



# Mandala Project RESEARCH

What is a Mandala?  
How can you make one?

All images are from Carolyn Scrace's book [Zen-Doodling Mandalas](#)

What is a Mandala?

# Introduction

**Z**en Doodling Mandalas is designed to enable you to get the maximum enjoyment and relaxation from Zen Doodling. This book is packed with inspirational mandalas and bold, exciting designs aimed to encourage creativity and build artistic confidence. Step-by-step instructions show how to achieve various simple techniques.

## A fun activity

Zen Doodling is a really fun activity that anyone can enjoy doing. No special materials or equipment are needed; doodling can be done any time, anywhere. It is incredibly relaxing—simply let your mind wander and start Zen Doodling!

## Unique designs

This book explores basic color theory and shading techniques. It explains how to create patterns and includes advice on using themes and designing unique, inspiring mandalas.

## Self-discovery

Zen Doodling can become a journey of self-discovery. During prolonged periods of Zen Doodling the conscious mind will tend to drift and it's possible to achieve a heightened sense of self-awareness—of our relationship to others and our place within the universe.

“The aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance.”

Aristotle





# Mandalas and meditation

The word *mandala* comes from the Sanskrit language and means "sacred circle." Circles have been used as potent symbols by many cultures throughout history. In general, a circle symbolizes the cycle of life, wholeness, continuity, and harmony. Combining Zen Doodling with mandalas creates powerful images which can be used to aid meditation and help individuals focus inward.

## Sand mandala

Mandalas date back to the 4th century when they were originally created for the Buddhist religion. They were often in the form of scrolls carried by travelers, thereby spreading their popularity. Buddhist monks famously construct exquisite mandalas out of millions of grains of colored sand. Shortly after completion, the monks destroy the mandala to symbolize the impermanence of existence. They then disperse the sand in a river in order to symbolically share its blessing.



## Meditation

- Find a quiet spot that is neither too hot nor too cold.
- Make sure you can sit comfortably, and place your mandala at eye level in a well-lit position.
- Close your eyes. Breathe deeply, slowly, and evenly letting your whole body relax. Start to visualize the mandala; picture the center and try to focus your own energy inward to your heart. Keep still and breathe deeply until you are ready to open your eyes.
- Still breathing deeply, look at your mandala with your eyes slightly unfocused. Keep your gaze centered and try to see the entire image as a whole. Now start to explore the different parts of the mandala.
- Focus your eyes and begin to study the outer edges of the mandala, slowly working your way toward its center. Feel the power at the core of the design, close your eyes, and let the energy flow back and forth.
- If you feel tired at any point, stop the exercise, concentrate on your breathing and, when you are ready, slowly stand up.
- Try meditating for just two minutes. Gradually increase the time you devote to it - meditation works best if done on a daily basis.

# How do you make one?

Part 1: Reviewing the basics

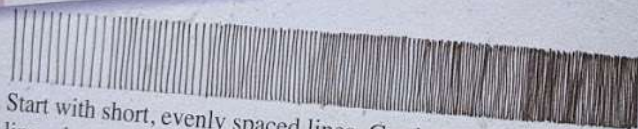


# Light and shade

B

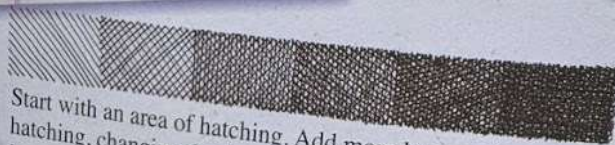
uilding up layers of tone to create the effect of light and shade adds depth to Zen Doodles. Practice different shading techniques such as hatching, cross-hatching, and scribble.

## Hatching



Start with short, evenly spaced lines. Gradually space the lines closer and closer together. The density of the lines creates the variation in tone.

## Cross-hatching



Start with an area of hatching. Add more layers of hatching, changing the line direction each time. (This is easier to do if you keep turning the paper around.)

## Scribble



The density of the scribbled line creates tonal variation.



This mandala design looks flat and dull, whereas the shaded version (below) has depth and vibrancy.



Added shading makes these yellow shapes appear rounded.



The cross-hatching on this pattern makes the boxes look solid.

Decide on a constant light source before you start to add shading.

Light source

Graduated shading makes the plaited border look 3D.



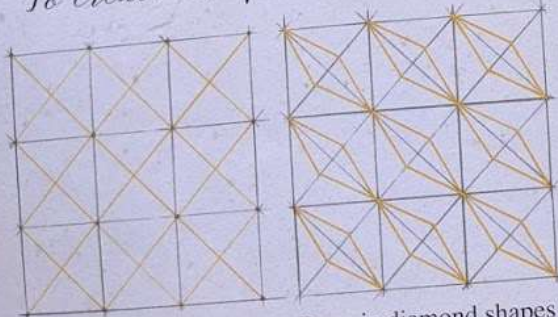
By adding shading on and around the leaf shapes, they appear to be rounded and raised above the rest of the pattern.



# Deconstructing

**D**oodling complex patterns can appear daunting at first. However, by studying the basic shapes, you can break the design down into simple, easy-to-draw components.

To create the pattern below:

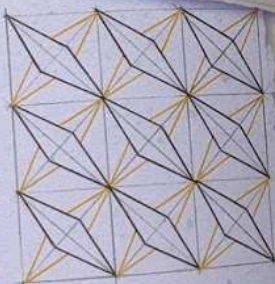


Draw a pencil grid. Add diagonal lines as shown.

Draw in diamond shapes on one set of diagonal lines using a fineliner pen.



Use gel and felt-tip pens to color in the design (left). Create dramatic results by using a range of tones from gray to black. Try another color scheme and add some simple doodles (right).

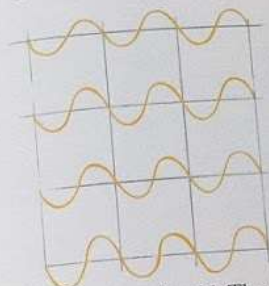


Add diamond shapes on the opposing diagonal lines.

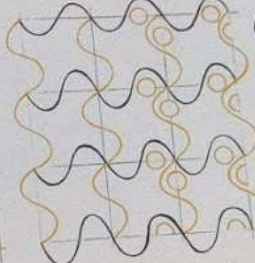


Note: Yellow lines indicate the next step.

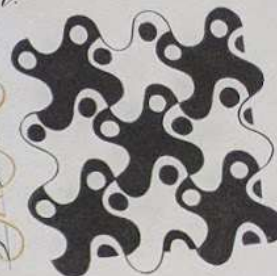
For this jigsaw-shaped pattern:



Draw a pencil grid. Then draw in a wavy line and repeat, as above.

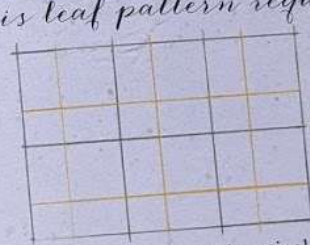


Add more wavy lines in the opposite direction. Draw in circles.

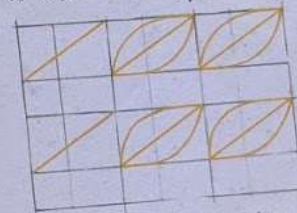


Color in alternate shapes using black and white gel pens and felt-tips.

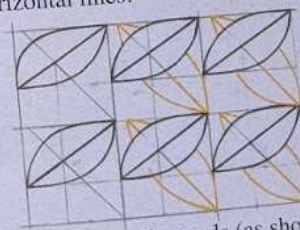
This leaf pattern requires a more complex grid:



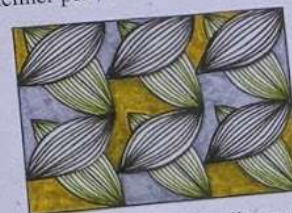
Draw a pencil grid. Add vertical and horizontal lines.



Draw in diagonal lines. Using a fineliner pen, add leaf shapes.



Draw in more diagonals (as shown). Using a fineliner pen, add bigger leaf shapes behind the first set.



Color in the pattern. Use line work and flat color to create interest.



# Pattern building

Start by drawing a simple line. Add a short line, turn it into a triangle, add a dash, then a dot... Relax and enjoy the enriching experience of Zen Doodling!

The triangle shape that inspires this progressive doodle quickly turns into a diamond that is then embellished with stripes and curls.

From a diamond shape the pattern develops into a cube and then an elaborate heart shape. The possibilities are endless!



See how a single doodled line can develop into a series of striped shells.

The line becomes a curl, the curl becomes a spiral...

Before long you have created a myriad of patterns to Zen Doodle! Begin Zen Doodling by drawing a bold curving shape, then start to fill it with patterns.

...and develops into a flower... then a star...





# How do you make one?

Part 2: The Creative Process Behind making a THEMED Mandala

# An Artist's Full Creative Process

A strong design doesn't happen by accident, it's planned. The next bit of information takes you on one artist's journey from beginning to completion of their mandala.

NOTE: Your project is expected to show this level of thought and planning. You are welcome to follow their process step by step but can also add some of your own processes in as well.



## Asymmetrical cat

**T**raditionally a mandala has a symmetrical design that radiates out from a central point. Asymmetric mandalas are now becoming increasingly popular. They still evolve from a central point which reflects our own inner core. The act of drawing a mandala releases creative energies and helps an artist to relate and connect with everything in the universe.

### Focus

The cat in the center of this design is the focus of the mandala, while the other cat shapes radiate outward. The asymmetry of the design is due to the central cat's pose, and in particular its tail, which curls down out of the picture. The coloring of the four smaller cats also creates imbalance.

“ The cat went here and there  
And the moon spun round like a top,  
And the nearest kin of the moon,  
The creeping cat, looked up. ”

*William Butler Yeats*

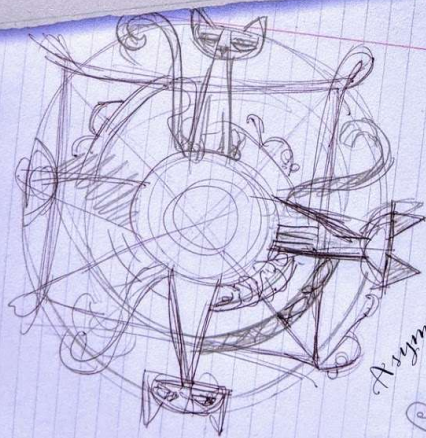




## Planning with a pencil rough

Carry a notepad with you at all times for scribbling and doodling any ideas that come to you. The pencil planning stage can be the most exciting part of your design! Use scrap paper so you never feel that it's too good to mess up. Make lots of thumbnail sketches of your ideas and designs.

### Thumbnail sketches



Symmetrical cat?

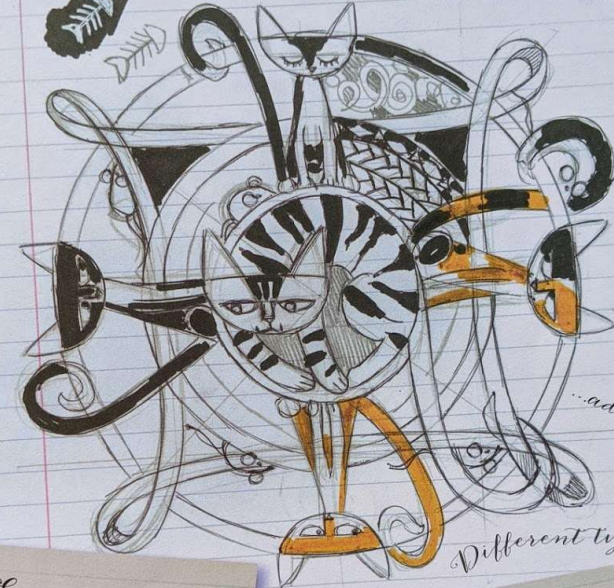
Asymmetrical cat!



### Rough sketch

Fishbone pattern

Asymmetrical mandala



...add mice?

Different types of cat

### Experiment


When you are happy with your thumbnail sketch you may want to draw a slightly more detailed version. Experiment with tonal values and try contrasting areas of black and white. Think about the colors you might use. A limited palette often works best.

### Wish list

Cats, mice, fish pattern, herringbone, fishbones, different types of cats, stripy, ginger, patchwork, Cat's cradle wool patterns? Curvy patterns - Art Nouveau...



## Structure

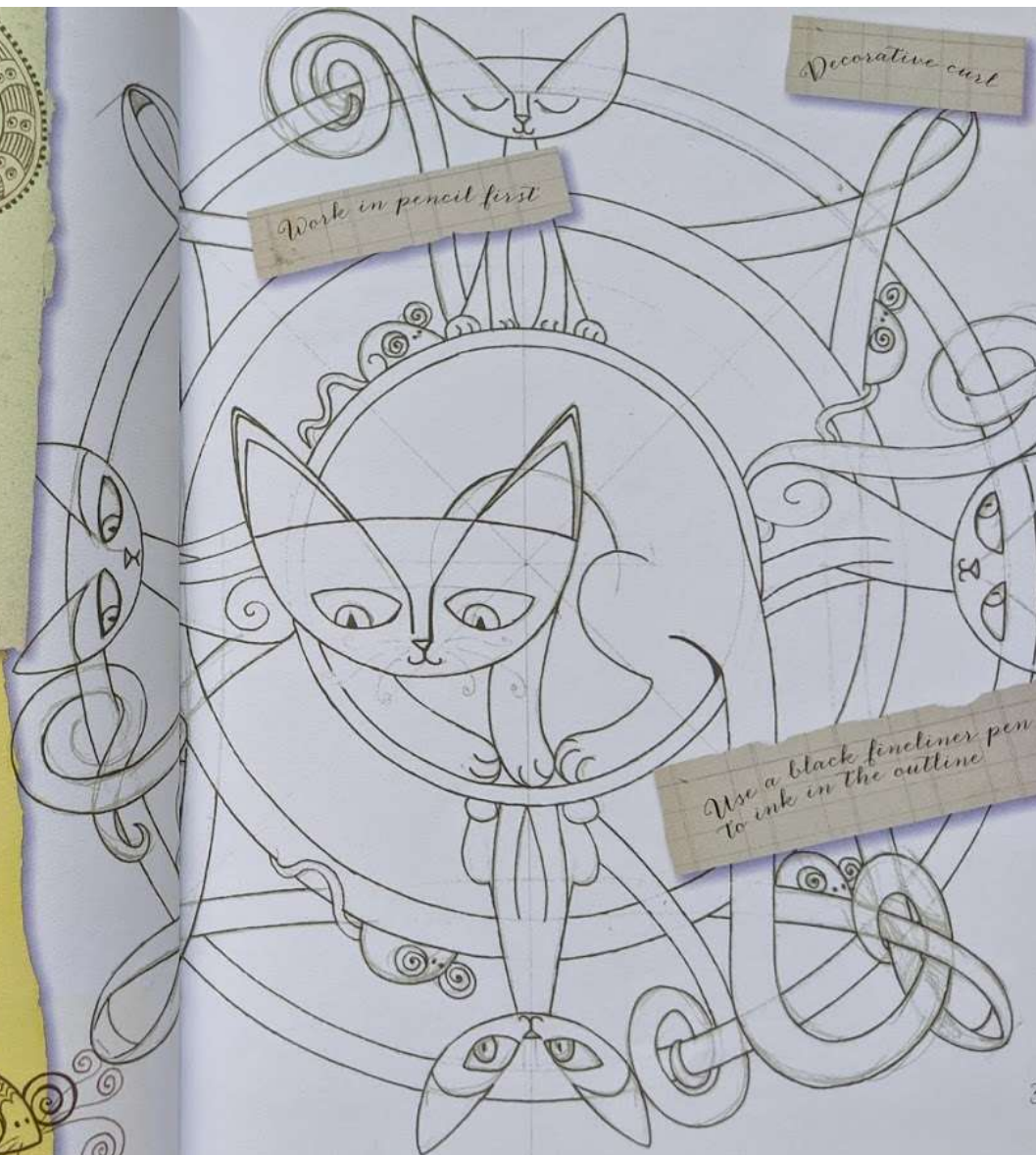


Once you have mastered drawing the main elements of your mandala, start sketching out your finished design. Think about how a cat watches a mouse and draw in the cats' eyes following different mice in the picture. Have fun with the cats' tails by varying the way they curve and wrap around the picture frame.



### Handy Hint

Use a pencil and compass to draw a series of circles. Take a ruler and draw a vertical and a horizontal guideline through the center point. Now add two more guidelines midway between them. These lines will help you to position the cats. Add a decorative curl between each cat.



Decorative curl

Work in pencil first

Use a black fineliner pen to ink in the outline



## Doodle the cat

The simple act of stroking a cat is known to reduce physical and emotional stress. Cats naturally exude calming, positive energy, which makes them the ideal subject for a mandala. If you own a cat, draw in anything that you identify with it: favorite foods, toys, the pattern of its coat. Try to think like a cat as you Zen Doodle into your design.

### Patterns

Now the fun really begins. Relax and start to Zen Doodle. Begin by blocking in some of the black areas using a marker pen. Add pale brown felt-tip to the cat's markings, using fineliner pens for detailed work. A herringbone pattern makes an apt choice for doodling the central border.

Herringbone pattern

Erase the pencil lines

Use gray felt tip to add depth to the pattern



## Making patterns

**H**ave some scrap paper handy for trying out patterns and color schemes before you start doodling the finished mandala. Keep all your experimental scraps—they will prove invaluable for future doodles.



# Inspiration Ideas

Looking at what other's have done before helps you get an idea of what is possible and might spark an idea for you.







