

Poems To Color In

by Ellie Cross

When I first moved to India from the United States, I was incredibly fortunate to stumble upon an inspiring group of people who come together on Tuesdays for something called "Stone Soup Adda." Inspired by Awakin Mumbai meditation circles, the Tuesday gatherings were started by a couple in Mumbai who had the space to welcome people into their house for an evening of sharing.

The meetings were based on the popular folktale of "Stone Soup" that tells the story of a hungry visitor to a village who notices that the villagers seldom spend time together or share anything among themselves, let alone with visiting strangers. The visitor has an idea and picks up a stone, announcing to everyone in the village that this "magic" stone has the power to create a delicious soup. The villagers are intrigued. "But first," says the visitor, "I will need a pot and some water and something to heat the soup." Villagers go running to gather these things.

The story goes on and on, as the visiting stranger continues tasting the soup and suggesting delicious additions. By the end of the evening, all the villagers have contributed something to the broth, and soon there is a hearty soup which they all enjoy together. They are delighted at coming together and sharing and realize the magic of community is not in the stone.

During Stone Soup Tuesdays, friends and strangers sit around and share anything that has inspired, touched or moved them. The sharing may be in the form of writing, art, songs, music, dance, stories, activities, games or presentations. People can choose not to share if they want to just listen for the evening, and after the sharing ends we have dinner together.

The first time I was planning on attending Stone Soup, I had no idea what to expect and no clue what to share. I'm a visual artist, but it seemed pretty strange and egotistical to pass around a painting or drawing I'd done. Therefore, I decided I'd share one of my favorite poems by Rilke. I'm such a visual thinker however, that as I read through the poem I started having all these images in my head about what the poem might look like if it were illustrated. I started sketching and realized that it could make a fun coloring page for kids and adults. So, I went in with a tiny stack of these illustrated poems and when it was my turn I passed them around the circle and read the poem aloud.

Later, after dinner, I brought out crayons and sat among people as they colored in the words and images of the poems. I noticed that coloring was the perfect activity to do. As we chatted, people seemed calm and relaxed with something in their hands -- and the act of coloring in the images I'd drawn sparked conversation about the poem itself and its deeper meaning. Finally, it was magical to see the myriad ways people added their own colorful touches, design, and flair to the poem.

I was hooked. I began illustrating an inspiring poem every other week or so until I had enough to create a tiny book.

Here are three examples for you to enjoy (click on the image to download the full sized image, that you can download, print and use in your community):