FAMILY ACTIVITY: INKBLOTS

In this activity, youth will be getting messy creating inkblot images. Youth will be flexing their creative muscles by ‘seeing into’ inkblot images, and bringing their creative visions to life by transforming their inkblots through drawing. Youth will be engaging in multiple modes of communication through discussion, visual communication, and sharing feedback with their peers.

Creative thinking skills are not just used in artmaking, but are valuable for solving problems and navigating challenges across life, school, and work. Creative thinking skills are not fixed, and can be built like a muscle (a good metaphor to use when facilitating). Here, youth will develop creativity through a divergent thinking activity, where they’ll come up with multiple possible responses to the visual prompt (inkblot image), as well as through their own drawing decisions. Along with problem-solving, developing creativity has been shown to increase intrinsic motivation, deep understanding, joy, and positive emotional engagement in young people (2018, Jessica Hamlin and Joe Fusaro).

MATERIALS AND INSTRUCTIONS

**Materials**
- **Exemplar** - inkblot image created in advance, or created during the guided demonstration during the activity
- **Paper** - one sheet/camper, plus a few extra
  
  *Computer paper is fine, but thicker is better. Mounting computer paper on construction paper is also good.*
- **Liquid watercolor paint** - drippable, but still vibrant
  
  *This can DIY-ed, depending upon what you have available. See MODIFICATIONS for guidance.*
- **Paint dropping tool**
  
  *This can vary, depending upon what you have available. Good options include: pipettes (very inexpensive), straws, squeeze bottles (can be recycled), medicine droppers/syringes.*
- **Vessels for paint** - cups or bowls
  
  *If using squeeze bottles, skip this.*
- **Water (optional)** - if droppers will need to be rinsed out between uses
- **Markers** - any will work, but black Sharpies are best because they won’t run on top of the damp paint
- **Crayons or chalk (optional)**

**Instructions**
1. **Inkblot Painting**
   a. Drip paint
   b. Fold paper
   c. Set out to dry
2. **What is Creativity? And ‘Seeing Into’**
   a. Discuss creativity
   b. Look for what can be seen in an example inkblot
‘Creativity’ is an often misunderstood concept. It is NOT fixed, or something one is born with, but a skill we can build with practice. It can help to talk about it as a muscle you can flex or build.

Creativity is NOT just for artists, but is a valuable life, school, and professional skill; developing creative skills will help us better navigate any problems or challenges that we encounter.

One aspect of creativity is divergent thinking, which is what this exercise is designed to facilitate. Divergent thinking means you’re able to generate multiple connections to an idea (multiple possible solutions to a problem). You’re helping campers build this skill by having them come up with multiple things they see in the abstract inkblot.

3. Drawing Into
   a. Look into your individual inkblot
   b. Draw on your inkblot with Sharpies to transform them

Most youth will jump in right away, with little guidance (depending upon individual personalities, group dynamics, and the point in the camp session they’re at). Here are some strategies for campers who need extra support getting started:

◆ look at the image from different distances;
◆ remind them there is no right answer/this is just a quick drawing, and they can always try again later;
◆ encourage them to start out by just adding one shape or line at a time;
◆ give them a theme, like turning it into a character or animal;
◆ encourage them to outline areas (this will engage them in careful observation, and get their ideas going)

When giving positive feedback on their creative work, be specific and ‘praise the process, not the person.’ DO NOT say “you are so creative/talented” - this reinforces the myth that creative and artistic skills are fixed, when they actually can be developed through practice. Try, “I like the way you’ve shown your creativity by doing…”

QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE

1. What do you think creativity means?
2. What do you see in the inkblot?
3. Why do you think we see different things?

REFERENCES, MODIFICATIONS, & EXTENSIONS

Modifications

The materials in this activity are flexible, depending on what you have available!

- Liquid watercolor paint is a ready-to-use, water-soluble paint. It works well for this quick activity because it is drippy and because it quickly absorbs into paper (unlike thicker paint), so it will be ready to draw on with markers (even if it’s still damp). If creating DIY paints, make sure they are concentrated enough to be very colorful! Each camper will only use a small amount of paint. Here are some DIY options:
○ Purchased, something like this.
○ Food coloring + water
○ Tempera or acrylic paint + water
○ Soak dried out markers or colored craft sticks in water (start a couple days in advance)
○ Crayola watercolor cakes + water

Extensions

Materials/Tools
Abstract images for ‘seeing into’ can be facilitated through many experimental means. With more time and/or different tools and materials, there are many more ways to get messy! Some of these will work better with thicker paint, and can be done collaboratively.

- Marbles
- Wind-up toys
- Strings, rubber bands
- Bubble wands - Mix liquid watercolors with dish soap and blow paint bubbles!
- Body parts - E.g. do different dances with painted feet!
- Old shoes/flip flops
- Scrunched or folded pieces of paper
- Any other objects that can get paint on them can be used as a tool!
- Paint on big paper (like roll paper)
- Use experimental materials for paint (e.g. ketchup, mud, etc.)

Concepts
If facilitators are interested in connecting this activity to other ideas in age-appropriate ways, here are some suggestions:

S - Psychology (Rorschach tests are a way of analyzing someone’s perceptions); Neuroscience (human brains have evolved to see faces and beings in inanimate objects); Physics (what happens when paint is applied from different distances, or with varying amounts of force?); Chemistry (why do the materials behave like they do?)

T - Take pictures of images, then edit, share, or learn about pixels

E - Why do our tools work they way they do?; Design a new painting tool or machine

A - Abstract images can help us think creatively, because our brains fill in the blanks; painting and drawing are powerful techniques because they can be used to create any kind of image

M - Symmetry (a reflected image is created when we fold the paper); Geometry (organic vs. geometric shapes)