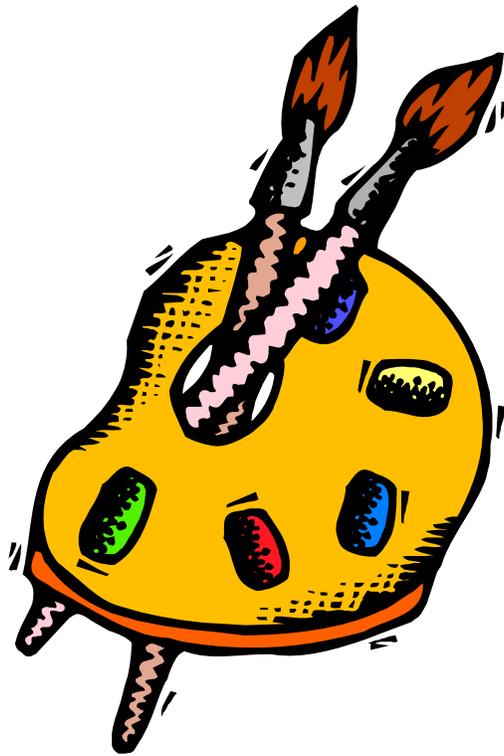


THE TRAINING INSTITUTE
FOR ENGLAND

ARTS MANUAL FOR
TUTORS OF BOOK 1



Promoting the Arts at the Grassroots: Creative Exploration in Study Circles

Unit 3 of Book 7 is called 'Promoting the Arts at the Grassroots'. Section 1 of this unit clarifies the role of artistic endeavour in study circles: You should not think of it as entertainment or as an extracurricular activity; rather it is *'an essential element enhancing the spiritual development of the participants'*.

The 27th Dec letter also mentions our attitude towards arts in the new 5 Year Plan:

"a graceful integration of the arts into diverse activities enhances the surge of energy that mobilizes the believers."

The term 'artistic endeavour' implies the use of all arts such as drama, painting, poetry, music and storytelling. But it also includes crafts of every description, from pottery to puppet-making, carving to crochet.

Bahá'u'lláh said:

"One of the names of God is the Fashioner. He loveth craftsmanship. Therefore any of His servants who manifesteth this attribute is acceptable in the sight of this Wronged One. Craftsmanship is a book among the books of divine sciences, and a treasure among the treasures of His heavenly wisdom. This is a knowledge with meaning, for some of the sciences are brought forth by words and come to an end with words." (Cited in *Extracts from the Writings concerning Arts and Crafts*, published in The Compilation of Compilations [Ingleside: Baha'i Publications Australia, 1991], vol. 1, p. 1)

In your study circle you may use the arts in a variety of ways: as a tool of learning – for example to assist with a difficult piece of memorisation or to illustrate a particular concept or piece of information; as an expression of the joy and harmony developing in your group, or to bring joy to the hearts and spirits of the participants; to develop a deeper appreciation of art and crafts among your participants; to help the participants discover in themselves some of the gifts and talents bestowed on them by God.

Bahá'u'lláh said:

"The one true God, exalted be He, loveth to witness handiworks of high craftsmanship produced by His loved ones. Blessed art thou, for what thy skill hath produced hath reached the presence of thy Lord, the Exiled, the Wronged. Please God every one of His friends may be enabled to acquire one of the crafts, and be confirmed in adhering to what hath been ordained in the Book of God, the All-Glorious, the All-Wise." (Cited in *Extracts from the Writings concerning Arts and Crafts*, published in The Compilation of Compilations [Ingleside: Baha'i Publications Australia, 1991], vol. 1, p. 1)

However ultimately your study circle has a single purpose – to empower the believers *'morally and spiritually in their resolve to tread a path of service in the Cause and to humanity'*, so your use of the arts must always have this end in view.

It is hoped that the ideas in this small arts manual will stimulate artistic endeavour in your study circles. You can use the suggestions as described in the book, or you can allow them to spark your own creative initiative. The manual doesn't include the many games which can be used in study circles since these can be found in other sources.

General Arts Resources on the Web:

There are tons of arts ideas for Ruhi on the excellent website www.ruhiresources.org

<http://www.prayerwindows.com/index.html> – and go to ‘Creative Activities’ for some great ideas on simple, artistic activities suitable for use in study circles

<http://www.painterskeys.com/quotations.asp> - for some interesting quotations about art from thinkers and famous writers

ARTS IDEAS FOR BOOK 1:

'REFLECTIONS ON THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT'



UNIT ONE: 'Understanding the Bahá'í Writings'

The purpose of this unit is to develop the capacity to read the Bahá'í Writings and to meditate on their meaning in order to fulfil the obligation of studying the Writings every day. If you have participants who are not yet Bahá'í you may want to supply them with some of the Writings so that they can fulfil both the purpose and the practice of this Unit. This can be done creatively.

Idea 1



Print off some extracts from the Writings on to A4 sheets. Invite your participants to pick some that appeal to them. Then encourage them to beautify their sheets using crayons, markers, paints, rubber stamps, glitter glue, or other art and craft materials. Be prepared to give the lead yourself, since many of your participants may not have used art and craft materials since childhood, and may be shy about doing so now.

You could prepare by doing a little research into the ancient art of illumination, using perhaps illustrations from the Book of Kells to stimulate ideas and inspiration. (see www.aon-celtic.com for ideas and a gallery)

Idea 2



In section 5 you are asked to memorise some quotations. You can use this opportunity to explore with your participants their attitude to memorisation, and if there is difficulty or anxiety, then simplify it by learning a quotation to music. Somebody in your community may have put one of the quotations to music already, or there may be a musical person in your group who can lead the participants in putting the quotation to music on the spot. Alternatively you may invite a musician to come to your study circle for the night to assist.

"Singing melodies will bring animation and happiness to the world of humanity, the hearers will be delighted and joyful and their deeper emotions stirred. But this gladness, this sense of emotion is transitory and will be forgotten within a short time. However, praise be to God, thou hast blended thy tunes with the melodies of the Kingdom, wilt impart solace to the world of the spirit and wilt everlastingly stimulate spiritual feelings." (Abdu'l-Baha, cited in *The Importance of the Arts in Promoting the Faith*, comp. Cited also in Book 7)

Idea 3

Section 6 of 'Understanding the Bahá'í Writings' asks you to carry out a number of exercises. You could use the arts in Exercise 2 by having the participants read dramatically the sentences "Don't bother me!", "Why don't you understand this?", "Would you care to wait, please?" and so on. Encourage them to explore the emotions they feel as they say the sentences with in a different tone and pace (as actors change their voices to engender differing emotions).

Idea 4

Ask the participants to research stories from different cultures and historical periods about truthfulness. It is a theme that has run throughout the history of mankind. Alternatively, you as the tutor could research this and then encourage the participants to prepare to tell the stories to the group. The book **'Stories Told by Abdul-Baha'** (compiled by Dr Amir Badiei and available from the Baha'i Resources website) has a wealth of stories about truthfulness as told by the Master of all story-tellers!

Idea 5

Exploring the consequences of back-biting can be very powerful, and drama is especially suited to do so. You could ask the participants, perhaps in 2s or 3s, to create a dialogue, or series of short scenes that demonstrate the effects of backbiting on the backbiter and the person being talked about.

UNIT TWO: 'Prayer'

The purpose of this unit is to understand the importance of daily prayer and to develop the required attitudes of prayer. To memorise 5 prayers and understand their meaning.

Idea 1



Make simple prayer beads by bringing along a selection of colourful beads and some string. These can be purchased easily and cheaply at any arts and crafts shop.

Idea 2

Use art and craft materials (glue, glitter, coloured paper, stickers, crayons, paints, threads etc) to create 'prayer cards' – a decorated card on which you include the text of a prayer. You may give these as gifts to those with whom you study a prayer as part of the practice of this unit.

Idea 3

Use art and craft materials to create a different sort of prayer card – perhaps a type of greeting card with the text of a Healing Prayer, which the participants can mail to a friend or family member who may be ill.

Idea 4

Read the poem on the website address below about prayer from a Christian angle to the participants (<http://www.gracegems.org/12/art.htm>) and then invite them to write their own poem about what prayer is to them. Encourage them to use creative images that appeal to the senses (sight, sound, touch and taste).

UNIT THREE: 'Life and Death'

The purpose of this unit is to understand that life is not the changes and chances of this world, and its true significance is found in the development of the soul.

Idea 1

Having read the purpose, but before studying the unit, invite the participants to write a poem about their own soul. Or, you could ask them to depict their soul in an image that they feel best captures it.

Idea 2

Invite the group to create a simple mandala inspired by their study of this unit. This can either be done as an individual exercise or as a group exercise. If it's done as an individual exercise, using a compass or small plate draw a circle on a sheet of paper. Then divide the circle up into sections. In each section, a word or phrase can be written, or nothing at all. Invite the participants to fill it with colour and design inspired by their study.

For a group project a very large sheet of paper is needed, which is then divided into sections – rather like a pie. Each participant is responsible for filling his section of pie with colour and design. Although the design must represent the inspiration of his own soul as he studies the quotations on life and death, in executing his design he must take notice of the designs adjoining his and attempt to harmonise with them, so that a unified whole is created.



The group project creates such a sense of unity, and the finished product is always breathtakingly beautiful. This one was created at an animator training in France.

Idea 3



Using the quotation in Section 6 as your inspiration, assist the participants to create a mime (silent, dramatic movement) showing the drama of embryonic development.

When they have finished invite them to stage their mime at a Holy Day, devotional, or party to mark the end of their study of the book.

Idea 4

In section 13, it can be very effective to ask the participants to work on a short improvised scene/s in which a teacher helps to reveal a gem of great value within one of his or her pupils (or a parent helps to reveal a gem within the mine of their child).

