

Drawing as Therapy

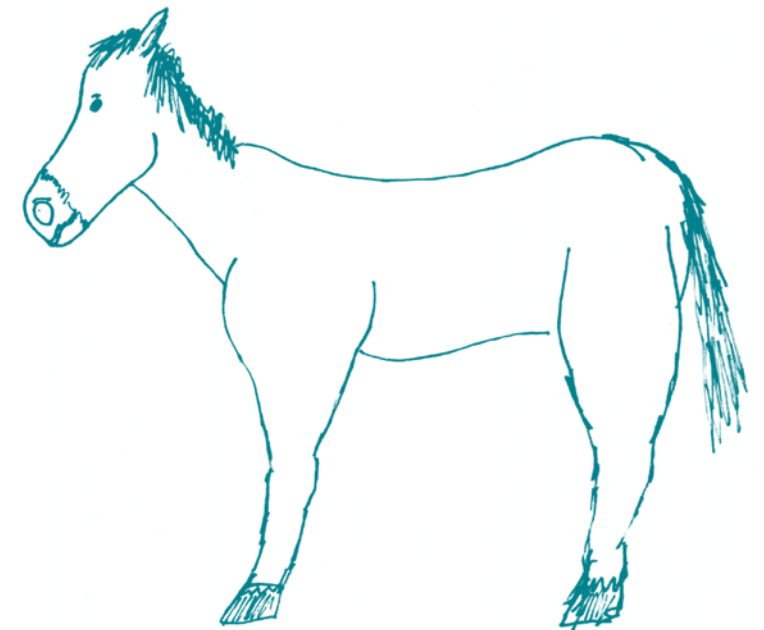
The School of Life

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Introduction

This is a drawing book for people who can't draw. It won't help you get any better at drawing. It won't teach you how to sketch an outline, shade an object, use proper perspective or correct proportions. There are no hints on how to produce limbs like Leonardo or torsos like Titian. All it aims to do is to encourage you to draw – or, perhaps more accurately, to encourage you to draw *again*.



4 Memory

In a sense, every picture is a memory – the likeness of a time, place, or person, or a feeling now lost or changed forever. We draw to help preserve or summon the past. Although few artists draw entirely from memory, many are drawn to subjects that in some way embody their childhood and youth: boyhood landscapes, or girlhood figures.



In certain ways, art is a more suitable medium for capturing our pasts than writing. Many of our memories – particularly our earliest – are primarily visual, or sensory. What we may struggle to capture or convey through language may be more suited to embodiment in shapes, lines and symbols. The act of drawing from memory, delving into the recesses of our minds, may dredge up details and impressions we may not have expected.

In the following exercises, you'll be creating drawings inspired by memories. You won't necessarily be asked to create an image of the past (in the matter of a photograph, say) but rather to focus more on evoking the sensual character of a particular time; not a record of how it looked, but a representation of how it felt, and continues to feel to this day.



My Sketchy First Memory

Draw your earliest memory. It is likely to be a hazy, sensory memory, not an event or an incident, but a recollection of a particular image (a patterned wallpaper; your mother's face) or sensation.

Don't add detail where none exists: capture the sketchy nature of your memory.

My Bedroom

Draw your childhood bedroom from memory. Try to include all the details you remember: perhaps the pattern of the bedspread, or the shape of the bedside lamp, or the favourite toy you kept by your pillow.



My Parents

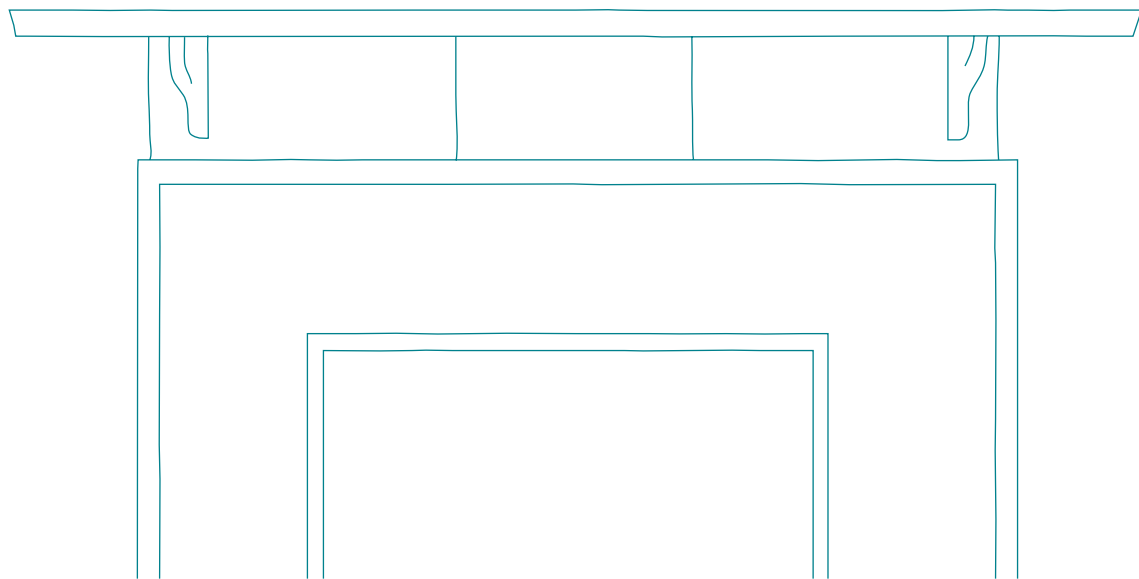
Take what you know about your parents when they were young, before they had you. Consider them with compassion and curiosity. Then try to draw them. Beside the picture, jot down what you imagine to have been their vulnerabilities and their strengths. Enjoy making a properly rounded portrait, psychologically speaking.

Imaginary Friend

As children, many of us had imaginary friends – an invented, benevolent companion we conjured to alleviate our loneliness, act as our confessor, and soothe us in difficult moments.

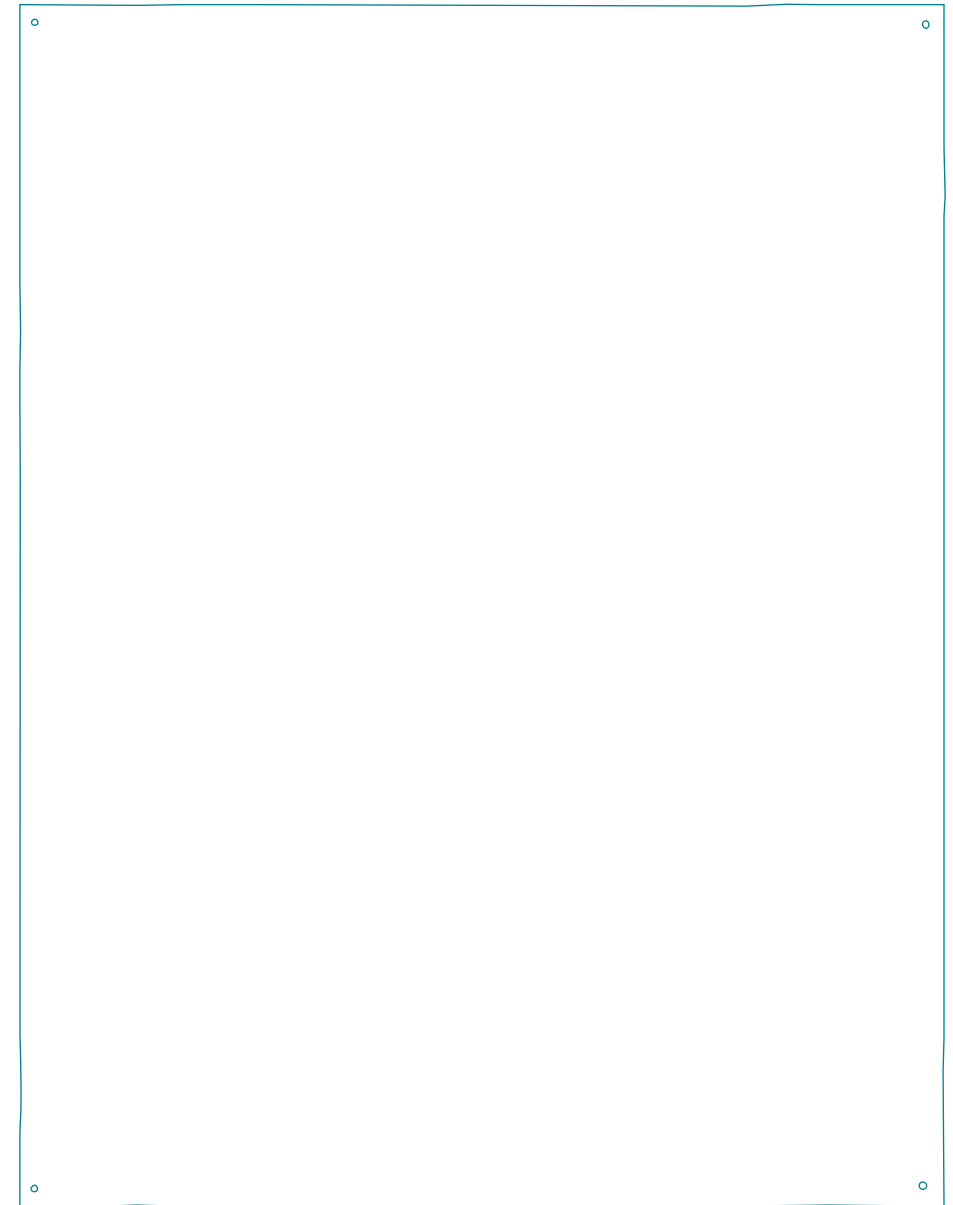
If you had one, draw your imaginary friend. Were they a human, or an animal, or maybe an invented creature? Did they wear a particular outfit?

If you didn't have one, draw the person, animal or object that played a nurturing role in your life – someone you could confide and place absolute trust in, and who you regularly went to for comfort.



Lost and Found

Draw a formerly treasured possession you have now lost – perhaps a favourite toy, or a family heirloom. Alternatively, it might be a psychological quality (hope, innocence or trust). Preserve in a portrait what has been lost in the world.



First Love

On this poster, draw the first person that you remember romantically (or sexually) desiring, as if they were hung on the wall of your bedroom as a teenager. As you draw, try to focus your mind on what it was that sparked your interest, and how this might have shaped your present tastes and choices in love.



My Happiest Memory

Draw your happiest memory. Try to capture not only the objective reality of the situation, but how it made you feel. You may wish to include abstract elements – shapes, squiggles, colours, etc.

My Most Painful Memory

Draw your most painful memory: a moment that marked you forever, the pain of which can still be felt today. Try to capture the feelings it conjured as well as the real-life details.



Old Wounds

Cover this page with scars of various sizes, from tiny nicks to gaping gashes. Each one should correspond to a painful episode in your past, which you might write down beside it. Their size and severity should correspond to the pain and significance of the hurt they have caused you. Reflect on how many scars you have sustained and on how, despite them, you have managed to persevere.

Remember This...

Despite the vastness of our memory, most of what we experience – incidents, days, weeks, perhaps even whole years of our lives – will eventually be lost.

Pick a recent memory that you wish to hold onto. It need not be anything significant – just a small moment of pride or pleasure that would otherwise be lost to time. Preserve it here for posterity.