

Scripture Doodling

A Bible Study Technique Description and Example

from the Rotation.org Writing Team

Scripture Doodling is a drawing technique applied by the student to a text of scripture to improve reading, listening, comprehension, and reflection.



1. Students are given a copy of the Bible passage and various kinds of markers and pens. Then they are walked through some examples about how to mark it up (doodle it) as it is read.
2. A second doodling pass is always appropriate.
3. Then it's doodle sharing and question time.

How you want them to mark the text may depend on the lesson or passage. How much of the doodles they share is up to you as this is not an art exhibition. See the lesson example below for a step by step process that explains the doodles seen in the image above.

Doodling was once thought by some to be an idle and mindless activity. But education and brain researchers have confirmed what many doodlers have been saying all along: **the simple act of "doodling" actually helps the brain focus, remember, and process meaning.** As teachers of *The Word*, doodling over, on, and around the Word provides us and our students with another engaging technique for Bible study.

- Doodling is primarily a form of "visual notation" which focuses our attention on keywords and phrases by embellishing them with symbols and minimalistic illustrations.
- Doodles can visualize what the brain is thinking about or wants to remember.
- Doodles can help explain text or expound on it.
- Doodles can create a visual map of the text, identifying at a glance what you think is important and profound.
- Doodles can be around a printed text or the text itself can be hand-drawn and doodled. (The graphics above and below are examples of these two types of text.)
- Doodles can be doodled while listening and reading, or after the fact as a means of contemplation.
- Doodling isn't about art, it's a means of visually and kinesthetically engaging and enhancing the text.
- Doodling is its own means and end. It doesn't have to produce something to share. Much of doodling's learning effect happens as the doodling happens.

Simply put, intentional scripture doodling helps the word dwell more richly...

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Intentional Doodling

"Intentional" doodling is teacher-guided. A good example of **guiding without prescribing** can be found in the [Writing Team's Lord's Prayer Art Workshop](#). In that lesson we lead the teacher and student through an **"intentional" doodling** process that can be used with any Bible text and modified in countless ways. (See the excerpt from that lesson plan below.)

Keep in mind that teaching kids to "intentionally doodle" shouldn't be prescriptive ("draw like this") or even always be literal. The simple act of outlining a word with color or adding simple shapes, such as arrows and hearts, is "good doodling" if it helps the student remember and think about the word being outlined.

Doodling also provides a **kinesthetic** component to reading, listening, and comprehension through the hand-eye-brain connection. As teachers, we use the science and techniques of kinesthetic enhanced-learning when we sing with hand motions, beat out rhythms, dramatize Bible scenes, and do art projects. Doodling is simply another part of the wonderful and mysterious way our brains enjoy interacting with content.

Being Bible teachers, we naturally have a lot of text to share with our students and that sheer plainness and amount of text can be a barrier to learning, especially to children.

Intentional Doodling gives us another technique in our Bible reading toolkit to help The Word jump from the page into the students' hearts and minds.



Lesson Example

Here's a portion of the Scripture Doodling Exercise from the [Writing Team's Lord's Prayer Art Workshop](#). (The full lesson is open to supporting members. The Doodled Scripture Page produced in this activity is used as part of the "wallpaper" in the Prayer Closet art project.)

Read and Doodle the Lord's Prayer

Give students a copy of the **Matthew 6 scripture passage** (PDF attached to the full lesson) along with colorful pens or pencils so that they can doodle and mark up the passage as they hear it.

Say: Today we will be doodling as we hear the Lord's Prayer from Matthew, chapter 6. 🧐 Your doodling page will be pasted on the inside of the "Prayer Closet" you're going to make.

The first part of the scripture doodle exercise will have them making simple "emphasis" doodles. The second reading will have them doing more interpretive doodling.

The First Read-Through and Scripture Doodle

Say: I'm going to read Matthew 6:9-13. As you listen, draw the following on your text:



1. DRAW STARS around words or phrases that seem very important.
2. DRAW ARROWS pointing at words or phrases that sound interesting or unusual.
3. DRAW QUESTION MARKS around words or phrases that you don't understand.
4. DRAW A CIRCLE of HEARTS around the one word or phrase that you think is the most important.

Then:

1. **Read the passage again** to the class slowly and thoughtfully giving them a minute or two to finish drawing their stars, arrows, question marks, and circles.
2. **Ask the students to share** some of the words and phrases they STARRED, ARROWED, and QUESTIONED, and offer some quick appreciation for their comments.
3. **Conclude by asking students** what they CIRCLED with HEARTS as their most important word or phrase (and why).

🐟 Teaching Tip: The words and phrases they marked are your opportunity to share more information about the meaning of those words. Use the Writing Team's Bible Background and the handy Word Study Guide (pdf attached to the full lesson)!

Second Read-Through and Scripture Doodle:

Say: Now, as I read the Lord's Prayer again, doodle some of the images and actions you are hearing. I'll go slowly, and you can doodle on the same copy of the scripture, whichever words or phrases you want. 😊 After I'm done reading I will give you several minutes to go back and complete your doodles. Let's work through a doodling example.

Doodle the following examples for all to see:

Our Father ⇒ What does "our" look like in a doodle? (a circle around the word "Father" maybe, or lots of smiley faces?) Is Father a strong or weak word; a loving or uncaring word? God loves us, so where could you put a heart in or around that word?

Who art in heaven ⇒ How would you draw "heaven" as a doodle? A burst of light? Angels?

Now it's time for the students to doodle some images...

1. **Read verses 9-13 again (this is your third time!)**, this time pausing after each phrase to give them time to quickly doodle an image or add doodles to a word in the text. Proceed slowly through each phrase of the prayer.
2. **Conclude by asking students** to show their doodling. Point out a few of their doodles and key ideas from the Lord's Prayer they represent.

🐟 Teaching Tip: When you pause your reading, offer doodling suggestions as needed.

Complete Your Doodling

Give everyone 3 or 4 minutes to go back over their scripture page and complete any doodling they want. **Remind them that doodling is QUICK!** It's not illustrating or painting. Use your cellphone's timer to set an alarm that they can see. This will keep them moving.

The Doodle-Fidget-Motion Connection

The brain loves to make our toes tap, fingers dance, and head nod as we "think" we're doing something else, such as listening to a teacher or music. A child might wiggle during a sermon, whereas an adult knows that may not be appreciated so they might take notes or nod their head in agreement. Both are forms of "fidgeting" -- body movements, often rhythmic, which capture the body's energy and redirect it into motion. And the crazy thing is that these motions actually help the brain FOCUS. They help stave off other forms of distraction.

The Brain-Body Movement connection is why we like music, why music literally and figuratively "moves" us, and why we like to teach motions to songs. Moving our hands as we doodle is simply part of that same spectrum.

Rather than rhythmically tapping out a beat.

our hands are creating "visual notes" and impressions

about the text.

We are taking the words off the written page

and visually singing them back onto the page

with lines, signs, and simple drawings.

Intentional Scripture Doodling thus gives us an engaging tool for a very special part of every Sunday School lesson plan, the scripture reading.

For those who think Bible doodling is baloney or a fad, let us remember some of the early doodlers:



John 8:1-11



"Illuminated Manuscripts"



Note: There are a lot of "Bible Journaling" or "Bible Doodling" resources online, mostly along the lines of "illustrating" Bible pages and verses with more artistic quality and personal devotional intent. Some of it is wonderful, and as a study tool it is to be commended.

HOWEVER, the "Scripture Doodling" we are talking about is especially useful with children and youth. It envisions much simpler illustrations (more true to the word "doodle"). And it is for use in a teaching context to help groups of students enhance their reading, listening, and comprehension of the Bible text they are studying.

This article was originally compiled by Amy Crane for the Writing Team.

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Further reading if you want to explore this topic more:

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