

## Indigenous Expressive Arts Exercise Invitation IV

**Title:** Collective Natural Element Mandala

**Age Range:** 3 to 100

**Objective:** To create a mandala or natural design as a collective group or family experiential. The objective is to connect to nature, seek natural elements found through a nature exploration, calling on a childlike sense of play and curiosity.

\*This natural mandala can be created by an individual as well as with a group.

**Mandala defined:** man·da·la

'mandələ/

a geometric figure representing the universe in Hindu and Buddhist symbolism.

○ Psychoanalysis:

a symbol in a dream, representing the dreamer's search for completeness and self-unity.

**Inspirational quote:** "Each person's life is like a mandala – a vast, limitless circle.

We stand in the center of our own circle, and everything we see, hear and think forms the mandala of our life." Pema Chodron

"The word mandala means 'circle'. A mandala represents wholeness, a cosmic diagram reminding us of our relation to infinity, extending beyond and within our bodies and minds. The mandala appears to us in all aspects of life, the Earth, the Sun, the Moon and more obviously the circles of life encompassing friends, family and communities".

<http://spiritualawakening.weebly.com/mandalas-what-are-they.htm>

### Materials Needed:

- A natural area to roam through and collect/gather natural elements
- Bag with pouches to gather varying elements (wildflowers, sticks, leaves, rocks, pinecones, berries)
- An surface to create your collective mandala (indoors or outdoors)
- Native flute music or classical music if mandala is completed indoors (if desired)

### Procedure:

1. Read the quotes above and meditate on your collective connection to the mandala and its meaning for you both collectively and individually.
2. Take a few moments to engage in nature by offering a group directive to connect to the natural environment. Take a walk as a walking meditation, following the breath in and out or noticing the sights, sounds, and scents as you connect to nature.

3. If desired by the group, take your shoes off and ground your body in the grass or dirt to feel the earth and charge your body.
4. Wander around and go where you feel led as individuals. Each person can follow their own inner guide to collect what they are drawn to. Allow yourselves to be with nature and go with the intention of gathering natural elements that speak to you.
  - \* Be curious, turning things upside down and looking at nature anew!
5. Gather what's beautiful, curious, forgotten, mystical, natural, wondrous, normally forgotten or perceived as devoid of beauty...
6. Once your family or collective community has gathered all the natural elements they desire, find a sacred circle or space to create the mandala.
7. In forming a mandala, it's nice to commence and give order to the organic process by placing some elements in the center of the area to create from the inside out of the circle. (If you are outside by a small pond or waterfall, this may be the center of your mandala as well). The mandala can be large or small, symmetrical or asymmetrical.
8. Allow the group to work in its own rhythm, creating in silence to engage in a meditative and collective creative process. (There becomes a kind of order to the chaos, as is the nature of mandalas).
9. Once the last of the elements is placed, feel free to move around and observe the mandala from all angles.
10. After the process, a group or family discussion about the meaning and experience around this process can bring closure.

\*I've led this activity with both my family as well as two different groups of colleagues. Each time, the process is different. Every result is beautiful and unique. There is a tremendous harmony that emerges in the group regardless of who engages in the process.

### **Special Consideration:**

When a group is forced to relocate the experiential due to weather or timing, etc., the energy and silence of the group can be severed. Bringing in meditative music or reading a quote about nature or oneness can create a holding space again and re-focus the group to create the mandala.

Group holding: Let go of rules, but create a small bit of structure and guidance for a group to help people feel playful and safe in the exercise.

Plan to be surprised! People who would not normally be inclined to do something like this can be very engaged and offer something very important to the collective. A child may create the order for the adults and an adult may bring the needed spontaneity. In the photo below, a child formed the word love from leaves with remaining earth elements.



