

## Blind Contour

### Studio from Home Series

This lesson plan was prepared by Rebecca Crofts for the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia.

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#### Suggested Grade Levels

Recommended for ages 8+

#### Introduction

We will be practicing our observational skills with a drawing technique called Blind Contour. Using three self-portraits from the permanent collection as inspiration, this technique will teach your hand and eyes to look more closely at your subject.

Grab a partner- this can come in the form of a guardian, a pet or you can choose an interesting object with lots of good lines like a plant!



Ellen Trider Lindsay, *Untitled*  
[Self-portrait] 1938, Ink on wove  
paper. 25.4 x 24.2 cm  
Gift of Jessie Power, Halifax,  
Nova Scotia, 1989



Berte Hart, *Untitled* [Self-portrait], 1938  
Ink on paper. 25.4 x 24.4 cm.  
Gift of Jessie Power, Halifax, Nova Scotia,  
1989



Howard D. Callahan, *Untitled*  
[Self-Portrait], 1938, Ink on wove  
paper. 25.2 x 24.0 cm.  
Gift of Jessie Power, Halifax, Nova  
Scotia, 1989

## Set Up:

Set up a comfortable chair facing your subject. You can either sit at a table or choose to find something hard (like a book or a board) to back your drawing while you do this activity.

## Materials:

- Paper (ideally without lines) and pencil
- Something hard to draw on (optional)
- Markers, coloured pencils or other drawing materials (optional)

## Process:

A contour drawing is a continuous outline of your subject. This activity is called a blind contour because you are not going to be looking at the page while you draw, but instead you are going to be looking at your subject only.

1. Begin by setting a timer and taking one minute to look at your subject. During this minute, don't do anything other than look at your subject, exploring as many details as possible by slowly tracing the lines of your subject with your eyes. During this process, you are not trying to memorize your subject, but instead you are gathering details about what is actually in front of you.
2. Pick up your paper and place your pencil point on your page. Looking back up at your subject, focus your eye on one point of your subject or model. Try to imagine that you are tracing the contours or the edges of your subject instead of drawing on a page. As your eyes move, let your pencil move with it while following these basic rules: don't look down at your paper and don't let your pencil lift from the paper. Continue to move your pencil along the same line as where your eye moves. Feel free to go back over areas you have already looked at.
3. It might be extremely tempting, but don't look down at your paper and don't pick up your pencil. Continue to move your pencil along the same line as where you move your eye. Feel free to go back over areas you have already looked at.
4. You can set a timer for 2 (or more) minutes or choose to continue drawing until you feel as though you have drawn all the details you can find in your figure. When you are finished, you can look down at your page and see your final drawing. Your page is likely to look like a complicated mix of lines and suggested forms. It will probably look extremely silly and only a little bit like your subject. Don't be discouraged, you did the activity correctly! It's best to remember that this technique is more about learning from the process than about producing a finished artwork.

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## Reflection

After looking down at your completed drawing what do you notice about it? Does it reflect your looking? Did you focus on specific areas? In what ways does your drawing reflect your subject? In which ways is it different? How did it feel to not look at your paper? Next time you try this activity, think about scaling up your paper size or try overlapping several drawings on top of each other in a collage.

