' – TIME FOR PAINTING

Participants begin drawing or painting while the music playlist plays, allowing their emotions to guide the process.

You may propose a theme if they want or need one. However, it can be very powerful to work without a theme, letting the creation emerge from participants' own emotions and feelings in the present moment.

15' – REFLECTION

- How did you feel during drawing/painting?
- Did your mood change during drawing/painting?
- What inspired you to use this medium and draw this image?
- Would you consider this activity as a part of your “mindfulness/meditation” exercise?

Facilitation notes

How to reflect on personal well-being through art

The activity is framed as a tool for non-verbal expression, stress reduction, and self-discovery.

Participants are encouraged to let go of the idea of creating “perfect” art and instead focus on exploring and expressing what they feel internally.

Using simple shapes, colors, and forms, they can uncover and externalize their emotions in an accessible and non-judgmental way.

Insights from participants’ feedback

Participants reported that the activity helped them access and express raw emotions, allowing them to release feelings and translate them onto paper.

Many described a **sense of relief and relaxation** afterward, as well as enjoyment in the freedom of the creative process.

Several participants highlighted that the activity gave them a **rare opportunity to draw without pressure**, letting go of the need to create something “perfect” and instead focusing on authentic self-expression.

Participants' quotes:

"I felt relaxed during the painting exercise."

*"Musical painting was the most beneficial for me
- i really let my raw emotions out on the paper"*

*"I liked process of drawing with the mood of the song;
without sketch or measuring the composition,
it gave more space to express the emotions in the moment."*

8

ACTIVITY

Clay:
touching the ground

Artistic methods applied

clay sculpture

Well-being areas supported

emotional release

relaxation

experiencing different sensations

focusing on senses

connection with themselves

Scientific evidence

- Working with clay engages the sense of touch, which plays a crucial role in emotional regulation, grounding, and connection to the body (Classen, 2020).
- Sensorimotor art therapy approaches highlight how tactile experiences, such as shaping clay, can support trauma processing by reconnecting individuals with physical sensations in a safe and controlled way (Elbrecht, 2013).
- Clay-based interventions are also associated with relaxation, stress reduction, and non-verbal emotional expression, allowing individuals to explore and release feelings that may be difficult to articulate (Souter-Anderson, 2017; Touching Clay, 2010).
- Combining clay work with reflective practices such as journaling can further enhance self-awareness, emotional processing, and resilience, as expressive writing has been shown to reduce stress and support cognitive and emotional integration (Pennebaker; Baikie & Wilhelm, 2005; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Emmons & McCullough, 2003).

Materials

- Clay (5-10 kg)
- Bowl(s) with water

- Scarfs/bandanas/blinfolds (*optional*)
- Foil
- Music (*optional*)

Estimated preparation time

15' for preparing the space (putting foil on the ground, so the clay does not make the floor messy)

Recommended group size

5–20 (depends on the room space, half of the activity they work individually)

Space

Spacious with good (preferably natural) lighting and no distractions.

Main steps of the activity

10'– GETTING IN TOUCH WITH CLAY

- Welcome participants and ask them to sit in a circle.
- Invite each person to take a lump of clay and explore how it feels—notice how the texture changes when they hold it in their hands, then add a bit of water to make it more moist.

15'– CONNECTING WITH EACH OTHER THROUGH CLAY

- After the first part, invite participants to take a larger lump of clay and shape it into a ball that fits in the palm of their hand.
- Once they have formed the ball (allow them some time to explore it), ask: *“How does it feel? Is it warm or cold?”* Then ask them to pass the ball to the next person (choose one direction and keep it consistent).
- Ask again: *“How does it feel now? Is it warmer, colder, or about the same? Has the size changed?”*
- Continue passing the clay balls around the circle, without too many prompts.
- If participants feel like sharing, gently encourage them, but allow space for quiet observation.

- When the balls return to their original owners, invite participants to reflect: *“Does your clay feel different now?”*

60' – CREATING THE FACE

The main part of the clay activity is to **create your own face** or **face of another person** with just clay. If you are creating a face of someone else, ask for their permission first.

Optional variant is to be **blindfolded** for getting more in touch with feeling with your hands (+ it can help with perfectionism).

10' – REFLECTION

- How did the clay make you feel when it was warm, cold, dry and wet?
- When creating the face, have you noticed something unusual?
- How was it for you when you were blindfolded?

Facilitation notes

How to reflect on personal well-being through art

Encourage participants to explore their feelings through touch, integrating their emotions as they create their own face or the face of another person. Invite them to reflect on how the physical act of creating can lead to personal insights about well-being, stress, and identity.

Insights from participants' feedback

Participants reported that the activity helped them feel more creative and open to experimentation. While some expressed a strong interest in continuing to explore clay, others were less comfortable—often due to perceiving clay as a messy material or not enjoying its texture.

Participants' quotes:

*"I really liked the clay activity.
I realised that even if my face isn't 'beautiful,'
it has many unique qualities,
such as defined shapes and interesting features."*

*"Creating my face from clay
gave me space to reflect on myself,
understand my feelings and express myself
in a new way."*

9 ACTIVITY

Dance your emotion

Artistic methods applied

dance
movement improvisation

Well-being areas supported

emotional expression
stress release
embodiment
self-awareness
emotional regulation
social connection
confidence

Scientific evidence

- Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) is recognised as an effective approach for supporting emotional expression, stress reduction, and body awareness (Koch et al., 2019).
- Embodiment theory suggests that emotions are experienced and processed somatically, not only cognitively, Movement can therefore support emotional integration and regulation (Shaun Gallagher, 2005; Nick Totton, 2003).
- Van der Kolk (2014) emphasises that body-based practices help release stored tension and emotions that are difficult to access verbally (The Body Keeps the Score).
- Group movement practices have been shown to strengthen social bonding, trust, and a sense of belonging through shared rhythm and synchronisation (Bronwyn Tarr et al., 2015; Scott Wiltermuth & Chip Heath, 2009).

Materials

- Speaker or portable sound system
- Phone or laptop with prepared playlist
- Spacious room with open floor
- Mirrors (*optional*, for comfort)
- Water bottles or access to drinking water
- Comfortable clothing for participants
- First aid kit

Estimated preparation time

15–20'

Recommended group size

10–20

Space

A spacious, safe room to allow participants to move freely and rest when needed.

Main steps of the activity

10' – ARRIVAL AND WARM-UP

Begin with gentle stretching, breathing exercises, shoulder rolls, and simple movements to help participants “arrive” in their bodies. Emphasise that there are no rules and that every movement is valid.

40' – TRAVELLING THROUGH COUNTRIES

The facilitator selects 5–6 countries and plays traditional or well-known music from each one in turn. For each country:

- The facilitator briefly introduces the country, typical movements, dances, and emotional qualities of the music.
- Participants dance freely, following their own impulses.
- If participants are from the country being played and wish to do so, they can show traditional movements.
- Others are invited to repeat, adapt, or improvise as they feel.

Participants are reminded to take breaks for water or rest whenever needed. After each dance, the facilitator asks short reflection questions:

- How did your body feel during this dance?
- What emotions did you notice?

10' – DANCE WITHOUT BORDERS

A neutral song is played, introduced as a “dance without borders”. Participants are invited to move freely, without cultural references, simply following their body and emotions.

The facilitator encourages **slowing down**, **enjoying the moment**, and **staying present**.

20' – REFLECTION

Participants gather in a reflection circle. Each participant is invited to share:

- How they felt before, during, and after the workshop.
- Which country's dance felt closest to them.
- How their body responded to moving without rules.
- Did you notice any emotional shifts while dancing?
- How could movement support your well-being in everyday life?

Optionally, participants can show one movement or say one word that reflects their current state.

Facilitation notes

How to reflect on personal well-being through art

Frame movement as an accessible tool for releasing stress, reconnecting with the body, and experiencing joy. Encourage participants to see dance as a resource for emotional regulation, not as performance.

Insights from participants' feedback

Participants described feeling cheerful, energised, calm, and deeply immersed in the process. Many highlighted a strong sense of flow, emotional release, and connection with their bodies while dancing.

Participants' quotes:

*"At first I thought I wouldn't succeed
because I wasn't a professional dancer,
but then I realised that no one is
a professional and this meeting is about
experiencing a journey and emotions.
In the end, I felt cheerful and full of energy."*

*"I was calm, in the flow,
and fully enjoyed the atmosphere.
I felt connected to my body
and released my emotions
through movement."*

*"After the workshop,
I wanted to go dancing more
because it gives me a sense
of freedom and happiness."*

10

ACTIVITY

Design on canvas

Artistic methods applied

painting
design

Well-being areas supported

self-expression
emotional awareness
stress reduction
mindfulness
self-esteem
identity exploration

Scientific evidence

- Art-making and mindfulness support stress reduction and emotional regulation by engaging focused attention, and sensory awareness (Kaimal et al., 2016).
- Colour psychology suggests that colours influence emotional states and self-perception, supporting reflection on mood and inner needs (Elliot & Maier, 2014).
- Cathy Malchiodi (2012) highlights that creating tangible art objects supports identity expression and self-esteem (Handbook of Art Therapy).
- Engaging in meaningful, hands-on creative work has been linked to reduced anxiety and increased feelings of competence and pride (Kaimal et al., 2016; Bandura, 1997).

Materials

- Cotton eco-bags
- Acrylic paints or special textile paints
- Paintbrushes of different sizes

- Sponges
- Palettes or disposable plates for mixing colours
- Jars of water for rinsing brushes

Estimated preparation time

15–20' (space setup, material organisation, paint preparation)

Recommended group size

10–20

Space

- A calm, well-lit room with tables and access to water.
- The space should be spacious so participants can work comfortably and be able to move around.

Main steps of the activity

15' – INTRODUCTION AND MATERIALS PRESENTATION

The facilitator introduces the tote bags and paints, explaining how acrylic textile paints work (they are long-lasting and washable). They demonstrate different techniques, such as using brushes, sponges, stencils, and freehand drawing. Participants are reassured that all styles are welcome.

15' – DESIGN IMAGINATION AND SKETCHING

Invite participants to take a few quiet minutes to **imagine their design**. Encourage them to consider symbols, colours, words, or patterns that represent their emotions, values, or identity. Light sketching—either on paper or directly on the bag—is optional.

90' – MINDFUL PAINTING PROCESS

Participants begin painting their eco-bags while relaxing background music plays. The facilitator moves around the room, offering support and encouragement, reinforcing a focus on process over perfection, and inviting slow, mindful painting.

20' – REFLECTION

When most participants have finished, the facilitator invites those who feel comfortable to share their bags. Simple reflection questions are asked, and positive, supportive peer feedback is encouraged.

- What does your design represent for you?
- How did you feel during the painting process?
- Which colours or symbols felt most meaningful?

The facilitator thanks participants, explains drying time and care instructions for the bags, and highlights the sustainability aspect — participants now have a reusable bag carrying their own story.

Facilitation notes

How to reflect on personal well-being through art

Frame the activity as a mindful practice that supports emotional regulation, self-awareness, and self-esteem. Emphasise that creative expression can be a healthy way to process stress and emotions.

Insights from participants' feedback

Participants described feeling calm, focused, and immersed during the creative process. Many shared that painting their eco-bag felt relaxing and therapeutic, allowing them to release stress and express themselves freely.

Participants also reported a sense of satisfaction and pride in creating something personal and tangible.

Participants' quotes:

*"Painting my eco-bag felt like therapy.
The colours helped me feel grounded
and balanced."*

*"I came stressed,
but mixing colours and painting
symbols that represent me
helped release tension."*

*"I didn't think I could relax
and draw, but doing it just for myself
was very expressive."*

11

ACTIVITY

Writing without a map

Artistic methods applied

creative writing
freewriting
storytelling
poetry

Well-being areas supported

emotional expression
emotional release
self-awareness
stress reduction
self-compassion
social connection

Scientific evidence

- Expressive writing research shows that writing about emotions and personal experiences supports emotional regulation, stress reduction, and improves mood (Pennebaker & Chung, 2011; Baikié & Wilhelm, 2005).
- Narrative approaches highlight that storytelling helps individuals organise experiences, externalise emotions, and make meaning from personal events (McAdams, 2001; Bruner, 1991).
- Short poetic forms (such as senkan or haiku-like structures) support emotional clarity by encouraging concise reflection and focused expression (Pennebaker & Evans, 2014).
- Group sharing of creative writing can enhance empathy and reduce feelings of isolation through shared vulnerability (Pennebaker & Chung, 2011; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Materials

- Paper or notebooks
- Pens
- Flipchart and markers
- Role cards (e.g. *traveller, teacher, tree, river, lost key, dreamer*)
- Calm background music

Estimated preparation time

10–15'

Recommended group size

8–20

Space

- A calm, cosy space that supports concentration and emotional safety.
- Chairs arranged in a circle or around tables (*optional*).

Main steps of the activity

10' – FREEWRITING WARM-UP

Participants write continuously for 7–10 minutes without stopping or editing. Suggested prompts (choose one):

- “I remember...”
- “Today I feel...”
- “If I were a colour, I would be...”

20' – ROLE-BASED STORYTELLING

Each participant receives or chooses a character role (e.g. *traveller, tree, river, lost key*) and **writes a short story** from that character's perspective (10 minutes).

Then, participants form **pairs or trios** and read their stories to each other. They connect their characters into a shared mini-story and then present their joint stories to the group.

25' – CREATIVE GROUP WRITING: SENKAN POEMS

The facilitator introduces the senkan poem – a simple five-line poem that helps express feelings and experiences in a concise and creative way.

Structure:

- *Line 1:* one word – the topic or feeling.
- *Line 2:* two words describing it.
- *Line 3:* three action words related to it.
- *Line 4:* a four-word phrase expressing a thought, experience, or meaning.
- *Line 5:* one word that summarizes the poem or offers a synonym.

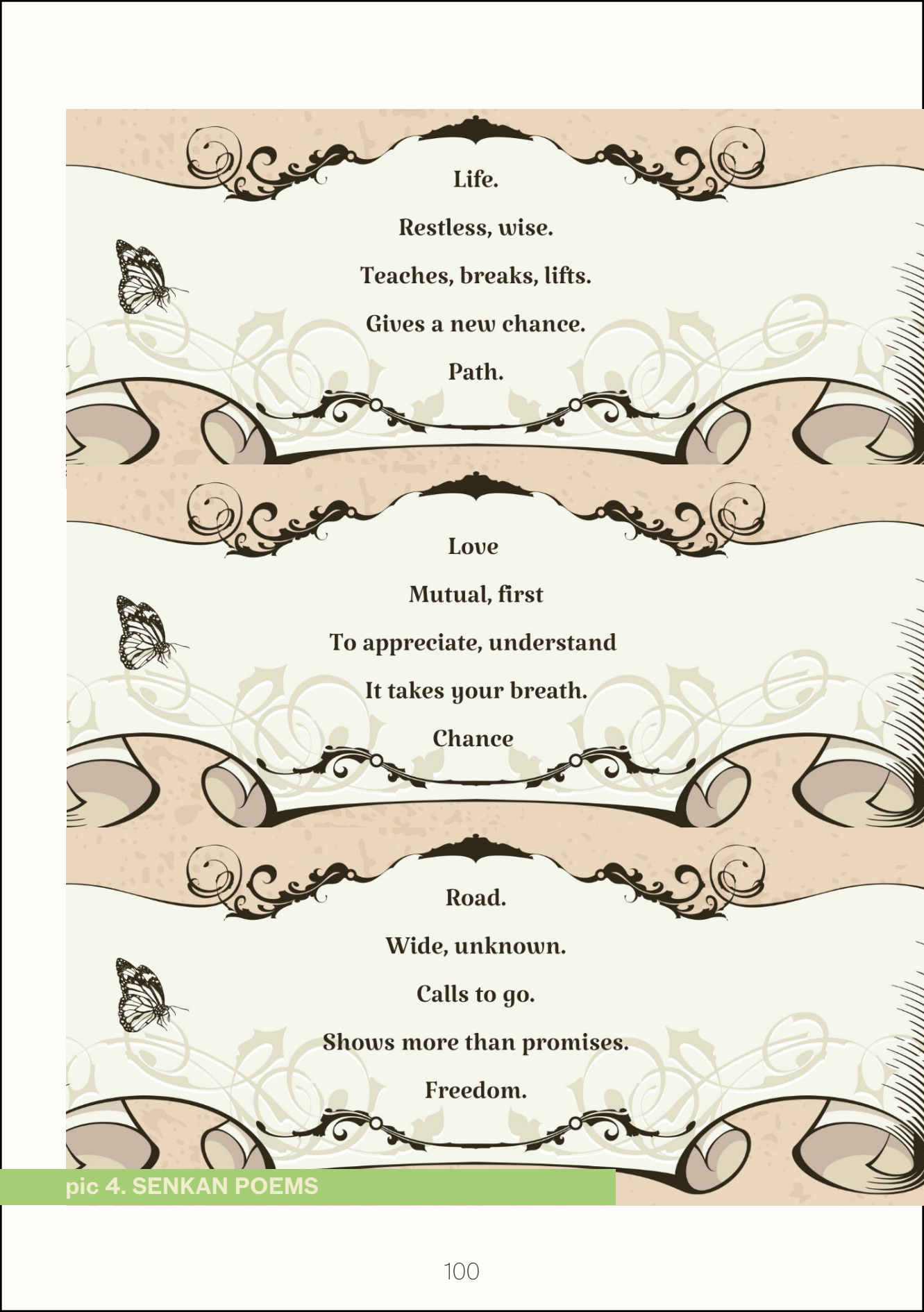
Example:

Calm
Gentle, quiet
Breathing, resting, slowing
I can be present
Peace

20' – REFLECTION

Each participant shares one word describing how they feel now. The facilitator highlights that writing can be a daily self-care tool and thanks the group for openness and trust.

- What did you discover about yourself today while writing?
- Was it easier to express emotions through a character or directly?
- How did your emotional state change during the workshop?
- What surprised you in your own writing?



Life.

Restless, wise.

Teaches, breaks, lifts.

Gives a new chance.

Path.

Love

Mutual, first

To appreciate, understand

It takes your breath.

Chance

Road.

Wide, unknown.

Calls to go.

Shows more than promises.

Freedom.

Facilitation notes

How to reflect on personal well-being through art

Frame writing as a safe outlet for emotions, reflection, and self-support. Encourage participants to use freewriting or short poems as a way to process feelings outside the workshop.

Insights from participants' feedback

Participants described feeling calm, supported, and emotionally engaged during the workshop.

Many shared that writing helped them access personal memories and emotions in a gentle way.

Several participants noted a sense of emotional release, inspiration, and lightness after the session.

Participants' quotes:

"Free writing opened up something inside me I didn't expect. It felt like discovering a new inner voice."

"Sharing my lines was emotional, but it made me feel less alone."

"Writing became a safe space to express things I usually keep quiet."

"I left feeling lighter and inspired."

12

ACTIVITY

Threading emotions

Artistic methods applied
string art/filography

Well-being areas supported
emotional expression and release
stress reduction
mindfulness, grounding
concentration, patience
self-esteem

Scientific evidence

- Tactile and repetitive art-making processes are widely recognised as supportive tools for mental well-being and emotional regulation (Elbrecht, 2013; Classen, 2020).
- Mindfulness-based art activities promote focus, emotional regulation, and stress reduction through repetitive, attentive actions (Kaimal et al., 2016).
- Somatic and sensorimotor approaches highlight that working with hands and physical materials supports grounding and emotional release by engaging the nervous system (van der Kolk, 2014; Elbrecht, 2013).
- Cathy Malchiodi (2012) emphasises that structured, hands-on art processes increase self-efficacy and emotional containment (Handbook of Art Therapy).
- Repetitive creative actions (hammering, threading) have been linked to calming effects similar to meditative practices, supporting concentration and emotional balance (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Malchiodi, 2012).

Materials

- Wooden boards (one per participant)
- Small nails
- Hammers
- Colourful threads or yarns
- Pencils for marking points
- Table covers (to protect surfaces and reduce noise)
- Small containers for nails
- Scissors
- Gloves (*optional*, for comfort and safety)

Estimated preparation time

20–30' (material layout, safety preparation, examples display)

Recommended group size

10–20 participants

Space

- Spacious room with sturdy tables, good lighting, and a calm atmosphere.
- Background music could support the concentration.

Main steps of the activity

15' – INTRODUCTION TO STRING ART AND SAFETY RULES

The facilitator explains the basics of string art and shows examples. Materials are introduced, and safety instructions for using hammers and nails are demonstrated clearly.

20' – PREPARING THE DESIGN

Participants choose a simple shape and lightly mark nail points on the board with a pencil.

20' – HAMMERING NAILS

- Place the board flat on the table.
- Hold the nail near the top.
- Tap gently until the nail stands.
- Hammer deeper, leaving the head above the wood.
- Keep nails about one finger apart.
- If a nail bends, remove it and try again.
- Work slowly and without rushing.

40' – THREADING EMOTIONS

- Begin by threading yarn between nails,
- start with one colour, add more if desired,
- follow your emotions rather than fixed patterns,
- use colour and tension to express mood and inner state.

20' – REFLECTION

- How did you feel while working?
- What does your piece represent for you?
- What moment of the process felt most calming for you?
- How did working with your hands affect your emotions?
- What do the colours and patterns say about your inner state?
- Was it easy or difficult to slow down and focus?

Facilitation notes

How to reflect on personal well-being through art

Highlight how repetitive, tactile actions support grounding, patience, and emotional regulation. Encourage participants to see focused creative work as a healthy coping and self-care strategy.

Insights from participants' feedback

Participants described the process as calming, soothing, and deeply engaging.

Many shared surprise at their ability to work confidently with tools and appreciated the **meditative rhythm of hammering and threading**.

Participants often expressed pride and relief upon completing their artwork.

Participants' quotes:

*"Hammering the nails was surprisingly calming.
It felt like releasing stress with every tap."*

*"Focusing on rhythm, nails,
and thread helped quiet my mind."*

*"The process was soothing, and I felt proud of creating
something meaningful with my hands."*

13

ACTIVITY

Colours of emotions

Artistic methods applied
fluid art (abstract painting)

Well-being areas supported
emotional expression
emotional regulation
stress reduction
self-awareness
grounding

Scientific evidence

- Cathy Malchiodi emphasises that abstract and sensory-based art-making supports emotional regulation by bypassing verbal processing and engaging the nervous system directly (Malchiodi, 2012).
- Van der Kolk highlights that creative, body-based activities help individuals process emotions stored somatically, especially when verbal expression is difficult (Van der Kolk, 2014).
- Csikszentmihalyi's concept of Flow explains how immersive creative activities reduce stress and increase well-being by fully engaging attention in the present moment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996).
- Research in art therapy shows that intuitive painting can activate the parasympathetic nervous system, contributing to relaxation and reduced anxiety (Kaimal et al., 2016).

Materials

- Medium-Density Fibreboard (MDF) art boards for fluid art (diameter 30 cm)

- Ready-to-use fluid art acrylic paints: white (largest quantity), blue, purple, black, yellow, green, red, brown, gold, silver, etc.
- Disposable black gloves
- Paper cups (approx. 150 pcs) – for paint and as supports
- Brushes (small)
- Wooden sticks (coffee-stick type) for mixing paints
- Spray varnish for sealing finished artworks
- Straws
- Protective table covers (plastic wrap or disposable tablecloths)

Estimated preparation time

30-40' (space setup and materials preparation)

Recommended group size

10-15

Space

- Well-ventilated space with large tables, easy-to-clean surfaces, and a calm atmosphere.
- The space should allow participants to move freely.

Main steps of the activity

10' – EMOTIONAL CHECK-IN

Ask participants to briefly reflect on how they are feeling in the moment. Encourage them to notice emotions without analysing them and to intuitively associate emotions with colours.

50' – FLUID ART CREATION

Participants put on gloves and choose colours freely.

Paint is poured onto the MDF surface and allowed to flow by tilting and rotating the board.

Suggested techniques for expression:

- Using straws to blow paint and create organic patterns.
- Using wooden sticks or brushes to guide or draw into the paint.
- Layering colours to reflect emotional complexity.

Participants are encouraged to follow sensations and emotions rather than visual control.



pic 5. FLUID ART

10' – FINISHING AND CONTAINMENT

When participants feel their artwork is complete, it is placed aside to dry.

Once the artwork dries, the facilitator applies spray varnish to seal the artwork. This step is explained as a **symbolic act of “containing” and protecting emotions** that were expressed.

20' – REFLECTION

Invite participants to step back, observe their work quietly, and take a few grounding breaths. The facilitator acknowledges the emotional work done and smoothly transitions the group toward reflection.

- How did you feel before starting the painting, and how do you feel now?
- What part of the process felt most calming or meaningful for you?
- Did any emotions appear that you did not expect?
- How did it feel to express emotions without words?

Facilitation notes

How to reflect on personal well-being through art

Highlighte how non-verbal expression can support emotional regulation and stress relief.

Encourage participants to recognise painting as a grounding practice that can be used whenever emotions feel overwhelming or difficult to express verbally.

Insights from participants' feedback

Participants described the painting process as deeply calming and emotionally releasing. Many reported feelings of harmony, inner balance, and emotional clarity.

Participants' quotes:

"I learned how to easily express my emotions through painting when I can't express them in words."

"The most helpful moment was when I started painting – I expressed my emotions on the canvas and felt incredible harmony."

"The painting process itself is very calming."

14

ACTIVITY

From feeling to shape

Artistic methods applied
plasticine painting

Well-being areas supported
emotional expression
emotional regulation
stress reduction
somatic grounding
increased self-awareness
sensory regulation
symbolic processing

Scientific evidence

Research shows that engaging with modelling materials can:

- Activate non-verbal emotional expression and reduce emotional overload, allowing feelings that are difficult to articulate to emerge in sensory and symbolic form (Malchiodi, 2012; Gussak, 2007).
- Support emotional regulation through tactile engagement. Squeezing, shaping, and manipulating materials can reduce stress and provide grounding (Elbrecht, 2013; Hinz, 2009).
- Facilitate immersion in the present moment and reduce anxiety, consistent with broader evidence on art-making and stress relief (Kaimal et al., 2016; Stuckey & Nobel, 2010).
- Lead to reductions in negative emotions, as well as increases in self-expression and overall mood (Gussak, 2007; Stuckey & Nobel, 2010).

Materials

- Plasticine blocks in assorted colours

- Rectangular MDF boards
- Plasticine modelling tools (stecks)
- Simple pencils (for initial pre-drawing)

Estimated preparation time

15-25'

Recommended group size

10-15

Space

- A calm, clutter-free room with tables covered for easy cleaning and space for participants to work.
- Natural light and if possible soft background music help create a relaxed atmosphere.

Main steps of the activity

10' – EMOTIONAL CHECK-IN AND SKETCH

Invite participants to close their eyes for a moment, notice their current emotional state, and choose a starting colour that resonates with that feeling.

They can make a **light pencil sketch** on the MDF board to outline an idea or shape they feel drawn to to represent their current emotional state (e.g., swirling lines for chaotic feelings, blocks for pressure, open spaces for calm).

50' – PLASTICINE SHAPING AND PAINTING

Participants use plasticine to fill, build up and sculpt on their board. Encourage a variety of techniques:

- Flatten plasticine to create colourful backgrounds.
- Build texture and low relief by layering pieces.
- Use sticks to draw lines, marks, or tactile patterns.

Throughout, remind participants that this is not about realism or technical skill, but about sensory exploration and emotional translation, encouraging them to **let shapes emerge intuitively** in response to their emotions.

10' – SENSORY INTEGRATION AND SLOWING DOWN

As participants finish, invite them to pause, place their hands gently on the artwork, and take a deep breath.

Naming the piece (even silently) can help in connecting internal experience with what has been made.

20' – REFLECTION

- What was the first colour or shape you chose, and why did it feel natural?
- How did working with your hands and the plasticine influence your feelings?
- Did any emotion emerge that you didn't anticipate?
- What does your work express about your inner state right now?
- How could you use this creative expression when you feel stressed or overwhelmed?

Facilitation notes

How to reflect on personal well-being through art

Guide participants to notice links between physical engagement and emotional shifts. For example, how squeezing and shaping plasticine may have lessened physical tension or helped make abstract feelings more tangible.

Highlight that this kind of creative, embodied practice can be used as a grounding tool outside the session.

Insights from participants' feedback

Participants shared that they enjoyed working with plasticine and found the process pleasant and engaging. Several participants described the experience as relaxing and appreciated the opportunity to shape plasticine and draw freely.

Some participants mentioned that the activity felt useful overall and that the process itself was meaningful for them. Others noted that working with plasticine helped them stay focused on the task and enjoy the moment.

Participants' quotes:

"Working with plasticine helped me develop concentration."

*"Knowing that others were there to help
removed pressure and fear of failure."*

"The process itself was relaxing and enjoyable."

"The activity felt fully useful and supportive as a whole."

15

ACTIVITY

**The secret map
of inner worlds**

Artistic methods applied

drawing
symbolic storytelling
guided imagination
fairytale therapy

Well-being areas supported

self-awareness
identity exploration
meaning-making
emotional reflection
connection with personal resources and challenges

Scientific evidence

- Fairytale therapy and narrative-based approaches are grounded in psychological theories that emphasise storytelling as a tool for meaning-making, identity construction, and emotional processing (McAdams, 2001; White & Epston, 1990).
- Bruno Bettelheim (1976) described fairytales as symbolic containers for internal conflicts and developmental challenges, helping individuals explore fears, hopes, and values.
- Narrative therapy highlights how symbolic stories allow people to externalise inner experiences and reflect on them from a safe distance (White & Epston, 1990).
- Jungian psychology emphasises symbolic imagery (maps, kingdoms, directions) as representations of inner psychic landscapes, supporting integration and self-understanding (Jung, 1964).
- In expressive arts therapy, creating personal symbolic worlds helps individuals access internal resources and reflect on life paths without direct confrontation (Knill, Barba, & Fuchs, 2005).

Materials

- A4 paper
- Colour pencils (minimum 12 different colours per group)

Estimated preparation time

10-15'

Recommended group size

Up to 20 participants (divide into groups of 4 participants)

Space

- A calm space with tables, allowing both individual drawing and small-group discussion.
- A quiet, imaginative atmosphere supports immersion in the fairytale metaphor.

Main steps of the activity

15' – CREATING THE INNER KINGDOM MAP

Participants draw a symbolic map of their personal kingdom. They are invited to place different elements according to the following directions:

- East – the sunrise of new possibilities.
- West – places of past experience.
- South – warmth, support, and safety.
- North – challenges, obstacles, and growth.

Participants name their locations freely (e.g. *“Forest of doubt”*, *“Lake of calm”*, *“Mountain of courage”*).

10' – PRESENTATION AND SELECTIVE SHARING

Each participant briefly presents themselves and one location that feels most important to them at the moment.

20' – PAIR WORK: CHOOSING A JOURNEY

Participants form pairs and imagine travelling through their kingdoms together, answering following questions:

- Where does the journey begin?

- Where do they want to arrive?
- What creatures, symbols, events, or helpers appear along the way?

This stage introduces movement and transition, preparing the narrative for the next fairytale activity (no. 16).

20' – REFLECTION

- Which place on your map feels most alive for you right now?
- Was it easier to talk about yourself through symbols rather than directly?
- What surprised you in your map or your partner's journey?
- Which direction (north, south, east, west) feels most present in your life?
- What would help you move safely through your inner kingdom?

Facilitation notes

How to reflect on personal well-being through art

Highlight that symbolic mapping allows people to observe their inner state with distance and compassion. Emphasise that recognising resources (supportive places) and challenges (northern territories) is a form of self-care and emotional awareness.

Insights from participants' feedback

Participants described the activity as meaningful and useful. Drawing the map of their own kingdom was often mentioned as a key moment that helped them reflect and generate new ideas.

Some participants shared that the process felt logical and well-structured, which made it easier to follow and engage with the activity as a whole.

Participants' quotes:

"Drawing the map of one's own kingdom was the most useful moment of the activity."

"Creating the map helped generate new ideas."

"Everything in the activity felt useful."

16

ACTIVITY

**Speaking through
fairytale**

Artistic methods applied

plasticine modelling
creative writing
symbolic storytelling
fairytale therapy

Well-being areas supported

inner dialogue
emotional expression
accessing internal resources
self-support
integration of strengths
self-compassion

Scientific evidence

- Fairytale therapy and symbolic dialogue are grounded in narrative and expressive approaches that support emotional processing and self-reflection through metaphor (McAdams, 2001; White & Epston, 1990).
- Narrative therapy emphasises externalising inner experiences and allowing them to “speak” through symbolic characters, helping individuals gain distance and insight (White & Epston, 1990).
- Jungian psychology highlights archetypal figures (such as guardians, helpers, messengers) as representations of inner strengths, boundaries, and protective functions (Jung, 1964; Hillman, 1975).
- Expressive arts therapy uses symbolic creation and writing to facilitate inner dialogue and integration of emotional resources (Malchiodi, 2012; Knill, Barba, & Fuchs, 2005).
- Writing messages from symbolic figures supports self-compassion and emotional regulation by activating reflective rather than reactive processing (Pennebaker & Chung, 2011; Neff, 2003).

Materials

- Soft plasticine (minimum 12 colours per group)
- A4 paper
- Pens

Estimated preparation time

10-15'

Recommended group size

Up to 20 participants (divide into groups of 4 participants)
- the same groups as in the 15th activity

Space

- A calm, quiet space that supports concentration, imagination, and reflective writing.
- Tables are needed for both modelling and writing.

Main steps of the activity

15' – CREATING THE GUARDIAN OF THE KINGDOM

Participants are invited to create a guardian of their kingdom using soft plasticine. After modelling, participants briefly present their guardian by sharing:

- The name of the guardian.
- Its qualities (e.g. *strength, care, wisdom, courage*).

15' – WRITING A MESSAGE FROM THE KINGDOM

Participants take an A4 paper and a pen and write a short letter from a resident of their kingdom to themselves.

- The message should be written in the first person (“I”).
- It must be signed (who is sending the message?)
- The tone can be supportive, warning, encouraging, or reflective

This step supports inner dialogue and self-reflection through symbolic distance.

15' – “GIFTS FROM MY KINGDOM”

Participants create a small symbolic gift from their kingdom - an object that represents warmth, support, or an inner resource. They are invited (optionally) to briefly explain what the gift symbolises.

10' – RETURNING FROM THE FAIRYTALE

- After the symbolic gift is created, invite participants to place the guardian, the letter, and the gift together in front of them.
- Invite participants to silently notice what it feels like to have protection (guardian), guidance (message), and support (gift) present at the same time.
- Ask them to imagine taking these elements back with them from the fairytale world into everyday life.
- Offer a gentle transition back to the group space (e.g. deep breath together, stretching hands), clearly marking the end of the fairytale journey.

20' – REFLECTION

- What qualities does your guardian protect in you?
- Was there something in the letter that surprised you?
- What does the gift from your kingdom represent in your life right now?
- How can you stay connected to your inner kingdom after this session?

Facilitation notes

How to reflect on personal well-being through art

Highlight that symbolic figures and messages often represent inner resources, needs, or boundaries. Emphasise that participants can return to these symbols mentally when they need support, protection, or guidance in real life.

Insights from participants' feedback

Participants shared that they enjoyed working with plasticine and drawing as part of the activity.

Several participants described the experience as engaging and pleasant, highlighting the creative process itself.

Many noted that moments of interaction, care, and mutual help within the group were particularly meaningful.

Participants' quotes:

"Working with plasticine and drawing was enjoyable."

*"Moments of care, mutual help, and communication
were the most useful part of the activity."*

"Group support was experienced as helpful."

About Art Well

Art Well is an international project dedicated to promoting (self-)care and mental health awareness through art among marginalised youth, supported by the Erasmus+ programme and co-funded by the European Union.

The partnership is led by INspire, z. s. (Czech Republic), in collaboration with partner organisations from Austria (Arge Nova), Hungary (EMINA Pályaorientációs Alapítvány), and Ukraine (Forward for Future).

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Art Activities for Youth Mental Health

Art can be more than a form of expression – it can be a pathway to well-being.

Art Activities for Youth Mental Health brings together a collection of practical, tested, and accessible creative methods designed to support emotional well-being, self-awareness, resilience, and social connection among young people. Developed through international cooperation between organisations from Austria, Czechia, Hungary, and Ukraine, this handbook combines non-formal education, artistic practice, and research-based insights into a resource for youth workers, educators, trainers, artists, and community organisations.

Inside, you will find 16 art-based activities ranging from painting, storytelling, journaling, and movement to filmmaking, clay work, and creative writing. Each activity includes step-by-step instructions, facilitation tips, scientific background, and reflections from participants who experienced the methods firsthand.

Created within the Erasmus+ project Art Well, this book offers practical tools for fostering self-care and mental health in an increasingly complex world. Whether used in youth work, education, community settings, or personal practice, these activities invite participants to slow down, connect with themselves and others, and discover the transformative potential of creativity.

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