



# INSPIRE

## Week One - Art making

Welcome!

Whenever I start something new, there's always a mixture of nerves and excitement. I suspect it's like that for you. Will this be a success or failure? If you know me, then there's a better chance you think this will work. If not, seeing is believing.

That's just how the brain works, even when dementia is getting in the way. We're constantly pulling information from our past experiences to inform what's next. When we don't have any experiences that help, or if there's a delay in accessing them, then we'll trigger the brain to help protect us. It's why starting things can be so difficult, whether we're trying to get out the door or just starting a new art project.

Art is tricky. It's based in creativity which is a delicate ability that can be squashed like a bug with judgment, criticism or being rushed.

So, I invite you to be open to trying and adapting this activity. I've been using it for years. It's companionable, adaptable and portable which means you can tailor its use to suit your needs, abilities and interests.

Edye



Back before I started Dementia Compass, I worked for a care company. I hosted activities and trained others to do the same. It was a great opportunity but it was also frustrating because I would often go home aware that there were residents who would be bored for the rest of the day, including Edna.

Edna was diagnosed with a dementia that was triggered at night. During the day, she would come find me because she was bored and lonely. She would sit while I did paperwork and visit. One day, I suggested that she work next to me. So, we identified this art activity for her to and she did it every day for years.

## ADAPTATIONS

This art activity is one of my favourite activities to do at home. It is **companionable**, **adaptable** and **portable**. I want to highlight ways you can adapt the art sheets to focus on cognitive ability and ways to match to your separate interests & abilities. With some consistency and time, you can use this to help structure your time and as a resource for some non-traditional respite.

### Companionable

You can work side-by-side either with the same art sheet, expressing yourselves differently or working together to make decisions. You can also choose art sheets that are different, taking inspiration from one another. If you have past art experience or different art interests, you're welcome to apply these same techniques to those.

### Confidence building

One of the challenges we can run into with cognitive impairment is a hesitation to start something new. It can be related to depression but also to a delay in retrieving memories that can inform this new experience so one can take action. Note, I used "delay" and not "disconnect"; this is important because there are other ways we can help access this information. When the brain isn't able to draw on past information to do something fast enough, it can lean on the experiences and trust of others. This works for you, too. If you feel nervous about trying this activity, you can lean into the confidence I have in it. And, then extend that confidence as you introduce it. A spirit of "We're in this together." is far better than "It's supposed to be good for us." The amygdala, one of our cognitive emotion centres, will use that confidence and uplifting spirit to release neurotransmitters to bolster our next steps.

### Side-by-side working

Working together side-by-side works like this too. I suspect you have other experiences of this already. The brain can use its muscle memory and the modelling it sees in each other to relax the pressure of pulling information from the past and use this information from the present. If you've participated in the Portals to the World programme, you'll recognise this technique from the art studio.

### Art expression

We know from years of practice that the brain can thrive in artistic expression even when it may be impaired in other ways. Scientists don't fully understand this; I think because the brain is so dynamic. The opportunity to express oneself, use physical movement, and focus is a very powerful combination.

When I worked with Edna, she started fairly simply. She didn't want a lot of colours or options when she started. With time, that changed, and she began to express herself more. Instead of working a selection of art sheets, Edna chose to work with only one, over and over again. She began to see how she could express herself differently and enjoyed the evolution.

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## PHYSICAL ADAPTATION

Unfortunately, we're not exempt from other physical changes to our bodies when we have a dementia diagnosis. So, I want to highlight some things to consider and ways we can adapt the art sheets to improve our experiences.

### **Visual impairment.**

You can adapt these art sheets to help reduce difficulties with eyesight. Here are some of the steps I have taken.

### **Strengthen the outline of the image.**

You can see from the butterfly art sheets that a part of the outline for colouring is bolder than the flowers. This can help if someone has difficulty highlighting what to focus on. It can be also very helpful to adjust the light on the image. Stronger will make the contrast more useful; lower light may help remove any confusing shadows.

### **Pre-colour a part of the image.**

Pre-colouring part of an image can be useful to help enrich the information available to the eyes or brain - it's a storytelling technique. You can see this in the Agra Travel Poster. If there is difficulty starting an activity like this, consider the Agra travel poster in one of its pre-coloured versions. You can even print out the three and point out the changes evident and discuss the next steps.

## DEXTERITY AND MOVEMENT

### **Small tremors**

If a slight hand tremor is getting in the way, try putting a folded facecloth under the wrist. A small bag of rice can also be helpful.

### **Spatial awareness and getting started.**

Sometimes it can be helpful to place the pen in hand on a piece of scratch paper to get started. It can help the brain connect to the movement without the fear of getting something wrong.

### **Holding pens and pencils**

Sometimes the pens and pencils are small enough to create discomfort or cramping, you can buy small rubber adapters to make them more comfortable, but first, try wrapping rubber bands at the point where the forefinger and thumb touch the tool.

### **Move frequently**

It can be easy to sit for a while without moving, but we need to. If you're finding that you can get lost in the activity, consider stretching or getting a drink every 30 minutes. Every time we move, get up, take a walk, shift gears, our synovial fluid flushes our joints and helps reduce pain and discomfort.

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## Easy step-by-step guide

### 1. Listen to the video guide.

Inside the video, I'll talk you through why this activity is so valuable and how you can adapt it to meet your abilities and interests. More details about how to adapt this can be found in this guide to adapt the art sheets depending on abilities.

### 2. Print out two copies of a favourite drawing for each of you.

Look at the images available and choose one or two that interest you. You can choose the same image or two different ones. Then, print two copies for each of you will take the pressure off of any mistakes. You can easily just start again without any hesitation.

### 3. Find a solid surface that you can work on.

Yes, you can work at a table to start, but ideally, you want to be able to take this with you so you can work in other comfortable spaces.

### 4. Unpack your coloured pens or pencils and lay them out on the table.

Before you start, take a moment to choose the colours you want to use for your image. Put the rest away.

### 5. Work side by side.

Set aside some time to work shoulder-to-shoulder - about twenty minutes. Talk about what you see, what ideas you have, where you might start. If there is hesitation to begin, try just making a mark somewhere on the sheet or begin together.

If you're able to dive right in, enjoy the focus and quiet together. But it may also take some time to get used to this experience, then discussion about what the image reminds you of can be helpful. The birds and butterflies are American but very similar to British species. How are the same or different?

### 6. Remain positive and creative, this is a time to explore.

This is not a time for judgment or criticism. This is a time to explore and become familiar with the tools. They will not be perfect, so learning what works and what doesn't is helpful for turning this into a useful activity you can turn to again in the future.

### 7. After twenty minutes, stop.

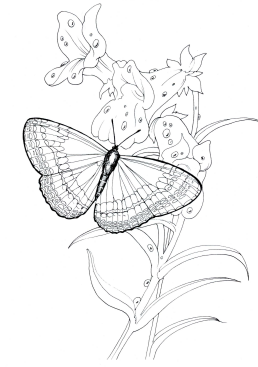
As you wrap up, talk about whether the tools are working for you. Do you need to do something different next time. It can take some time to get use to how much pressure to apply to the paper, whether the colour is too light or too dark. Work together to fix any challenges that come for you. If you want to talk through it, reach out to Edye.

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## Printables



American Red Spotted  
Purple butterfly



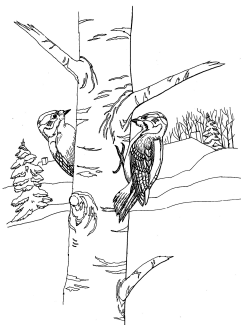
American White Admiral



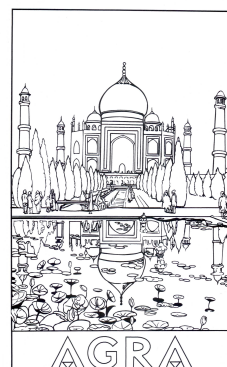
Sunflower bouquet Inspired  
by Vincent Van Gogh



Bouquet inspired by  
Henri Rousseau

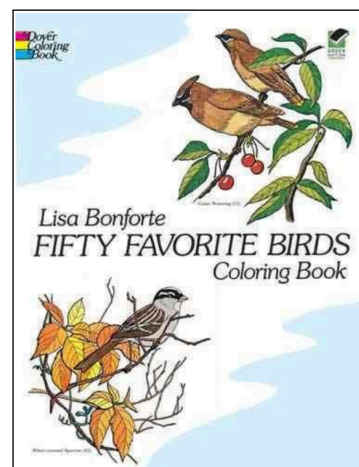
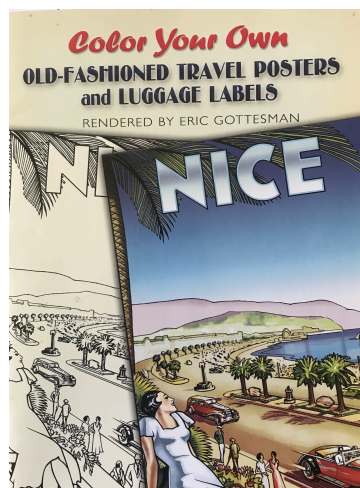
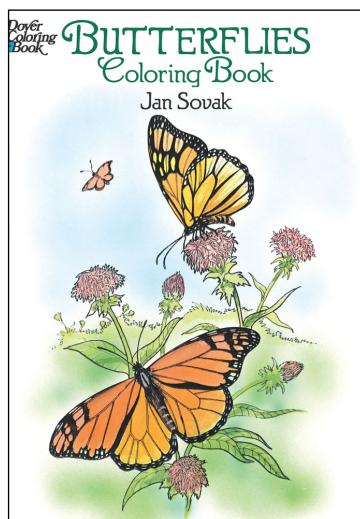


American  
Downy Woodpecker



Agra Travel Poster





### American Adult Colouring Books by Dover Publications

This artwork originated in a variety of colouring books published by Dover Publications. The sheets have been curated specifically for this activity. These art sheets have several very important qualities: they are adult in nature; they are not too complex but complexity can be built into them. And, they are relatable to real life.

You may have tried colouring books before but found them either childish or abstract. These are not. There are about a dozen of these books and they are available on-line at a reasonable cost, although this may change given the circumstance.

If you're interested in more sheets, please let me know. I'm happy to work with the publisher to arrange more availability.