

Hand Pattern Drawings



La Cueva de las Manos or “Cave of Hands,” Argentina. 5,000 BC

Background:

Hands are so marvelously shaped! There are four fingers of different lengths, very slightly webbed at their base (stop reading now: spread your fingers wide, notice, and smile). But the magic comes with the addition of the opposable thumb. It is the thumb that allows us to grasp pencils, brushes, tree branches, forks and spoons, medical equipment, bicycle handlebars and thousands of other things. Hands let us drive cars, cook dinner, play sports, perform surgery and make art. From pudgy baby hands to bony adult hands, hands are full of personality. This week, we will use our hands to make shapes and designs.

To create a hand pattern drawing, you can trace around your own hand over and over again by moving it around your drawing paper and letting the shapes overlap, or you can create a family “hands portrait” by letting everyone trace around their own hand on the same piece of paper. This will give you a variety of hand sizes and “personalities” to work with to create a great keepsake—a kind of snapshot of everyone in the family right now. (Might you even trace around your dog’s paw? Wow!)

According to Drexel University professor Girija Kaimal, “Art’s ability to flex our imaginations may be one of the reasons why we have been making art for thousands of years...since we were cave-dwellers.” Science journalist, artist, and cartoonist, Malaka Gharib, believes that “creating clears the head” and states that studies have shown that coloring inside a shape is more effective in boosting mood than coloring on a blank paper.

This week’s project allows us to color the many shapes created by tracing around our hands and letting our fingers overlap. There is no stress involved, but lots of opportunity to have fun and explore. Once overlapping hands have been drawn, you will need to decide how to finish the picture. Young children can simply color each shape a different color. Older artists might want to use a pen to create interesting patterns inside each shape. Hand pattern drawings can be a solo meditative endeavor or a family affair. Family members can take turns coloring in shapes; each person might want to use their own “signature” color. Don’t forget to date your work: it’s a snapshot in time!



Supplies:

Smooth paper, hand(s), pencil, markers or Sharpie pens, fine and thick

Procedure:

Place your hand(s) down randomly all over the paper and trace the outline with a pencil. For a more perfect drawing, you can have someone else trace your hand for you. Turn the paper often, making sure to overlap hand outlines so that you get an array of interesting shapes.

When you feel you have enough shapes, you are ready for the next step. You can color in each shape with marker or use a fine-tipped Sharpie to create a different pattern. If you do the hand pattern drawing as a family, here are a couple of fun variations:

- let each person choose a “signature” color or pattern. Fill in one section and then pass the paper to the next person, who will choose and fill in a section of their choice. Continue until all all sections are colored in. Look at the artwork as a family and talk about what you see.
- Make up your own “rules,” as if you were playing a game. For example, one person might say “I spy a really big shape” or “I spy a shape that looks like a curvy rhombus” and let others guess. When the shape is correctly identified, the person who guessed right gets to fill it in.

Hand pattern drawings are fun to share with extended family, especially those far away.

You can get similar interesting results by overlapping shapes of common household objects, such as silverware, cups, and keys, and coloring them in or filling them with patterns.