

DRAWING EXERCISES

First you must find what you would like to draw with. Pen and paper will do (I like to find my best black ink pen), or download the Procreate app to your phone, or, if you're stuck with nothing to hand, a finger in the dirt will always suffice.

Before you start, please consider why you are drawing. Drawing can be an essential tool for thinking. It can be used not just as a means to describe but also as a means to discover how to see anew. Many people think they can't draw but I insist that everyone can draw. Just think of what you used to produce as a small child. Drawings do not need to be beautiful and perfectly accurate to be meaningful. To draw well, one does not have to conjure up the perfect depiction; you need only find a good use for why you're doing the drawing. Stick men and symbols can be wonderful tools for discovery, as can pure abstraction. I encourage you, in these drawing exercises, to be confident that the marks you make are not to be compared with da Vinci, Monet, or even your friend, mother, or brother. They are yours to own and to be proud of.

To begin, loosen up a little with some scribbles. Take your piece of paper and for ten seconds draw all over it without thinking about what you're doing. Scribble everywhere. Marks can be gentle, large and angry, or explorative. The point is to not be afraid to start expressing and to begin to see what you can do. You might feel silly, but do this a couple of times over, taking longer with it each time. If nothing else, scribbling helps one overcome the initial fear of the empty page.

Exercise 1:

Alisse writes about invoking ancestors from any discipline and encouraging a deeper, broader perspective. Begin to imagine what this looks like in your life and think about how you would like to express it visually. Try to draw what it means to think more broadly and to access knowledge from different disciplines. You may want to use abstract marks to represent what you mean, or you could draw yourself on the page and the imaginary broad world of different disciplines overlapping.

Exercise 2:

In chapter I, the characters talk about illumination. Have a look through the book and choose a page that you feel has brought you a new kind of illumination. Begin to imagine what new understanding looks like and draw your version of illumination. You could use abstract marks, symbolic pictures, or even create a small comic strip of what it was like to experience this illumination.

Light in Dark Times: The Human Search for Meaning
Written by Alisse Waterston and Illustrated by Charlotte Corden

Exercise 3:

In chapter II, the characters speak about confronting their own motivations, beliefs, prejudices, and commitments. We all live in tension with what we'd like to do in and for the world and the constraints under which we live our lives. What does it look like for you to face the contradictions? Try to draw what it means to live and be in this tension of operating "within the logics of the larger system" while trying to do good in the world.

Exercise 4:

Where do you like to think? Where is your mind at its thinking best, and under what circumstances do you find yourself unable to think? Draw one of your favorite thoughts, and then draw a thought that you find hard to think about.

Exercise 5:

In chapter III, Arendt speaks about forming "projects of the will." What, if any, are your "projects of the will"? Draw yourself with others turning your "projects of the will" into reality.

Exercise 6:

In chapter IV, the characters speak about the dangers around the political facts of lying and truth. Imagine what these dangers look like. How would you illustrate them? How would you draw what it means to conflate opinion with truth? How would you depict in drawing form what radical deception looks like? These are difficult concepts, so don't think too hard about how to define them. Instead, draw the first thing that comes to mind. Have a look at what you've drawn and see if you can learn from it, then draw it again. You might be surprised at how quickly you can develop your own visual language to describe very complex ideas.

Exercise 7:

Eduardo Galeano asks the reader to exercise their "right to dream." What are your dreams for our world? Take the time to draw what a "livable future" looks like. What sort of things would be happening? Who would be there? How would we realistically live in this world? "How do you want to be human?"

Exercise 8:

As a celebration of hope, imagine and draw what "mutual understanding on a gigantic scale," looks like. You could use a lot of color or simple lines, you could think about it abstractly or define it by portraying a scene that sums up what this looks like to you. However you draw this, draw with hope and celebration, and move that feeling through your body to the page.