



## Imagination – the spiritual spark of creativity

If we were to add up all the hours we spend using our imagination, we would probably be very surprised. We often make mental pictures of things we cannot see. When we wake up in the morning, we think about what we have to do in the day ahead and visualise ourselves in action. We practise a skill, face and overcome a fear or try to work out solutions to problems in our imagination. When we are doing routine tasks our minds can be far away picturing what might happen after work, things we might say or do, or how someone might react to our actions.

How often have you composed letters in your mind? Something reminds you of an old friend and, almost unconsciously, you start imagining what you would say in a letter. Many letters never get any further!

People are moved by events, human relationships and environmental beauty to write songs, poetry, essays or books to express their response to what they have seen and heard.

Composers hear lines of melody and even complete orchestrations in their heads. What comes first in the songwriter's mind, the music or the words? Hearing music, does the dancer imagine movements that they ache to create? Does the dramatist imagine dialogue in the voices of known actors?

If you enjoy making things with your hands, you can start daydreaming about creating exciting projects. Flipping the pages of a garden book, the gardener dreams of creating blooming flowerbeds and bountiful vegetable plots.

What weaver, rug-hooker, needleworker or knitter walking through the woods in spring or autumn or along the beach in summer has not been moved to replicate the colours in wool?

The smell of wood or the sight of tools makes the carpenter's head spin with ideas for creating new pieces of furniture.

Painters may see a finished canvas in their mind's eye and make a hurried pencil sketch. The sculptor can visualise the finished sculpture in a block of marble. It is said that when Inuit sculptors in the Canadian Arctic carve soapstone, they release the animal, bird or person that is already in the stone.

Poets often say that they do not know where the ideas and images come from. 'They just pop into my head,' laughs one poet in delight at the memory of how she creates. Novelists find that their characters have such a life of their own that they just drive the story forward. Whether we express our own creativity or enjoy the talents of others, we can be deeply affected in unexpected ways. There are pieces of music that never fail to send a chill down our spine. It may be a simple melodic phrase of only three or four notes or a whole song or composition. It is a deeply spiritual moment. Words can have the same effect through the images that they call to mind and the sheer beauty of their sound. Almost any object makes a rhythm instrument.

Children are naturally creative. Watch them play. In sand or mud or water they are continually creating new structures, patterns or sounds. They mimic grown-ups, often catching the essence of the absurdities of adult behaviour. They spread paint over paper with unrestrained freedom.

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Often these creative children turn into adults who are afraid to express their artistic nature. People's creativity is stifled and ridiculed and so people ignore the creative side of themselves in favour of the logical, intellectual or analytical.

We have to allow ourselves the time and confidence to express our creativity in ways that are pleasing to us. Each creative act is a reflection of spiritual energy, an opportunity to harness a part of our being that is beyond the ordinary.



## The spirituality of drama

The flicker of the TV screen, the familiar theme music, the sound of conversation and laughter. The story line unfolds and the audience is gripped night after night and week after week.

The thrill of the cinema, the lights darken and the film begins. The audience is drawn into the action and real life is suspended.

The theatre darkens, the audience is hushed. In the moment before the lights go up the feeling of expectation is electric.

Every night of the week, all over the world, people in theatres, cinemas, watching the TV or listening to the radio at home are waiting to get caught up in a scene that portrays something of life.

Drama can show us something of the complexity of the human condition. The underlying theme of many plays is the age-old struggle between good and evil. Greed, lust, power and the manipulation of one character by another are common threads running through countless plots, both tragic and comic. The drama and the ideas in a play can arouse strong emotions. We can be moved to tears or to laughter as we sympathise or empathise with a character.

What is it that draws audiences again and again to some plays and has done so for centuries? After 400 years, Shakespeare's plays, both in English and translated into other languages, continue to attract people of all ages around the world. The dance and drama of Carnival in the Caribbean and in Latin America continue to draw the crowds. It is not simply skilled acting, directing, dancing, music or costumes that speak to people down the years.

Spectators are affected and united by what is happening because the line between fiction and fact is blurred. We seem to be listening to private conversations, as though we are looking into other people's houses and lives. We discover that the characters share our own strengths and weaknesses. We see ourselves mirrored in them. We are made to think of our own relationships, our own opinions, our morality and own mortality. We are challenged to think about the very meaning of life itself. Acting is an ancient custom. It may have begun when people imitated others' oddities in voice and action. Children doubtless have always mimicked their elders. Early cultures developed religious rites to mark the natural seasons like planting and harvesting as well as important periods in people's lives such as puberty, maturity, marriage and death. These rituals often had strong dramatic elements, which incorporated singing and dancing or other rhythmic movement. Many rites were designed to appease the local gods. The leading performers were priests or holy men and women.

These rites continue in some countries today. For example, beautiful masks are carved in many African countries and worn in ritual dance and dramas that mark rites of passage such as puberty or marriage and religious and cultural ceremonies. Chinese and Japanese dramas make use of magnificent costumes and masks in their depiction of vice and virtue.

Every culture has its own history of the development of drama. In many cultures, a purely secular drama, often comic, grew up as well as those that concentrated on religious themes.

## The spirituality of drama

Formal worship services have a strong dramatic element. The repetition of familiar words, music (vocal and instrumental), movement (processions, liturgical dance), special robes, props (symbols and ornaments), a sense of timing and congregational participation: all these are accepted dramatic conventions.

Other kinds of dramatic techniques are popular, too. Puppet shows, at which the Japanese are probably the most accomplished with their depictions of Shinto and Buddhist legends and other themes, are often used as teaching devices. Mime, based solely on movement without words, can express inner feelings with a unique grace and beauty and be universally understood.

National news programmes, which we casually believe to be unbiased fact, undergo rigid editing and orchestrating, in much the same way in which a play is written and directed. Our hearts and minds are often touched by the drama within the daily news. Conversely we can become jaded and bored by so many accounts of human suffering. Or, and this is the most terrible of all, the drama of the news can be a recipe for further acts of violence. Producing dramatic performances can be complex. They bring together many creative people to work as a team: writing, acting, singing, dancing, stage design, costume-making, lighting, music, choreography and more.

Is drama just make-believe? Some plays and films and programmes give new hope to people because the acting is so realistic that the story seems credible. Others are simply fun: action, sound and colour, raising our spirits and pulling us out of negative attitudes. There are dramas whose central idea is intended to influence our opinion on a moral issue and the dramatisation of it sheds light where other forms of communication has failed.

Drama is indeed make-believe, but it invites us to ponder the human story: the power of good and evil, the breakdown and the healing of relationships and personal responsibility. These are all issues that encompass the spiritual dimension of life.



## Spirituality and dance

The link between spirituality and dance is profound. Dancing is an opportunity to move into a different medium of creativity. It allows us to express ourselves, our hopes, our thanks, our sorrows, our joys and our celebrations in a non-verbal way. It harnesses a spiritual energy that comes from within and is expressed in movement and music. Every culture has its own dance traditions: folk dance, tribal dance, classical dance, film dance and sacred dance. All forms of dance are based on detailed rules and systemised sequences of movements or dance steps. Some of these are extremely old. For example, the *Bharata Natya Sastra* is an ancient Indian book on dance, music and drama that is dated between the second century BC and the fifth century AD. The dance movements written down in that book are still performed in India today. For example for the Dev Dosi Dance, women are selected to dance before the Gods in the temples.

### Sacred Dance

Perhaps sacred dance is the most overtly spiritual form of dance since it is a type of worship that uses the body to offer honour and reverence to the mystery that lies beyond the self. Sacred dancer Karusia Wroblewski Flynn says: 'Dancing Scripture is to go deep into the words, finding something of the essence, and letting that come up through the body and resonate as movement.' Within many religious traditions, dance takes place in temples, shrines, churches and holy places. Within the Christian tradition for example, dance has taken place in church in celebration of festivals, as part of a pilgrimage and in order to teach people about the Christian story.

### Folk dances

Traditionally, folk dances are danced for recreation and enjoyment as well as to celebrate seasonal and social festivals.

#### *From India:*

*Garba* – a clap dance performed in a circle danced mainly at Navratri (the Nine Nights Festival) in praise of the Goddess Amba. Traditionally it is danced only by women. Today both men and women dance the Garba. *Dandya Ras* – a stick dance performed to songs in praise of Lord Krishna, also danced in a circle by men and women.

*Ras Lila* – depicts various aspects of Krishna's life in dance form.

#### *From England:*

*Morris Dancing* – imagine six men wearing white shirts and trousers decorated with ribbons and bells on their legs. A musician holding a fiddle or a squeezebox begins to play a tune. The six others begin vigorous, athletic dance, moving up and down, back and forth, gesturing with big white hankies in their hands while performing special leaps and capers. In another dance they put away their hankies and clash metre long wooden sticks with each other in rhythm with the music. This is Morris Dancing and stems from nineteenth century village dances.

#### *From Latin America:*

*Aztec dance* – within Aztec culture, dance and music was very important. Folk dances were used for all purposes – to worship, to make war, to celebrate victory, to bury the dead, to

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invoke the help of the gods or to ward off evil. People still dance these dances in Latin America today. There is little change to the old dance forms and costumes but the concept and function of the dance is completely altered.

*From Africa:*

*Umhlanga* – the young maidens of the Kingdom of Swaziland dance before the Queen Mother and the King, having presented the Queen Mother with reeds for her homestead.

*Incwala* – the men of the Kingdom of Swaziland, dressed in full warrior costume, dance in the King's cattle kraal in order to celebrate the first fruits of the harvest.

*Zulu war dances* ~ from South Africa, these were performed before a war to mentally prepare the warriors for battle.

*From Asia Pacific:*

*Kohomba Kankariya* – from Sri Lanka, has no bearing on any particular religion but is performed in order to invoke the blessings of the deities on animal breeding and cultivation. It is performed as a number of drumming and dance sequences that take days to complete, beginning and ending with prayers. It is also seen as a ritual that invokes blessings on invalids and helps to avoid disasters like epidemics that threaten villages, provinces or whole countries.

*The Haka* ~ A Maori dance from New Zealand. It was performed before a battle but now it is used in sport, i.e. by the New Zealand All Blacks Rugby team.

Find out about folk dances in your country.



## The past remembered: stories to tell

Remember when...?' In a gathering of family or friends, these words are the prologue to a story, one that links the listeners together. Those who played a part in the story are excited by the memories it brings to mind. Those who have heard it before, but were not eyewitnesses, are equally caught up in the telling. Those to whom it is new recognise that the story is significant. Hearing it gives them a special sense of belonging to the family or group of friends. The story has become part of a common memory.

Stories provide a sense of continuity in the family, the clan, the community and even a whole nation. They are a spiritual link between the past and the future and fundamental to a sense of community. All the world's religions tell stories. They contain stories that have a base in fact but are overlain with interpretation. They fire the imagination, inspire the spirit and often point to a model of moral behaviour.

Story-telling is one of the most powerful and ancient teaching methods. Listening to stories is one of the most pleasurable ways of learning. Family stories told and re-told, some funny and some tragic, ensure that what is significant gets passed from one generation to another.

Trusted story-tellers, often grandparents (sometimes the word for grandmother is almost synonymous with the term for story-teller) ensure that stories are handed down to succeeding generations. Myths, legends and parables have all the elements of a good tale. They entertain, they relate to real life, there is enough suspense to maintain interest, they pose and solve a problem. Many stories have a moral theme. Fables are a good example of this. Through them the listeners hear wisdom that they might otherwise ignore. Many stories

tell about make-believe characters but others are about real people.

Knowing the stories of those who played a part in the lives of our own forebears helps us to understand who we are and our place in history. The stories can be commonplace, or of daring deeds and exciting adventures. Encompassed within them are values precious to the family or nation. Customs and ceremonies arise from them. New members ask, 'How did that start?' and shiver in anticipation when someone replies, 'Well, let me tell you...' There are times of sadness too, and from these events generations learn how to cope with tragedy.

Paradoxically, stories of the past can carry seeds of destruction for the future. Family quarrels and national jealousies can simmer for decades, even centuries, erupting time and again. Ethnic wars have always broken out like wildfires all over the globe, kindled by memories of past injustices and perpetuated by the re-telling of old hurts. Stories that tell of the triumph of one person or group should not humiliate or de-humanise another person or group. The memory of the vanquished is long and unforgiving.

On the other hand, story telling can begin to heal past injustices and atrocities. The work of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission is an important example of this. By telling their stories, both victims and perpetrators were able to move toward forgiveness and reconciliation.

Stories have a great potential for good. They can show vividly what good things happen when individuals work for the benefit of the whole. When listeners are caught up in exciting narratives that tell how others have

acted in difficult circumstances, they are often able to apply these strategies to their own lives. Story-telling is greatly valued within Guiding. It is used to keep traditions alive and to bring home moral points. The story-teller needs neither tools nor instruments. Imagination, a dramatic sense of timing and a lively voice are what the art demands. We all have opportunities to be story-tellers.

### How Jackal got his Markings (A Hottentot story)

The Hottentot used to tell how eventually even the Creator became angry at the slyness of Jackal, and at the way he would always torment the other animals with his tricks. So the Creator decided to punish him. He appeared before Jackal one day, disguised as a young boy.

The 'boy' persuaded Jackal to give him a ride on his back. He said that he was lost, and was too tired to walk any further. If Jackal would help him to find his village, he said, he would reward him with a tender young goat when they got there. So Jackal allowed the 'boy' to climb upon his back, and set off, already planning to himself how he could trick the 'boy' into giving him not only one goat, but the whole herd.

Suddenly, he felt the 'boy's' legs grip his back with a terrible force. 'I am the Creator,' cried the 'boy', and he produced a ball of fire. 'and this is my punishment for all your wicked ways.' So saying, He struck Jackal on his flanks with the fire, which set the animal's coat ablaze.

Jackal begged for mercy, but the Creator disappeared, leaving the ball of fire on Jackal's back. Jackal rolled desperately, and finally managed to put out the flames. Then he went on his way, much shaken and humbled.

And that is why, to this day, the Jackal has black marks along his body, and silver 'ashes' on his back – so that all the animals can see that he was punished by the Creator for his wicked ways.



## Writing a journal

As long as people have written, they have kept diaries and journals. The 17th century Londoner, Samuel Pepys, is famous as a diarist. *The Diary of Anne Frank*, kept during World War II by a young Jewish girl hidden in a Dutch attic, is known around the world. The voyages of explorers and adventurers live on in the books of many stay-at-homes who experience a little of their thrilling exploits by reading their journals. Some journals read like the bare bones of an appointment book; others tell the writers' most significant experiences and reveal their innermost feelings.

If you have kept a journal for a number of years, you probably re-read bits of it sometimes. Is it a surprise? Do you find events that affected you greatly are now almost forgotten? Have your attitudes and interests changed? Is your journal a record of personal and spiritual growth? What does it tell you about yourself?

Some people make their own journal books, even the paper itself. A book whose pages you have stitched and whose cover you have designed is a very personal belonging. Many people add sketches. Others like to listen to favourite music while they think and write. People have even made their journal into a video or even designed a web page.

At one time it was the fashion to keep what was called a commonplace book, a scrapbook in which to paste clippings from newspapers and magazines, to copy quotations, sayings, poetry or anything memorable. Although not as personal as a journal, what a person chooses to clip and keep is remarkably revealing.

Some find it helpful to write according to a consistent pattern. For example, they tell what happened of personal importance, then how they felt about it and finally what difference it might make in the future. Some people set goals and track their progress. Other journals speak chiefly of the writers' interpersonal relationships. Writing down the details of troubled relationships can be the beginning of a solution. Our feelings of anger can be calmed. We can see with new eyes and begin to see another point of view.

In the Christian tradition, some people keep a journal of their relationship with God. They write down what they are thinking and feeling, about their prayer life and their relationships to others. They try to see where God might be.

Whatever your religious belief, let your journal be a means to your spiritual growth.



## Expressing spirituality through poetry

Poetry, like all the arts, is universal. Despite the difficulties raised by differences of rhyme, rhythm and language, many poems are successfully translated. Poems are loved and appreciated by readers for centuries. Some will be as fresh and meaningful in the 21st century as they were in the 17th. They speak from the human heart about emotions that do not change. The economy of words makes them easy to remember and to treasure.

All artists, whether painters, sculptors, photographers, dancers, musicians, actors or craftspeople, are first of all observers. They express what they observe of life through the medium of their skill. Poets succeed in putting into beautiful and powerful words universal feelings because they are such keen observers of people and the environment.

Many people are moved to write poetry, especially when they feel deeply about something. It is a very private activity. It has the advantage of needing only pen and paper and can be worked on mentally even when the poet is engaged in some undemanding activity. But in creating a poem and putting it down on paper, we can work through times of discouragement and reach a sense of peace within ourselves. We can discover something about ourselves, both what is troubling us and what makes us feel good. It can be a time of spiritual growth.

Of course not all poetry is serious. Light-hearted poetry or verse often tells a story about the follies of the human race or the animal world. It can be a simple enjoyment of sound and rhythm without verbal sense. This too encapsulates something of our spiritual pilgrimage.

Many sacred scriptures and holy texts contain the most wonderful poetry. The Hindu text the Bhagvad Gita is written in Sanskrit Sholka which is poetic verse. The Psalms and Song of Solomon in the Hebrew Bible or Christian Old Testament are also wonderful poetry that encapsulates the soul's quest for the divine.

*'Set me as a seal upon your heart,  
as a seal upon your arm;  
for love is strong as death,  
passion fierce as the grave.  
Its flashes are flashes of fire,  
A raging flame.  
Many waters cannot quench love,  
neither can floods drown it.  
If one offered for love  
All the wealth of his house,  
It would be utterly scorned.'*

(Song Of Solomon 8:6–7)



## Meals – creativity, community and spirituality

Celebrations! Birthdays, weddings, anniversaries, graduations, honouring achievements, religious festivals, marking rites of passage, homecomings, commemorating the life of one who has died, national holidays: all these are occasions for family and friends to come together and have a meal.

We share food as a means of sharing joy and thanksgiving, and sometimes sorrow, with those whom we love. The food and the table are prepared with the best ingredients, the best dishes, and the loveliest decorations. Exchanging stories and reliving memories bring fun and laughter. These are traditions that bind families and communities together in unity and strength.

Yet nothing seems further from spirituality than food! We eat and drink every day to sustain our bodies. We can be forgiven for thinking that if anything is spiritual about food, it is abstaining from it.

But food and water have many spiritual benefits. They are essential to life. The health of mind and body depends on nutritious meals. Bread in its many forms is well-named the “staff of life.” Potable water, more precious than gold, should be everyone’s birthright. Starving people have neither the physical strength nor the mental will to consider their spiritual needs. Those of us who have enough to eat must find ways to ensure that all are fed. There is enough food in the world to feed everyone.

Whether we have an abundance of food or just a little, we all find joy in sharing it. When a friend or a stranger shows up at mealtime, we scurry around to set an extra place, exercise our ingenuity to make food go farther and

depend on the family holding back so that the guest may be fed. This very informal occasion can become a celebration of hospitality.

Food preparation often falls to women. In many parts of the world they also do the planting and harvesting. It can be a tiring job but it can also be a way to express our creative imagination and a means of showing our love. The 20th century has seen a great movement of people all over the world, as a result of war and the globalisation of the economy. When people move they take their food preferences and customs with them and introduce them to their new neighbours. Food then becomes a road to understanding and appreciation of other ways of life.

### Fasting

In most religious traditions people fast as a means of spiritual discipline, renunciation, self control, self purification or cleansing. They do not eat or they only eat small meals. Scientifically this gives the organs of the body rest. This is totally different to starvation diets that lead to illnesses such as anorexia. The Hindu term for fasting, ‘upavasa’, literally means ‘living with God.’ It requires self-control to fast. If we also take some positive action like donating money to feed the hungry, or trying to correct a weakness, fasting takes on even greater meaning.

Fasting is particularly associated with solemn occasions of prayer and repentance: the Jewish Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement); the Christian season of Lent that reflects Jesus’ 40 days’ fast in the wilderness; Islam’s fourth pillar of faith, Ramadan which is a month of collective fasting. Celebratory feasts with special food and visits to family and friends generally follow fasts.



## Dance

### Purpose

To give people an opportunity to express themselves and their spiritual awareness through dance.

### Materials needed

Music, sheets, light, holy readings, scriptures

### What to do

Invite people to choose any of the activities below. Some people are more comfortable than others in expressing themselves through dance. Sensitivity is needed and encouragement.

- A narrator reads aloud a poem, prayer or piece of scripture or holy reading. Shine a light behind a sheet. Behind the back-lit sheet, a dancer performs rhythmic movements to complement the words.
- Play taped music expressive of spiritual emotions as one or two dancers create suitable movements to reflect what they feel.
- Illustrate the words of a song you like through dance or movement. Waving coloured scarves is often effective.
- See if you can create a dance to a piece of scripture or a holy reading.
- What folk dances do you know? Invite a teacher in and enjoy learning new dances together. Try and find out the meaning behind each dance.



## Movement and drama

### Purpose

To give people the opportunity to express themselves through movement and drama.

### Materials needed

Poems, prayers, music, pens, paper, sheets, light.

### What to do

Invite people to choose any of the activities below.

- Act out a simple story as a narrator reads it. Or act out a story in mime, without words, perhaps accompanied by music.
- Ask a group to write poems using the Japanese haiku seventeen syllable and three-line pattern. One person reads aloud while the writers act them out.
- Small groups mime for others to guess the ideals of the Girl Guide/Girl Scout Promise and Law: honesty, loyalty, helpfulness, friendship, courtesy, self-discipline, integrity, resourcefulness.
- Try the Mirror. Pairs face each other. On a command to begin, one starts any kind of movement, which is immediately imitated by her partner. Continue, the one shadowing the other's movements, until the command to change is given. Without pausing, the follower becomes the leader and the movements continue with grace and ease. Someone watching should not be able to detect which is the leader. The intense co-operation and concentration called for in this simple exercise creates an amazingly peaceful atmosphere.
- Dramatise a simple scene, poem or prayer by projecting human figures and/or props against a backlit white sheet so that the audience sees them in clear silhouette. The only equipment you need is an electric lamp with a bare bulb and an unwrinkled white sheet, hung tautly on a rope or wire. The action or tableau takes place between the back of the sheet and the lamp.



## Spirituality and art

### Purpose

To give people an opportunity to express themselves and their spiritual awareness through art.

### Materials needed

Large pieces of paper, paints, crayons, coloured pencils, clay, sand, art books, pictures, post-cards

### What to do

Since the beginning of time, people have expressed themselves and their spirituality through art.

1. Invite participants to paint or to draw or to express through clay some aspect of their understanding of spirituality. If these materials are not available, people can draw in sand.

Do not ask people to explain their work! Some people may feel reluctant to enter into this exercise. Gentle encouragement may be needed.

2. If there is a local art gallery, encourage participants to visit to see what symbols, images and archetypes artists use to express different aspects of their understanding of spirituality.
3. If you have access to art books or pictures, invite people to look through them to discover further expressions of spirituality.



## Sharing a meal

### Purpose

To share a meal together!

### Materials

Different foods

### What to do

1. Invite participants to decide together on a particular event that they wish as a group to celebrate. Are there any foods that are appropriate to that meal? For example, a celebratory meal in Africa might have goat on the menu whilst in the UK or USA turkey would be traditional.

Decide on a date and get different people to cook different dishes. Decorate the room and the table (if you are eating inside and using a table). Enjoy eating together, being together as a community of Girl Guides/Girl Scouts. Have fun!

Whilst eating, invite people to talk about occasions when they have met with family, friends or neighbours to celebrate a special occasion with a meal. What do people remember about the gathering?

2. Invite people to bring in their favourite recipes. Compile a group recipe book. Try them out!



## Story-telling

### Purpose

To celebrate the art of story-telling.

### Materials needed

Favourite stories

### What to do

1. Invite participants to bring along their favourite short stories for a story-telling evening. For some people, the story will be from a book. For others it will be part of their oral tradition and therefore not written down. Simply enjoy the telling and the hearing of stories.
2. Invite a skilled story-teller to the group to tell stories.
3. Get the group to collect stories that they enjoy that can be read and re-read on different occasions.
4. Improvise the telling of a story. Sit in a circle and get one person to start. The next person continues and the story is told around the circle until the last person finishes.