

## What Is a Mandala?

A mandala is a wondrous and meaningful design made in the form of a circle. The word *mandala* is from the classical Indian language of Sanskrit and, loosely translated, means “circle.” These special drawings were first created in Tibet over 2,000 years ago. Traditionally, they displayed highly intricate illustrations of religious significance and were used for meditation. Since then, they have been made by people from various cultures. In the Americas, Indians have created medicine wheels and sand mandalas. The circular Aztec calendar was both a timekeeping device and a religious expression of ancient Aztecs. In Asia, the Taoist “yin-yang” symbol represents opposition as well as interdependence. Over the past 2,000 years, mandalas have become a tool for displaying individual and cultural uniqueness the world over.

A simple definition of the mandala is that it is a circular drawing made to represent the harmony and wholeness of life or the wholeness of a person. Tibetans used mandalas for calming themselves and for thinking about the meaning of life. *Today, people often create mandalas to form a simple representation of who they are.* To make a mandala, a person begins by thinking of symbols that represent him or her. These symbols might include a dove to represent peace, a heart to represent love, or an open hand to represent friendship. The symbols a person chooses are then carefully drawn in the mandala.

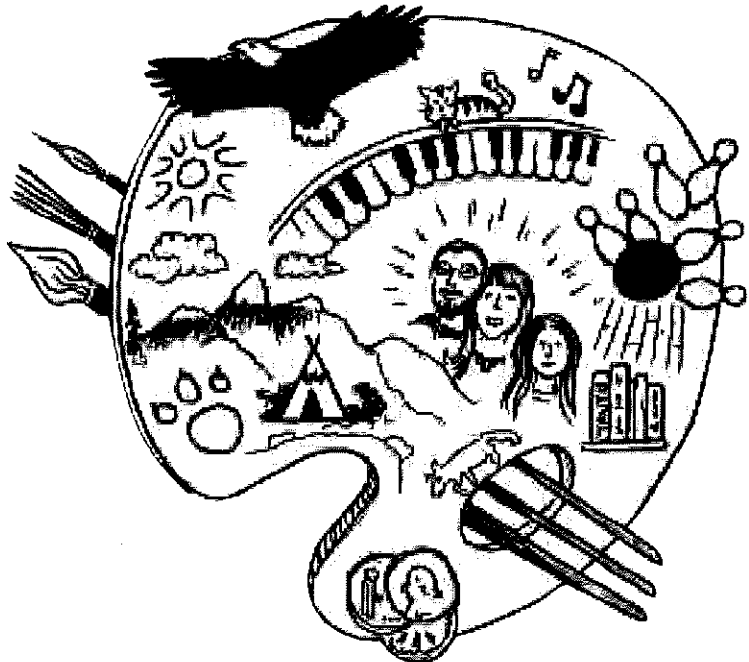
The shape of a mandala is a circle because a circle is the most simple and universal shape found in the world. It is the form of the eye, the sun, a snowflake. Also, since there is always a center to a circle, as you look at a mandala it exercises your mind and draws you into the center of yourself or your topic.

For more information about mandalas, visit these Web sites:

Aztec Calendar: [www.crystalinks.com/aztecalendar.html](http://www.crystalinks.com/aztecalendar.html)

Mandalas in Education: [www.mandalaproject.org/What/Index.html](http://www.mandalaproject.org/What/Index.html)

Mandala Links: [www.abgoodwin.com/mandala/ccweb.shtml](http://www.abgoodwin.com/mandala/ccweb.shtml)



<b>The Symbols of My Life</b>		
<b>Things Important to Me</b>	<b>Symbols Representing the Things Important to Me</b>	<b>What the Symbols Mean</b>
<i>Examples</i> Feeling safe Family Friendship	<i>Examples</i> Dove Heart Rainbow	<i>Examples</i> Peace in the world Love/unity Hope

# Mandala

**Goal:** To enhance students' comprehension and interpretation of a text through visual, symbolic, and collaborative activities.

**Rationale:** This strategy moves students from a literal understanding of a text to a metaphorical understanding, deepening their interpretations and personal connections. It allows students to link words and symbols as they negotiate their understanding.

**AVID Methodologies Used (WIC-R):** Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration, Reading

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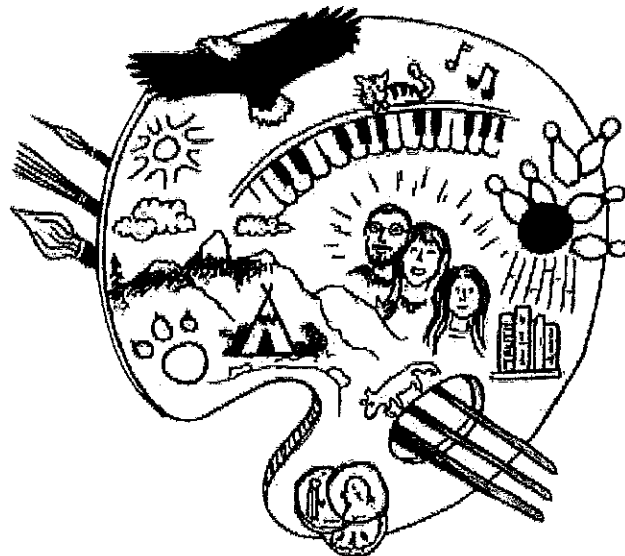
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**This is an example of the types of symbols that can be used in a mandala. What can you figure out about this person based on the images presented here?**



## Steps in creating a mandala:

1. Make a distinction between "signs" and "symbols".

Sign: It means one thing, only one thing

(Examples: a stop sign, a dollar sign, a traffic light)

Symbol: Means many things.

(Examples: A ring, a heart, a bird)

- You must think about its meaning.
- We must interpret its meaning.
- That's what makes symbols rich with meaning.

2. You are going to create a Mandala for a major character in the story or a historical figure. Choose a character/figure that you feel you could represent symbolically. Remember, you will focus on using only symbols in describing this character/figure.

3. On scratch paper, brainstorm images/symbols that represent the various sides of the chosen character.

4. After you have brainstormed, choose 5-6 symbols that you think are your strongest and should be placed on the mandala.

5. On a clean sheet of white paper, draw a large circle that fills nearly all of the paper.

6. Choose the symbol that you think best represents your character or that you think is most important to that character, and place that in the center of the circle. After that symbol is placed, now place the rest of the objects on the mandala. The most important being towards the center while lesser symbols should be more towards the outside.

7. After all symbols have been placed, write 1-2 paragraphs explaining the symbols you chose and why you placed them where you did on the mandala.

8. Color and decorate as you see fit.

9. Write a paragraph or two, using complete sentences, to explain the meaning of each symbol and why its location on mandala is significant.