

The Librarian's Ultimate Guide to Coloring Programs

Tips and Tricks from Your Fellow Librarians

Timing and General Tips

- Offer morning and evening sessions. Keep it very informal.
- Allow attendees to come anytime within a 3-hour time frame and stay as long as they want. Don't get discouraged—keep trying until you find a time that works for your community.
- Clearly mark designated spots for coloring if you have younger people in this area in your library. It is also important to have plenty of coloring pages, bookmarks, or posters available to color, so that random library books are not taken and marked in.
- Have a theme each month for the coloring pages. In our library, game night (Candy Crush Saga) and secret-garden-themed pages have been favorites.
- Always have plenty of coloring pages, and encourage patrons to take multiple pages; if they take an extra home with them, it will encourage them to come back.
- Don't use the same coloring pages two times in a row; always have fresh ones available and save the leftover ones for next year.
- Sit and color with your patrons. Tell them about upcoming programs, and let them get to know you!
- Add this to your STEAM program or your makerspace. Adult coloring sheets make the easiest, cheapest maker addition to your library.

Environment and Refreshments

- Have the coloring take place in a separate room apart from the rest of the library.
- Consider having a "Quiet Coloring Zone" and an "Ok-to-Chit-Chat Coloring Zone."
- Put a few tables together to make one large table for socializing and sharing, and have TV trays to accommodate both the socializers and the folks who want quiet time.
- Have the tables grouped together in a way that groups of 10 can sit together, chat, and get to know new people without being overwhelmed.
- If you have a large enough area, provide bean bags or other lounge furniture to create a fun atmosphere for pre-teens, teens, and young people to lounge and color. Provide clipboards for a hard surface on which to color.
- Lower the lighting or turn off the lights in an unused part of the room to make it more relaxing.

- Set up themed stations and provide an example and a challenge in each. Beginner: Color the exact pattern; Intermediate: Distort the pattern and blend colors and mediums; Advanced: Use blank paper and create your own pattern following the theme.
- If you have a café, hold your program in this area. Not only does this attract patrons who haven't yet heard about the event, it also negates the need to spend programming budget on snacks, as people can purchase their own.
- Serve hot or cold apple cider, depending upon the weather, and cookies.
- Combine the program with hot chocolate so kids and teens can color while waiting for their drinks to cool off.
- Provide a Keurig machine so participants can make their own beverages.
- Have all of the tables set up with crayons, colored pencils, and markers. As patrons walk in, they can select their coloring page(s) right away, sit down, and begin coloring while you can grab them their drink.
- Play jazz or classical music to soothe the tension and stress away. Or play a podcast, audio book, or show Youtube videos of nature. Ask your participants for feedback on whether they prefer to listen to music or to chat with their neighbors—or both!

Materials

- Favorite coloring books: *Mermaids: Calm Ocean Coloring Collection* by Selina Fenech; *One Year Wiser: The Coloring Book* by Mike Medaglia; *Secret Garden: An Inky Treasure Hunt and Coloring Book* by Johanna Basford; *Color Your Own Famous American Paintings* by Dover Masterworks; *Color Me Calm: 100 Coloring Templates for Meditation and Relaxation* by Lacy Mucklow; *Animals: Color Counts, A Color-by-Number Collection* by MindWare; *Scenic Transformations Coloring Book* by MindWare; *Line Designs* by Dale Seymour; various Manga coloring books.
- Provide color-by-number options.
- Use books with perforated pages so patrons can take home their work.
- Put out a free-will donation box to cover supplies for the next session.
- Provide a variety of coloring items, including pages, postcards, bookmarks, and sun catchers, ranging from easy to intricate.
- Along with easy-grip coloring materials, provide over-sized coloring pages for attendees with fine-motor difficulties.
- Provide blank sheets and bookmark-size sheets for a make-your-own-design option.
- Old clip-art books can make great coloring sheets—another use for weeded books!
- To create a club mural, provide one large coloring sheet and have each attendee color a section of it.
- Place pencil sharpeners and a basket for shavings at each station.
- Have a small jar or tube of Vaseline available to dip the tip of colored pencils in—this makes the color much more vibrant.
- Use good quality paper to print out coloring pages so that adults and students can save their masterpieces.

- Feature a shape for the season to color, such as a leaf for fall, tree for Christmas, and so on.
- Have colored pencils, fine-tipped markers, and other tools available to accommodate each person's preference. Encourage people to bring their own items, too, by adding "Materials will be provided, but you are welcome to bring your own" to your publicity materials.
- Have good-quality markers available for brighter coloring. Using pencils sometimes can cramp small or arthritic hands; markers require less pressure for a bright result.
- If possible, demonstrate how to mix colors and shade with the colored pencils. Or partner with a local craft store to have a staff person share tips about different products and techniques. Show Youtube and Facebook tutorials and share handouts about using the color wheel and other tips on color theory.
- Recommended pens: Staedtler gel pens, Gelly Roll gel pens.
- Crayola Twistables crayons and colored pencils come in bold colors and don't create a mess like pencil shavings or torn crayon papers do.
- Have a drawer cart on wheels that houses the coloring pages, colored pencils, crayons, and markers. Label folders for regular patrons where they can keep their coloring pages so they don't have to carry them back and forth to the library. Keep the cart in your coloring center.

Program, Promotion, and Display Ideas

- Invite a local artist to bring in samples of their Zentangles and to talk about the art form. Provide small pieces of paper/triangles to practice Zentangles on, and then display them in the library.
- Partner with a local drinking establishment to host Cocktails and Coloring or Couples Coloring.
- Kick off your summer library program with a Come Color at Your Library Day!
- Include a session on adult coloring as stress relief in your adult summer reading program.
- Incorporate adult coloring into a game night at the library. While teens and younger kids are playing games, this would be a great opportunity for adults to sit back and relax and take their daily stress away.
- Pair coloring pages with literature and hold a coloring-book group in the library.
- Encourage circulation of older titles by including a sticky note in the book that congratulates the patron and gives them a free coloring page of their choice.
- Create a coloring station in the library, surrounded by books about art and coloring. Post signs throughout the library directing patrons looking to relax to visit the coloring station.
- Advertise the program as "no artistic ability needed." Encourage patrons to try coloring and just have fun.
- Create a display of drawing and art books for patrons to check out.
- Create a binder filled with pages patrons colored, display the pages on a bulletin board, or paint a wall area with magnetic paint and post with magnets. This will also showcase the variety of artistic mediums (markers, colored pencils, water colors, bold/vivid, pastel/subdued, etc.). Be sure to promote your next program time on the display.

- Program Themes: Cocoa, Coffee, and Coloring!; No Worries, No Kids, Just Coloring (and Snacks); Grandma/Grandpa and Me...Color My World; Color Me Calm; Coloring and Cocoa; Creative Kids Coloring Club (for tweens); April Showers got you down? Don't want to wait for May flowers? Come into the library and pick from our coloring pages. Color one to add to our bulletin board or take it home.
- Hold a coloring contest for school-age children, and establish a bulletin board where all the participants can post their artwork. Post the winners on your Facebook page.
- Encourage adults to frame the pieces they worked on and switch them out the next time they color a new one.
- Hold a coloring contest over the holiday, or any time, and divide the contest into four age groups. Display submissions and reward the winner in each age group with a book.
- Hold a contest where the adults judge the children's coloring and the children judge the adult's coloring. The prizes would be, of course, colored pencils and a coloring book.
- Provide an adult coloring option during children's programming events to introduce patrons to the concept of adult coloring. Each page should have the times and dates of future adult coloring events. You can also provide information on stress relief.
- Advertise your coloring program as a screen-free event to connect with family or simply a chance to unplug. Collect phones in a box or ask participants to turn off their phones to promote a truly relaxing and unwired atmosphere. Consider encouraging participants to pledge to turn their phones off for a certain number of minutes a day to de-stress and bond with their families through coloring or other activities.
- Hold a silent auction of coloring baskets and book baskets to raise money for the program and future programs.
- Provide a sign-up sheet for patrons who would like an email reminder about the program.
- Send out information via social media featuring the designs you will have available to be colored.
- Publicize in many ways: press releases to local newspapers and radio stations; posts on social media; posters throughout the community; and flyers handed out in the library to customers. You might also hang flyers at the local senior center.

Participants

- To give adults who come to color a restful time, ask that no children come. If possible, provide childcare through additional staff or volunteers.
- In order to help attendance, consider having a kids' program in another part of the building so that childcare is not an issue.
- Host a program for families, where the whole family works together to color a family poster.
- Host a mother/child or father/child day with age-appropriate materials for both.
- Host an intergenerational program with simple coloring pages and crayons for the kids and coloring pages ranging in different degrees of complexity and detail for the adults. Read aloud books about artists and being artistic.

- Create a theme for your intergenerational program, and have levels of the same type of coloring page (e.g., a simple flower to complex floral patterns). Change the theme each month.
- Provide coloring materials to use when employees are on breaks and lunch breaks as a short diversion from their work.
- Place coloring sheets and pencils/markers out on tables during staff workshops to give doodlers something to do.
- Offer to host coloring events for local organizations and clubs, such as your local Red Hats group, for an easy way to bring in the public.

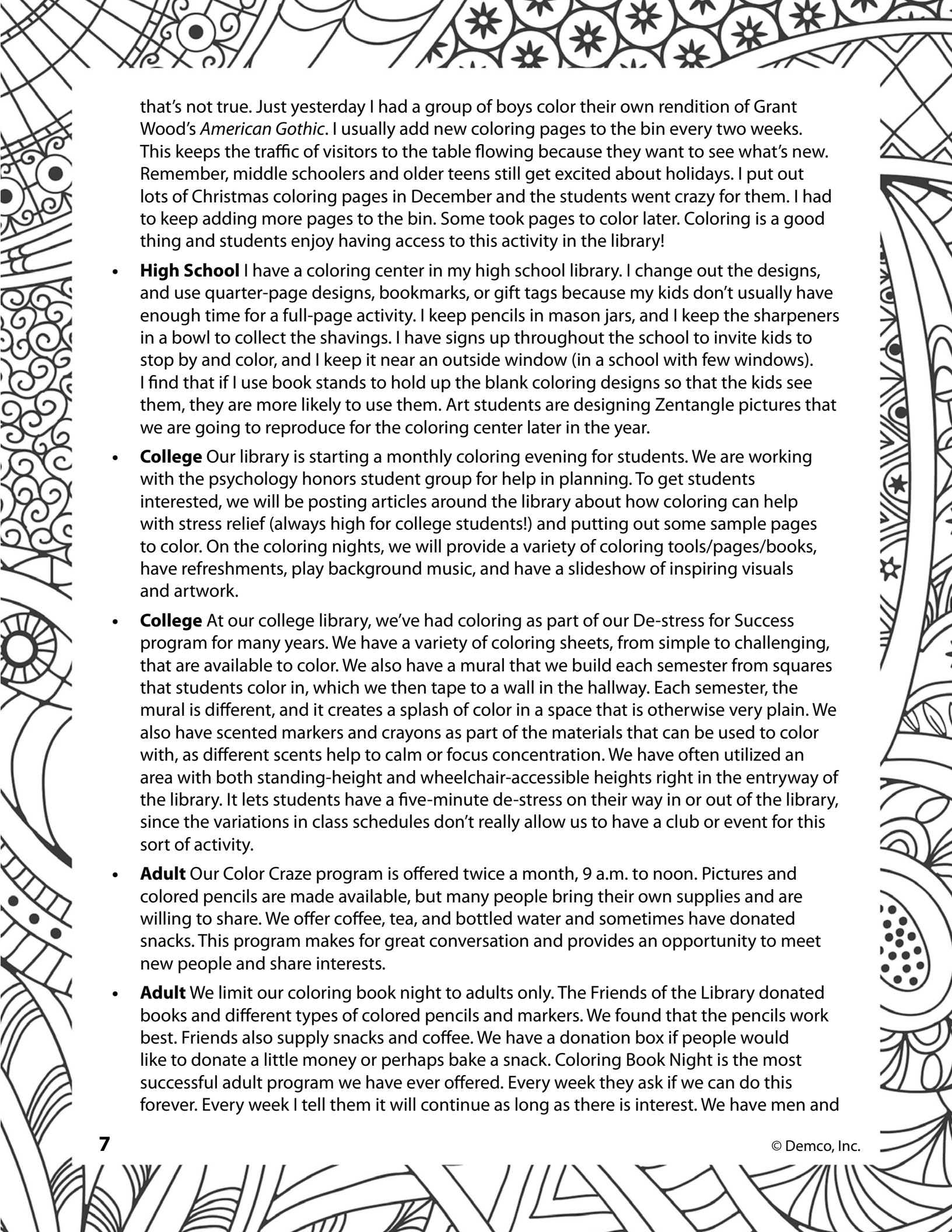
School Settings

- Set up a coloring station for before and after school, lunch, recess, study hall, and during parent-teacher conferences, or start a coloring club at those times. It gives kids something to do and has a relatively low overhead.
- Set up a coloring station during testing times, when stress is at an all-time high; call it De-stress Before Your Test.
- Have kids color cut-out letters to label the shelves.
- Provide a Color Craze Bookmark to any student or parent who buys a book at the school book fair during a certain time (such as Literacy Week). This provides an extra incentive to purchase books and something fun for students to do with their parents after shopping together.
- Allow students of all ages to color while you read aloud to them. This helps with classroom management and deters disruptions.
- Offer coloring opportunities for kids who are having a bad day to help them calm down, focus, and be successful in the classroom. Coloring in groups also promotes social skills with peers.
- Use activity stations in the library for kids who finish checking out books and want something productive to do while others are still looking for books; include a Color a Bookmark station.
- Start a craft club (including coloring) for staff members at your school on days you don't have staff meetings. This gives you a chance to unwind and spend some relaxing time together.

Program Descriptions


- **All Ages** Our program was intergenerational with simple coloring pages and crayons for the kids and coloring pages ranging in different degrees of complexity and detail for the adults. Entire families, including the dads, came and colored. We played classical music, and one of our philanthropies brought in cookies. Our librarian demonstrated how to mix colors and shade with the colored pencils and had examples of some of the pages, even including a black-and-white-colored page. We downloaded free designs from the Dover website.

- **All Ages** We hosted a Colorpalooza that went very well. We provided the Demco book bags, bookmarks, and coloring pages, along with an assortment of items to color with, including permanent markers, regular markers, gel pens, and colored pencils. This is a small-town library, population 3800, and we had almost 60 people attend! We're now in the process of planning one with an Easter theme.
- **All Ages** Our library just had a coloring party. It was a great success; 38 patrons attended. We scheduled it for a Sunday afternoon, 2:00 to 4:00, so that it wouldn't interfere with church. It also enabled people who work through the week to be able to attend. We had music playing softly (Enya). Everyone loved it; it was so soothing. We provided fine-point markers, crayons, and colored pencils. For the coloring books, I went to Hastings and bought ones featuring animals, flowers, landscapes, gardens, mandalas, stained glass, and religious themes. We took all of the pictures out of the books and laid them on a table so you could see them better for selection. We served vegetable trays, chips and dip, and cookies. Beverages included soda, hot tea, hot chocolate, and bottled water. We decorated the room with pictures of crayons and colored pencils and laid out tiny paintbrushes on all the tables. It was a blast! We're going to do it again at the end of the month.
- **Kids** The way I have done a coloring program for kids at the public library is to start with some easy doodling. I like to have a squiggle copied for kids and have them create something out of the squiggle. Then I have them make a very busy squiggle and color in the random shapes.
- **Kids** Occasionally I do a coloring contest and have all the kids color the same picture. It is really great to see the variety that the kids come up with when they all color the same picture. Then I pick several winners and give them a cool prize. This is a great activity to do when the kids are in the library on spring break or when they have a holiday and are out of school and hanging out at the library.
- **School (Elementary)** We use the coloring program to reward great behavior and for our Box Tops program. Behavior has improved and Box Top collection is up by a couple hundred.
- **School (Elementary/Middle)** I have coloring pages and pencils available in the library for students to use on a daily basis. The students who are excused from PE with injuries find it relaxing and it takes their minds off of their pain. Students visit the library before and after school, and at lunch—sometimes JUST to color! What is special is the tranquility that I see when the students are coloring and the pride they have when they've finished. Most of them want to take their creations home. I also have a wall where I display the coloring pages, which entices others to visit the library to view them and, hopefully, check out books! It also brightens up the room. Additionally, I'm a Girl Scout Troop Leader for 17 sixth graders. My girls color at every meeting. It helps them get through goal setting and discussions, especially those about tough topics.
- **Middle School** I created a corner in our middle school library called the Imagination Station. On the table is a stacked office rack that offers multiple selections for students to color and a bin of crayons, colored pencils, and markers. I also have an IKEA paper roll for students who want to make larger signs. There is also a rack of specialty scissors. This week some of the coloring options are from the book *Color Your Own Famous American Paintings* by Dover Masterworks. One might think the coloring table is only frequented by girls—



that's not true. Just yesterday I had a group of boys color their own rendition of Grant Wood's *American Gothic*. I usually add new coloring pages to the bin every two weeks. This keeps the traffic of visitors to the table flowing because they want to see what's new. Remember, middle schoolers and older teens still get excited about holidays. I put out lots of Christmas coloring pages in December and the students went crazy for them. I had to keep adding more pages to the bin. Some took pages to color later. Coloring is a good thing and students enjoy having access to this activity in the library!

- **High School** I have a coloring center in my high school library. I change out the designs, and use quarter-page designs, bookmarks, or gift tags because my kids don't usually have enough time for a full-page activity. I keep pencils in mason jars, and I keep the sharpeners in a bowl to collect the shavings. I have signs up throughout the school to invite kids to stop by and color, and I keep it near an outside window (in a school with few windows). I find that if I use book stands to hold up the blank coloring designs so that the kids see them, they are more likely to use them. Art students are designing Zentangle pictures that we are going to reproduce for the coloring center later in the year.
- **College** Our library is starting a monthly coloring evening for students. We are working with the psychology honors student group for help in planning. To get students interested, we will be posting articles around the library about how coloring can help with stress relief (always high for college students!) and putting out some sample pages to color. On the coloring nights, we will provide a variety of coloring tools/pages/books, have refreshments, play background music, and have a slideshow of inspiring visuals and artwork.
- **College** At our college library, we've had coloring as part of our De-stress for Success program for many years. We have a variety of coloring sheets, from simple to challenging, that are available to color. We also have a mural that we build each semester from squares that students color in, which we then tape to a wall in the hallway. Each semester, the mural is different, and it creates a splash of color in a space that is otherwise very plain. We also have scented markers and crayons as part of the materials that can be used to color with, as different scents help to calm or focus concentration. We have often utilized an area with both standing-height and wheelchair-accessible heights right in the entryway of the library. It lets students have a five-minute de-stress on their way in or out of the library, since the variations in class schedules don't really allow us to have a club or event for this sort of activity.
- **Adult** Our Color Craze program is offered twice a month, 9 a.m. to noon. Pictures and colored pencils are made available, but many people bring their own supplies and are willing to share. We offer coffee, tea, and bottled water and sometimes have donated snacks. This program makes for great conversation and provides an opportunity to meet new people and share interests.
- **Adult** We limit our coloring book night to adults only. The Friends of the Library donated books and different types of colored pencils and markers. We found that the pencils work best. Friends also supply snacks and coffee. We have a donation box if people would like to donate a little money or perhaps bake a snack. Coloring Book Night is the most successful adult program we have ever offered. Every week they ask if we can do this forever. Every week I tell them it will continue as long as there is interest. We have men and

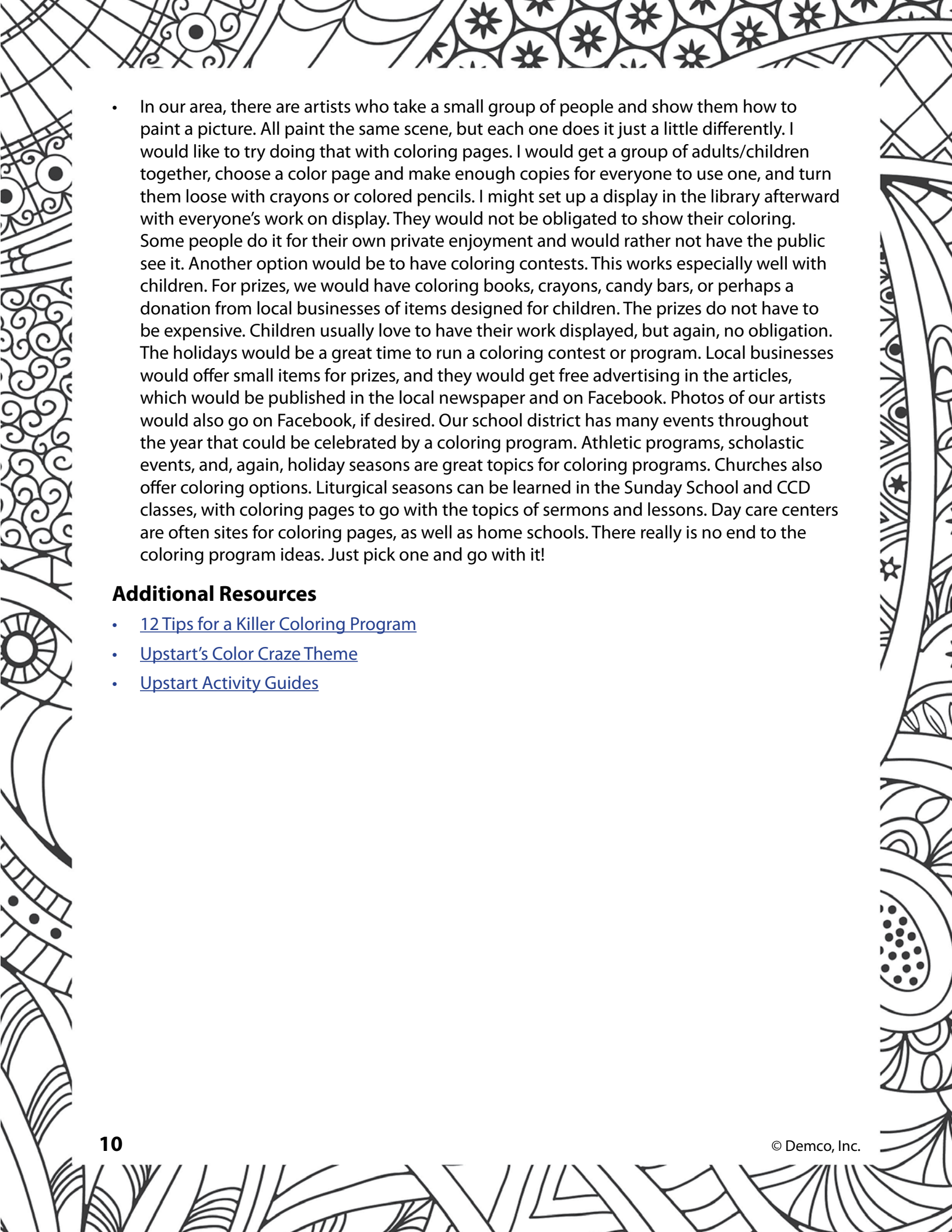


women artists. Some of them have never used the library. We have light conversation and soothing music. I feel that they like the idea of it being free! Some bring their own books and share with others.

- **Adult** We have been very fortunate with our adult coloring program. We began last September. We meet once a month. Our patrons are very generous and are taking turns providing light refreshments. They also help us promote our program. We provide the space, water or coffee, a variety of coloring sheets, markers, and pencils. Twice participants have donated markers. We also provide soft music, although, quite frankly, no one pays much attention to the music. They are too busy chatting and having a good time. We promote our program in our newsletter and with flyers in the library and throughout the community. We also make sure we connect with the Senior Citizen Center and the senior citizen housing in our neighborhood. The biggest mistake we made initially was scheduling this program in the evening. Once we changed it to the afternoon, our attendance doubled! So far, we have had a theme for each program, either due to holidays or change of seasons, but we also offer a variety of pages. Our patrons seem to enjoy this.
- **Adult** We provide utensils and paper, snacks, and coffee. Patrons love to have something to munch on while coloring. Our library has also been providing this twice a month over lunch to catch people who have a break during their day to color at the same time. Each session lasts for 2 hours to allow for people to drop in when they have the time. It's a relaxed and easy program that people really love.
- **Adult** We have developed a successful Third Thursday Coloring Club that has themed coloring pages for the holidays, weather, and so on each month. Typically 12–30 adults chat, color, and relax among new and old friends and often call administration to tell us how much they enjoy the program. We found that having at least 6 different pages, several pencil sharpeners, and plenty of colored pencils, markers, and crayons allows the creativity to flow.
- **Adult** We set up an adult coloring station in our library. I took a picture of it and put it on our Facebook page to advertise it. I set out an *Archiscapes* coloring book we had already, plus a sketchbook, some coloring pages and a basket of sharpened colored pencils, all on a tray that can be moved out of the way if someone wants to use the table for another purpose. I plan to add different books, maybe changing the theme from time to time.
- **Adult** We offer coloring as a passive, stress-reducing program for staff. I include clipboards so they can be portable and several sets of markers and pencils. If they leave their efforts behind, I put them in our sunny windows to share the enjoyment.
- **Adult** We always run our program in the late winter/early spring, and we use the same theme as the Collaborative Summer Reading Program (CSLP). This year I have planned a coloring party and I'm calling it Color Yourself Calm to fit in with the CSLP theme Exercise Your Mind, Read. During our 6-week program, we are exploring how lots of different media, including reading, storytelling, music, art, exercise, and food, affect the mind, body, and soul. I plan on having a local musician play classical guitar in the background while we color. I am going to diffuse relaxing essential oils and serve herbal tea. I hope to have a chocolate fountain with fruit to dip for brain and body healthy snacks.

Plans for Future Programs

- I haven't done a coloring program yet but am excited to try one out! Our library is in a small town, and I am really working on getting families to come to the library together.
- I do a STEM after-school program, and I think incorporating a coloring program would be an interesting idea. I think I would try blending the coloring program with science projects, literacy, and Legos. That way the kids would not only be coloring but also doing some higher-order thinking.
- We are going to start a program with juvenile and young adult patrons to encourage reading as well as coloring. Charles Vess and Michael Kaluta created the *Mythic Coloring Book*, which is absolutely stunning. We will incorporate this with three different juvenile books Vess illustrated with authors Neil Gaiman and Charles DeLint. For the young adult patrons, we will use the novel *Stardust* and Sandman graphic novels, written by Neil Gaiman and illustrated by Charles Vess. A nice plus is that all of the books translate exceptionally well for adult readers too, so no one who wishes to participate will be turned away. I love the idea of getting the whole family involved.
- Some adults are hesitant about "exposing" their artistic talents, so I want to read *The Dot* by Peter H. Reynolds to them.
- I would love to start a program geared toward senior citizens—either go to the senior center or have them come to the library. I think it would help keep their cognitive and fine-motor skills sharp. Another idea would be to have one of our local artists, and we have a lot, lead a class sponsored by the library.
- Since we are very short on staff, we will be making a mini art studio, placing the items in a box in the Teen Zone. Right now we have crayons and color pages for the kids in the children's area, and it has become very popular. The teens have begun coloring the pages and leaving them at the desk for me to hang up. The idea began to really take off and soon everyone was leaving their artwork to hang up. I switch out the color pages weekly. I can use bookmarks and posters as a way to advertise the new program.
- I want to start a coloring program as part of our SmartLunch initiative—students have a one-hour lunch block. They eat lunch during 30 minutes of that SmartLunch, then have to go to tutorials if they have a class in which they are earning below a passing grade. Otherwise they may elect to go to a teacher's room, the media center or computer lab, intermurals, etc. I want to offer a creative coloring space that can also be available at other times of the day. I hope to attract more teens to come back to the media center by doing this.
- I am thinking coloring might be a way to track progress for a library reading club. Participants read a book, then color an object or portion of an object (representative of whatever the theme happens to be). Each participant starts with a white page or poster or canvas with black lines. As the participant completes a book, he/she is allowed to color one segment. It could be spots on a leopard, colors of a bird's feathers, leaves on a tree, or crayons in a box. The more books read, the more colorful the page. Theme ideas: Color Me Read!; Books Add Color to Life; What Color is Your Imagination?; What Color is Fiction?; Reading Adds Color To Life; Thank You, God, for Color.

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- In our area, there are artists who take a small group of people and show them how to paint a picture. All paint the same scene, but each one does it just a little differently. I would like to try doing that with coloring pages. I would get a group of adults/children together, choose a color page and make enough copies for everyone to use one, and turn them loose with crayons or colored pencils. I might set up a display in the library afterward with everyone's work on display. They would not be obligated to show their coloring. Some people do it for their own private enjoyment and would rather not have the public see it. Another option would be to have coloring contests. This works especially well with children. For prizes, we would have coloring books, crayons, candy bars, or perhaps a donation from local businesses of items designed for children. The prizes do not have to be expensive. Children usually love to have their work displayed, but again, no obligation. The holidays would be a great time to run a coloring contest or program. Local businesses would offer small items for prizes, and they would get free advertising in the articles, which would be published in the local newspaper and on Facebook. Photos of our artists would also go on Facebook, if desired. Our school district has many events throughout the year that could be celebrated by a coloring program. Athletic programs, scholastic events, and, again, holiday seasons are great topics for coloring programs. Churches also offer coloring options. Liturgical seasons can be learned in the Sunday School and CCD classes, with coloring pages to go with the topics of sermons and lessons. Day care centers are often sites for coloring pages, as well as home schools. There really is no end to the coloring program ideas. Just pick one and go with it!

Additional Resources

- [12 Tips for a Killer Coloring Program](#)
- [Upstart's Color Craze Theme](#)
- [Upstart Activity Guides](#)