



HM Prison &
Probation Service



Learning
Together

Keeping connected: introducing ThinkLets

Learning Together builds educational communities that bring together people who live, study and work in universities and criminal justice organisations. Together, we want to use the power of education to improve lives, institutions and communities.

Covid-19 is a major challenge to our health and wellbeing. It means that we cannot physically come together as a community to learn with and from each other. But we can still keep learning and supporting each other to stay hopeful, positive and engaged.

Members of the Learning Together Network have created ThinkLets to help us all keep connected. Each ThinkLet contains resources that will help us to think about new ideas and develop new skills together, even from afar.

Each week, for the next eight weeks, two ThinkLets will be shared across our national community. We hope you enjoy them and find them helpful.

**Keep well. Keep hopeful. Keep connected.
And keep Learning Together.**

Please note:

The following resource was created with love and care by a member of the Learning Together Network. We sincerely hope that the creator's work will be respected by distributors, readers and users, and will not be subject to plagiarism or other forms of academic misconduct. Thank you for your cooperation.

ThinkLet #2

Drawing Connections... at the Edges: Creativity for Wellbeing

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There's no doubt about it, these are interesting times. These are anxious times. For me, even before Covid-19, life has felt anxious and all too often I have struggled to see beyond my own predicament. Until I'm forced to - like now, in this global situation. How, what, when? Worries for those we care about. Are they safe? Have they got enough provisions? What about the wolf at the door? The elephant in the room?

We can question, we can reason, we can try and make sense of it, but there are times when we just need to sit with it and let it be. 'Locked down' are we.

This is an important time for us to learn together, to see the world with fresh eyes - especially now, as people are experiencing and seeing things from new perspectives. Creativity enables us to do just that. It's about observing, watching and really seeing. It's about showing the world the way you see it, through doodling, collage, creative writing, soap carving, matchstick modelling... Whatever works for you. Share your perspective with the world, especially at this time.

The Irish poet Pádraig Ó Tuama articulates our need to build relationships with one another across difference this way: "We need ways of navigating our differences that deepen our curiosity, deepen our friendship, deepen our capacity to disagree, deepen the argument of being alive. This is what we need. This is what will save us. This is the work of peace. This is the work of imagination."

Take a deep breath. This is your space, and your time. Pick up a pencil, or a pen; find a scrap of paper, or an empty packet and make marks. Be mindful in your creativity - taking in simple details and reflecting on them. What have you to share? I look forward to seeing your creations...

Wishing you good health and hope in your heart.
Rebecca



*Drawing Connections... at the Edges,
Group hands & mark making (2017)*



We each view the world through our own lens. This view is personal to us, but is shaped, moulded, coloured—or even clouded—both by life experience and by the perspectives of other people, reflecting the many ways in which we come to understand the world around us and all it contains. *Drawing Connections* is a creative initiative that seeks to give people opportunities to take a variety of perspectives through different artistic practices. Even if some of those perspectives might last only a moment, they may leave a lasting impression. Over the last few years, *Drawing Connections* has had a rewarding journey. The project has created safe-spaces in collaboration with a range of award-winning artists (some with lived experience of the CJS), to enable participants (some with no prior artistic experience) the opportunity to experience the benefits of creative practice for themselves. We want you to have this opportunity too.

Let's start this *Drawing Connections* session with a gentle exercise, to reset the mind and encourage calm. Cortisol levels, which increase with anxiety, reduce immunity. So be kind to yourself. Take a few minutes to zone-in. Consider spending 5-10mins doing the exercise described below.

Accomplished martial artists master their practice with a grounding in Qigong: 'qi' means energy, and 'gong' means work. Qigong therefore means the exercise of your internal energy. The practice of Qigong has helped me to address anxiety related to past and present traumas, maintain my mobility and improve my immunity. The opening stance for most martial arts is called the Wuji stance. Here's how to practice it yourself:

Repeat steps 1-15 as many cycles as necessary. Inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth. It is alright if your chest feels a little sore after this Qigong exercise.

1. Stand with your legs shoulder width apart.
2. Relax the whole body.
3. Inhale as you raise your arms forward and upwards with palms facing each other until they are in line with your ears. Make sure your arms and fingers are straight.
4. Hold your breath for about 9 seconds, grabbing the ground with your toes and tightening your buttocks.
5. Exhale and relax your toes and buttocks.
6. Inhale as you slowly lower your arms to the sides at shoulder level.
7. Hold your breath for about 9 seconds, grabbing the ground with your toes and tightening your buttocks.
8. Move your arms to the front at chest level.
9. Form two fists and inhale more to maximum capacity.
10. Hit your chest while exhaling hard with a strong "hey" sound, coming from your abdomen.
11. Release your fists and relax your toes and buttocks.
12. Continue to exhale as you move your arms forwards.
13. Inhale as you spread your arms to the side.
14. Continue to inhale as you lift your arms upwards.
15. Exhale and lower your hands with palms facing downwards. Visualize you are collecting qi (energy) with your palms and it forms a mist around your whole body to protect you.

Once you have zoned-in, let's start by looking at simple **mark making and observational drawing**:

- As a general rule, a 2B pencil is the preferred drawing pencil as it is soft and good for shading, but an HB pencil (which has a sharper point for finer detail) or a pen (ink/ biro/felt-tip) is just as good.
- The quality of paper matters when it comes to watercolours, but for now, use whatever you can get your hands on (and are allowed to use!). Cardboard, old cereal packs, magazines, newspaper...
- Doodle over the top of images if you need a guide, or tear images up and stick them together (collage) if you can get your hands on some glue.
- In terms of subject - if you're not doodling or using your imagination - start simple. Hands are notoriously difficult, but other body parts could be a good choice, as well as inanimate objects.

- If you are doing observational drawing, draw what you see, not what you think you see. Look for the shapes and blank spaces in between - that's what people mean when they say draw the 'negative space', the space outside the outline.
- Breathe deeply, be patient and get absorbed in what you are drawing. Practice makes perfect!



Vases – Donald, DC 2017



Feather Study – Molly, DC 2018



Beetle study – Leon, DC 2019

Drawing a portrait: Faces are something we see from the day we are born. Most faces include two eyes, brows, cheeks and ears, one nose, mouth, forehead, chin and philtrum (area between top lip and nose). Generally, this is all supported by a neck and beneath the skin are all manner of incredible and fascinating things that work together, similar in every one of us (muscle, tendon, flesh, teeth, cartilage and bone) but distinctive to each of us to make us individual. When it comes to drawing, having looked at many faces, we instinctively draw what we believe we see...

So, for this next exercise get a photo of a loved one, or someone else you wish to draw (from a newspaper/magazine). Now turn the image upside down. This (partially) tricks our mind in to seeing something 'new'. Now, rather than drawing a face, consider you are drawing a landscape.

As before, look for the 'negative spaces' and shapes. Where is your outline? Is it solid or broken? Try not to get 'bogged down in detail' - keep it light, and try setting yourself time limits. This is a great way to 'loosen up'.

The image to the right shows how the person drew their portrait upside down first, then turned it the right way up... The left drawing captures more of the photo's character, don't you think?

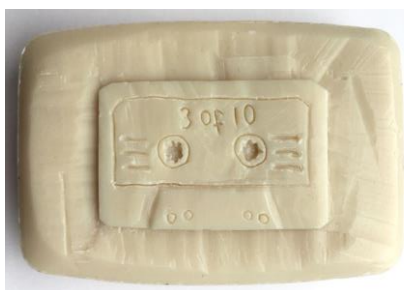


Soap carvings: Lee Cutter is one of the brilliant artists *Drawing Connections* has worked with recently. Some of you may be familiar with his work, which includes observational studies of things located within his cell, which he made out of prison issue bars of soap. All you need to make soap carvings is a bar of soap, a plastic fork and any other tool that can make a mark, such as a pencil. There are two main ways of carving soap:

1. **A relief** – this is a shallow carving, where you treat the block of soap as a canvas and draw directly into the surface.
2. **A sculpture** – this is where you remove larger chunks to reveal a more three-dimensional object.

Using your fork, pencil, or other tool, make a rough outline or shape by chopping, scraping and drawing into your bar of soap with one of the two types of carvings in mind. My advice would be to start delicate and slow, and really try to understand the material. Once you have an idea of what it could look like, you can now go in with some details. Don't worry if bits unexpectedly break away - soap can be a little unpredictable. Often the most interesting carvings are the ones where pieces have been broken off.

If you are having a hard time thinking of an initial idea to work with, you can always make a couple of small drawings on scraps of paper. I tend to make drawings on the side as I'm carving too, as it breaks the process up into stages and helps me to move forward. If you want to smooth off a surface, you can always add a tiny bit of water and rub the soap with your finger. If the carving is wet, it'll be softer to carve, which will create a different type of mark to carving dry soap. If you have access to any inks or paints, you can always rework them and colour the surface of the carvings. A poignant thing I often think about: the great Renaissance artist, Michelangelo, made large carvings from blocks of marble and once said that his job was to free the human form trapped inside the block!



Lee Cutter was encouraged in his creative work by **KOESTLER ARTS**, who supported him through a mentorship when he was ready for it. Lee now works with Koestler, helping to curate exhibitions of artworks submitted to their annual competition. Perhaps you would consider sharing some of your work through them? Do speak to prison and education staff if you wish to get involved. Latest information below:

We know there will be particular challenges in prisons because of the coronavirus pandemic. Your safety and wellbeing, and that of our communities, is of course the priority. If writing, song lyrics, art or design is one of the things that helps you in hard times, or if you want to try these things for the first time to get you through, please be reassured that the Koestler Awards will still go ahead. We're moving the Koestler Awards deadline right back to when we're all allowed back in the office, so prepare your work as usual and rest-assured **we will accept it with a new deadline, which we'll announce soon after we're all back**. To enter the 2020 Koestler Awards:

- Make your artwork as usual (remember small artworks and poetry made with limited materials in prison cells can be really great). If you've already sent entries, but now find you want to continue to use the Awards to motivate your creativity through this time, we are allowing an additional 5 entries per person – so 10 maximum.
- When things are back to normal, you'll be able to get entry forms from the library, education, the Koestler Arts website, prison staff, or by writing to us. Our Freepost address, for letters and small entries, is FREEPOST KOESTLER ARTS.
- Send them to us as soon after prisons and other organisations are getting back to normal – we'll announce a realistic deadline.

Enquiries: We have set up a service with Royal Mail to hold any post until then, so we will get any letters and parcels you've sent us safely - there will just be a delay in our response. We are still working, and can answer emails to info@koestlerarts.org.uk as usual. We can't wait to (eventually) see your entries – thank you!

A note on this year's themed category:

The Koestler Awards themed category this year is 'window.' Does this take on new relevance to you now? We think it will to your audience – people reading your poems, listening to your music, or looking at your drawings. Communities across the UK, and the world, are now looking out their windows at a changed world. Some are experiencing isolation and feeling cut off. Maybe they're appreciating different things than before...