

## Lend-a-Hand Community Art

Learn about henna body art and then try your hand at creating a design on a paper hand. Then display all the hands as a community project.

### You will need:

- [The Art of Henna](#) discussion material
- Copies of the [Henna Symbols Guide](#)
- Flattened cereal box or poster board
- Fine-tipped black marker
- Pencil
- Eraser
- Scissors



Print a [picture of some completed henna designs](#) to show artists. Post a copy on your bulletin board to create interest in the activity.

### Directions:

Before beginning the project, read and discuss [The Art of Henna](#).

1. Trace your hand and about 5" of your forearm onto a flattened cereal box or poster board. Spread your fingers as far apart as possible.



2. Cut out the hand and use a pencil to sketch out designs as shown on the previous page. Use the [Henna Symbols Guide](#) to help generate ideas. Keep in mind that the designs are more like doodles, and doodles don't have to be perfect.
  3. Use a marker and trace the pencil lines you want to keep. Allow the ink to dry for about 10 minutes before erasing the unwanted pencil lines.
  4. Group all the hands together to make a powerful display. Attach them to walls or bulletin boards or hang them like mobiles.
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# Henna Symbol Guide

**Swans:** Success

**Birds:** Messengers between heaven and earth

**Parrots:** Messengers of love

**Owl:** Knowledge, wisdom, protection

**Peacocks:** Beauty, love, desire, and passion

**Fish:** A woman's eyes

**Scorpion:** Love and romance

**Lizards and snakes:** Seekers of enlightenment

**Tortoise:** Protection and fertility

**Butterflies:** Transformation, new beginnings. Two butterflies symbolize a happy marriage.

**Dragonflies:** Rebirth, new beginnings, rejuvenation

**Flowers:** Joy and happiness (most common of all henna designs)

**Flower bud:** New life, fertility, and joy. In bridal henna, the bud symbolizes the start of a new love and a new life.

**Lotus blossom:** The light within; awakening of the human soul. It also represents grace, beauty, creativity, sensuality, femininity, and purity.

**Vines and leaves:** Longevity, devotion, perseverance, entwined lives, and vitality

**Sun, moon, and stars:** Deep love between lovers/partners

**Crescent moon:** Newborn baby

**Feather:** Truth, order, justice

**Paisleys:** Fertility and good luck

**Eye:** Protection from the "evil eye"

**Zigzag:** Rain; fertility and abundance

**Ripples:** Running water, which purifies and brings life

**Square:** Healing; protecting the sick

**Mandala:** Universe; cycle of rebirth/life

# The Art of Henna

In this learning discussion activity, we explore henna as we learn about what it is, where it comes from, its history, and how it's used to create beautiful tattoos.

## What is henna?

The henna is a tropical shrub or small tree that is native to northern Africa, Asia, and Australia. It particularly thrives in India, with its cycle of droughts and monsoon rains. The henna dye is derived from its small leaves, and its fragrant white to red flowers are used to produce perfume. It can be grown outdoors in climates where temperatures never drop below 50°F (11°C) and also indoors as a houseplant. If indoors, find the sunniest place possible and plan on it growing to eight feet or more in five years. Outdoors it can grow up to 15 feet high.

The henna dye is obtained by drying the leaves and turning them into a fine powder. This powder is mixed with a slightly acidic liquid such as lemon juice (and often essential oils) to form a paste used for dyeing fabric, hair, and skin in the form of intricate tattoos.

## What is its history?

The henna plant and the dye it produces has been an important part of the culture of the people living where it grows since ancient times. The use of henna for tattoos dates back more than 5,000 years, all the way back to ancient Egypt where it is believed Cleopatra (always a trendsetter) used it to adorn her body. It was also used to paint the nails of mummies before burial. A part of cultural and religious practices throughout the world, henna tattooing is used today as an expression of good luck and happiness and is a part of many ceremonial events such as marriages, festivals, and births.

## What is henna art?

Mehndi is the ancient traditional Indian art of applying henna to the hands and feet. Different cultures use henna in unique ways. Indian henna paintings often feature fine lines and floral patterns, whereas Arabic designs are larger in scale with bolder and more geometric patterns. Hindu brides are painted with henna to symbolize joy, beauty, and spiritual awakening. It is a very special time with the gathering of female family and friends who share with the bride their secrets of a happy marriage and home. In addition to henna body painting for both men and women, Moroccans paint henna designs on their doors to bring prosperity and chase away evil.

When you think of henna art, you generally think of tattoos, but unlike traditional tattoos, they are painted on using the applicator from the henna tube or

a special brush rather than with a needle and ink. Henna tattoos are not permanent and wear off within three to six weeks. They can be applied anywhere on the body, although certain locations have special meaning and significance:

- A tattoo on the palm of the hand allows the person to receive and offer blessings. Popular designs include images of suns, flowers, and mandalas.
- A tattoo on the top of the hands is suggestive of protection. A popular design is that of a shield.
- A tattoo on the right hand of a man is considered projective, and the left hand for the woman is receptive.
- A tattoo on the foot is especially spiritual and connects the body, mind, and spirit with the earth.

### **What do some of the symbols mean?**

- Sahasrara: An ancient symbol uniting the soul with a divine force
  - Peacock: Beauty
  - Swans: Success and beauty
  - Birds: Messengers between heaven and earth
  - Dragonflies and butterflies: Change and rebirth
  - Paisley designs: Fertility and luck
  - Flowers and petals: Happiness and joy
  - Vines and leaves: Devotion and vitality (perfect for marriage celebrations)
  - Eye: Spiritual form of protection from the “evil eye”
  - Snakes and lizards: Enlightenment
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