

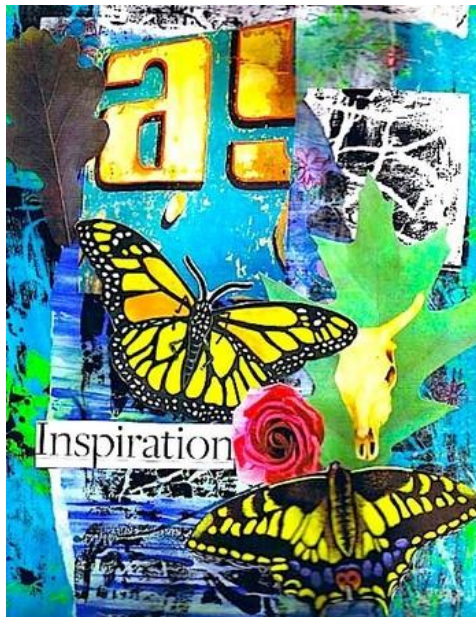


ART BRIDGES: Lesson Plans for Enrichment, Growth and Healing

Spontaneous Art Therapy Activities for Teenagers

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Shelley Klammer

<http://www.expressiveartworkshops.com>



Mixed Media Collage by Shelley Klammer

Encouraging Teens to Find their Creative Power

The pressure for teens to conform so that they are not made fun of needs to be considered when designing and facilitating art programming. In my experience, facilitating art for incarcerated youth, I found that teens are often self-conscious and suspicious about art-making, especially if they feel like they do not have any "talent".

Interesting a skeptical group of teens to create art became a process of creating each art session around the element of surprise. My challenge was to make art-making fun, challenging, and interesting in a way that was expressive but not overtly "therapeutic" or requiring of artistic "talent".

I found that many teens did not want to participate in my art group if they felt that they were not good at drawing or painting. Some were quite cruel to each other when they deemed that another's art was "no good". Others were hard on themselves. Finding ways for teens to create art that could not be "labeled" as good or bad by peer standards became my goal.

Passion, Fun, Intensity and Confidence

We all remember being acutely self-conscious as teens. The key I found in working with teenagers was to develop art projects that could not be easily evaluated, that were fun, contemporary, surprising, challenging and even humorous in scope.

My art group grew over time as many teens came to experiment with art-making in a passionate and intense way that made them forget their intense self-consciousness for a period of time. Because no two classes are ever alike, the element of surprise often shocked the group out of their preconceived ideas of what creativity could be.

Following is a list of art activities that have worked well with teenagers that encourage spontaneity, original thinking, and imagination. All projects focus on the fun, exploration and intensity of the creative process, and are not overly based on an end product that could be judged by peers.

1. Timed Art Competition

Adding a sense of urgency to finish an art project increases spontaneity and most teens love to compete against their peers. Offer a set time limit and create an art challenge that does not allow time for too much thought or self-consciousness.

2. Altered Magazine Photo

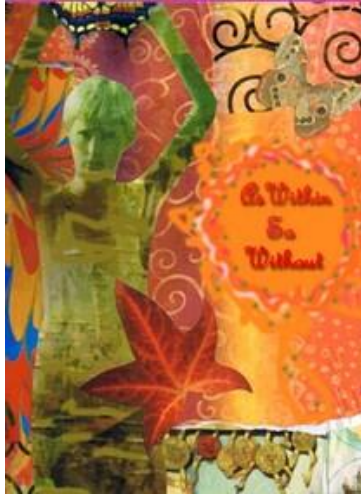


Invite your teens to alter magazine photos with oil pastels and acrylic paint. Matte magazine imagery works well. Oversized fashion magazines with black and white photos can be purchased for your art group. Have magazine pages pre-cut out so that your group members do not spend group time reading the magazines. Teens love to deface photographs. This can be a therapeutic and humorous art exercise that does not require drawing or painting skills.

3. Tin Foil Sculpture

Give each teen a roll of tinfoil. Set a time limit of one hour and ask them to make a sculpture using the entire roll of tinfoil.

4. Words to Live By Collage



Asking teens what words they live by can be a revealing exercise. Offer a personal example of what words you personally live by and then go around the art table and ask each member what motto they live by. If they do not know what their personal motto is, that is ok.

Have a variety of quotes available printed on paper and cut into strips. Ask each member of the group to create a collage that represents their "words to live by" quote. It is important for teens to define themselves and often their quotes might reflect a negative or subversive world view. All views can be discussed in the group.

5. Collaborative Art Making

Group your teens up into teams of two or three and have them make a collaborative painting or sculpture. At the end of the competition offer prizes to every team - chocolate bars work well! Designate and define the strengths of each art piece, such as, "the most colorful sculpture, the most original sculpture, the most surprising sculpture", etc. Everyone gets a prize.

6. Crumpled Paper Painting



Teens love surprise and novelty. Providing activities that cannot be predicted often invokes excitement and mystery. Pre-paint sheets of paper with dark blue or black paint and crinkle them up into a ball. Have the balls of paper set up in each place. Ask teens to create a spontaneous painting using the lines on the crumpled paper. This project can be painted in 3-D or 2-D formats.

7. Surprise Assemblage

My favorite art supply store was the dollar store when I was on a budget and was looking for elements of surprise to incorporate into artwork. In front of each teen, assemble a pile of random items such as pipe cleaners, wood shapes, small toys, fabric scraps, yarn, buttons, screws, nuts, and bolts etc. and ask the teens to make an assemblage using at least one of every item. This kind of art exercise resembles childhood play and can keep participants absorbed and creating spontaneously for a long period of time. Set a time limit so that members of the group do not over-think their process.

8. Drip Painting



This can be a large-scale painting done on large sheets of paper on the floor using pots of latex paint on canvas or paper, or, as shown above, this painting can be done small scale using watercolor paper and paint. Organic watercolor shapes can be painted on the background prior to the drip painting.

9. Toilet Paper Sculpture

One teen told me that when he was in solitary confinement he got in trouble for making sculptures out of toilet paper, coffee-mate, and water. I thought it was a brilliant idea! The next group session found each teen with a roll of toilet paper and a dish of flour and water. Offering structural items to hold up the sculpture is helpful, such as coat hangers, pipe cleaners or Popsicle sticks.

10. Crazy Quilt Collage



Invite your teenagers to tear up two or three magazine pages into squares without telling them why. Give them a timed period to collage a "crazy quilt". This is a good exercise for girls. Alternately you can have a pile of pre-torn square collage pieces in a pile in front of each person along with a piece of paper. Challenge them to cover the entire piece of paper in 15 minutes or less. It is always helpful to challenge teen art groups in ways that they do not expect.

11. What Are They Thinking?

Have large sheets of paper set before each chair, along with one magazine, scissors, glue stick, and a black felt pen. In this exercise it is important to reveal the process step by step. If the group asks what you are doing don't tell them! Ask teens to pull out pictures of five people, cut them out, arrange them on the paper and glue them down. Then ask the members of your group to draw a thought bubble above every head and write what each figure is secretly thinking. Invite members to share as a group afterwards. This exercise can be quite humorous!

12. Ongoing Group Mural

If you have a permanent art studio or craft room to work in, an ongoing group mural that teens can paint and draw on whenever they desire can be a way to paint group concerns or interests in an ongoing manner over time. A group theme can be decided upon ahead of time, or you can simply let the process evolve organically. Loose organic shapes can be sketched out and the mural can be abstract to encourage all to participate.

It is helpful to outline and to post up a list of parameters beside the mural on a sign to hone the focus and set the goals of the mural. This exercise promotes freedom of expression as well as the invitation to create when inspiration strikes. Tape or pin large sheets of paper or cardboard on the wall and have covered containers of tempera paints and brushes available.

13. Doodling - Tagging

Invite your teens to create their own graffiti signature "tag" with felt pens and or paint. Tagging can be done small scale with felt pens or paints. Have your teens draw an outline of their initials and doodle within them. Tags can be an ongoing project especially if they are elaborately doodled.

14. Upcycled Collaborative Junk Sculpture



Have piles of junk available to create a large group sculpture such as old household items, toys, colorful straws, chicken wire for building forms, building construction refuse such as colorful electrical wires, etc. You can also encourage teens to create a junk landscape on a large board, or a large collaborative mobile out of junk.

15. Giant Candy Sculpture

Provide a creative array of gumdrops, marshmallows, cookies, candy, chocolates, as well as structural items such as toothpicks and longer skewers to create edible candy sculptures. This is a humorous and engaging activity that can be done on a large scale as a group for special events.

16. Painting T-Shirts

Purchase black or white t-shirts and provide colorful latex house paint for teens to paint their own t-shirts. Latex paint can be diluted down or left as is. Provide photocopied examples of simple, colored patterns and designs for reference. Latex paint is a little stiff but it washes well, is color fast, and does not require heat-setting.

17. Inspirational Hands

This is a good exercise to increase positive inspiration and bonding within a teen group. Divide your teens into groups of five. Have each teen trace out their hand on paper, ask them to cut it out and letter their name on the palm of their cut-out hand. Then, in a round robin have your group pass each hand around the table and ask each group member to write a positive quality about the person on one of the fingers on the paper hand. When the hand reaches its owner invite them to reflect upon the positive feedback and embellish their inspirational hand with doodling, ephemera or inspirational quotes.

18. Tissue Paper Collage



Begin by asking your teens to tear up various colors of tissue paper into large and small shapes and sizes. Provide white card stock for collage background and ask each artist to cover their entire surface with white glue thinned with water. Working very quickly, invite your group to place large and small pieces of tissue paper on the wet glue. Brush the top of each piece of tissue paper with glue as well.

Suggest starting with the lightest colored tissue papers first, towards layering the darker colors on top. Or, for more dramatic collage, the darkest colors can be the base. Add lighter and brighter colors on top. The entire surface of the collage can be coated with diluted white glue, taking care that the glue is thin enough so that it does not tear the tissue paper.

19. Group Magazine Collage

Place 2-3 magazines in front of each teen and ask them to cut out 10-20 images and 10-20 words or phrases that attract their interest. As each teen is cutting out their imagery, pass a large black poster board around the art table and ask each teen to add one image or one phrase before handing the collage to the next participant. Encourage the group to fill the entire board and to layer and overlap the imagery. When the collage is finished, invite the group to identify themes and visual stories, and to decide upon a name for the collage.

20. Word Play

Playing with words and feelings can be a good way to start out each art group spontaneously. You might start out with a printed, photocopied sheet that has one question or written prompt turned face down each week. Sharing after writing is optional. Some ideas are:

- Define love...
- Weird is...

- Normal is...
 - I feel depressed when...
 - Make a list of 5 things you want to do in your life.
 - If you could trade lives with someone who would you be and why?
 - One food you would never give up is...
 - 10 things I expect in a good friend are...
 - 5 of my best ideas are...
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21. Poured Line Painting



This technique offers teens the opportunity to play with "fail free" abstract painting as originated by artist Jackson Pollock. This is a pure process art technique that cannot be preplanned.

Ask teens to pour black latex wall paint onto a sheet of watercolor paper in free-form poured lines. Allow poured lines to cross and form interesting shapes. Teens can also "rock" the paper to create spontaneous designs. Allow lines to completely dry and provide watercolor paint to fill in the shapes with jewel-like color.

22. Temporary Tattoos

Ask your group to form into pairs and ask your teens to discuss what they would each like for a tattoo. Ask each person about what is most important to them as the foundation for their design. Provide simple photocopied samples of tattoos downloaded from the internet. Using Cray Pas water soluble crayons and fine brushes invite teens to take turns painting tattoos on each other. Have your group discuss the significance of their tattoos with the group.

*Heartfelt thanks to **Shelley Klammer** who graciously gave permission to Hildegard Center to re-post these activities for our project. Shelley is a Registered Counselling Therapist and a Registered Counselling Supervisor with the Association of Cooperative Counselling Therapists in Canada. She currently works in Canada's largest therapeutic art studio, Artworks Studio, for adults at the end of life with dementia and/or physical and mental challenges. While she is designated as a counselling therapist, she has logged over 11,000 art therapy hours in the studio and feels blessed to have worked with hundreds of clients from all walks of life in this creative capacity. Please visit www.expressiveartworkshops.com to learn more about Shelley, her workshops and books, and her work.*

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