

What is the Zentangle® drawing method and why is it being taught at PTDW?

By Analisa Bevan

What is the Zentangle Method?

The Zentangle® method of drawing is a mindful art practice. The Zentangle method, created by Maria Thomas and Rick Roberts, uses simple, structured patterns that are easy to learn to create beautiful drawings. These patterns are called Tangles. This non-representational art form generates deep focus and relaxation. Ideal for “artists” and “non-artists”, Zentangle art is surprisingly satisfying given its simplicity.

So how does this relate to PTDW?

I thought to ask Pamela if I could teach the Zentangle Method at PTDW after observing her teaching style and her interactions with students over many years of watching my daughter take ballet, contemporary and tap classes and seeing several parallels between this art form and dance instruction.



Everything is possible one stroke at a time

The Zentangle Method teaches that everything is possible one stroke at a time, meaning that if you break down the technique enough, even the most complex of Tangles (or dance choreography) can be mastered. This reminds me of how beginning dance students watch the advanced classes in awe wondering if they'll ever be able to dance such complex choreography with strength and grace. Watching young dancers over the last several years and thinking about how they're dancing has developed and knowing it boils down to learning to dance one step at a time I see a connection to so many things in life that we think are hard or impossible, yet when we're given the steps, they become accessible and doable.

No mistakes

Of course, we do things we don't mean to do sometimes. What we do with those actions is the difference between road blocks and new opportunities. The Zentangle method teaches that there are no mistakes; a line drawn that doesn't conform to the pattern is an opportunity to take the drawing in a new direction, a challenge to incorporate a new pattern and a quest to carry on and see the project through to the end without giving up. The parallels with dance performance are strong here. When a dancer missteps they're taught to not walk off stage (crumple up the paper), they carry on, in the moment figure out how to adapt and see the dance through to the end. And of course, with practice the muscle memory and focus improve the artist or dancer's ability to carry out their planned patterns/choreography.



Don't hurry, be deliberate, breathe.

When drawing using the Zentangle tangles we develop a rhythm that draws the artist into a very focused state, like a meditation. The patterns are repetitive and often detailed, some very linear and others very organic. The more relaxed, unhurried and deliberate we approach them, the better they work out. Throughout we're reminded to breathe and relax. There's a zone we get into that to me looks a little like when I see dancers really feeling the music and carrying out their choreography. Both art forms provide more to the artist than the final product.

More about the Zentangle Method

The Zentangle method of drawing (or doodling) is organized to be simple to learn, easy to access with the only required supplies being a pen and paper. Being non-representational there are no expectations for what the finished product should look like, freeing the artist from judgement about "getting it to look right". And while the Zentangle method lays out a process and provides guidance with a library of predefined patterns, it doesn't have rules that must be followed, allowing for endless creativity. A traditional Zentangle tile is a 3 ½ inch by 3 ½ inch cardstock with a variety of tangles drawn in black ink with graphite pencil shading.



The process of tangling can be quite meditative, or it can be quite focusing. At times when I need to quiet my mind, I can tangle for 30 minutes and settle my thoughts. And when I need to listen carefully and analyze situations, I find tangling around my meeting notes exceptionally effective at ensuring I am paying close attention (counter intuitive, I know, but true).

About the class

The Zentangle class being offered at PTDW starting this fall will be an 8-week exploration of the Zentangle method. Each week the class will learn several new patterns, practice making Zentangle art, expand to techniques using color, shading and highlighting. We'll explore tangling on traditional tiles, round "Zendalas" and finally tangle the world with a student choice of media.

About the Teacher

Analisa Bevan is a Certified Zentangle Teacher who's been tangling for nearly ten years. She's excited to share her passion for this mindful non-representational art form that can be done anywhere with almost any writing instrument and surface. She's found deep joy in making Zentangle art ranging from standard 3 ½ inch square tiles to embellished shoes and one of a kind holiday cards to the most intriguing meeting notes margins. In her other job as a regulator at the California Air Resources Board she's found that using Zentangle doodling has helped her focus and contribute critically to her work.

