

AGNES LEARNS



Creating magic

GRADES 9–12

Abby Nowakowski asserts that, “with our tattoos, we can dream up better and more radical futures, where our skin tells stories and casts spells.”

Explore different ways to express yourself and create magic with the following activities:

Art Activities

Experiment with fashion

Fashion is a form of visual self-expression that folks commonly participate in. Create a fashion drawing, with yourself as the model. Dream up your ideal outfit, something that feels uniquely ‘you’, or features current trends that you like. What are three words you would use to describe your personal style?

Explore collage

A collection of tattoos is kind of like a collage on skin. Create a collage on paper. Start by collecting images from magazines or art books that speak to you. Think about how you place the images and play with negative space. Did you overlap many images, or give them space from each other? How do the images relate to each other? What does the collage reflect about you?

Create a flash sheet

A flash sheet is an important tool for tattoo artists. It is a portfolio of available ‘pieces’ that can be booked and tattooed. Create a flash sheet on a piece of regular or tracing paper. Try drawing important images, items and ideas. Think about your style—you could try delicate line work, fill in shapes with bold colours, keep everything in greyscale and more. When you look at your finished flash sheet, do you notice any themes that connect the images you created?

Exhibition view, *we are magic: a love letter to our tattoos*. Photo: Garrett Elliott

If you'd like to extend the lesson beyond visual art, here are some other activities:

Reflect on self (language)

Create a word cloud of words that describe you. Start by writing a list of words that describe different parts of your identity and how you feel about yourself. Take a piece of paper and write the words that feel the most true in large letters, adding the other words around them in different sizes based on their importance. Use colour to emphasize different words. When you're done, reflect on how the exercise made you feel—did you learn something new about yourself?

Write a love letter to yourself (language)

we are magic has an accompanying [publication](#) that includes thirteen love letters to tattoos composed by artists, writers and folks that Nowakowski has tattooed. Write a love letter to yourself. Focus on your favourite aspects of yourself, and dreams or aspirations that you wish for the future.

Investigate tattoos through time and across cultures (history)

Tattooing has a long history—people have been marking their skin for millennia. Tattooing has a place in a myriad of cultures, including Inuit, Indigenous Polynesian, Indigenous Filipino and more. Read [“The Origins of Tattooing: A Brief Overview”](#) by Etta Coleman and delve into the history of tattoos. Watch PBS's “Skin Stories” if curious about Polynesian tattoos, or CBC's [“Etched on the Skin”](#) to learn more about Kakiniit (Inuit tattooing). Why do you think people are compelled to mark their skin? What did you find most interesting about the history of tattoos? Are there any traditional reasons for tattooing that you feel aligned with?

GLOSSARY

Interdisciplinary: Artwork or an artistic practice that involves more than one artistic discipline. Also used in the context of academia and science when using two or more areas of study.

Mycorrhizal network: An underground network formed by the connection between plants and fungi that can be mutualistic, symbiotic or parasitic.

Radical: Relating to the fundamental change of the nature of something. Often used in the context of progressive or revolutionary politics.

Handpoke Tattooing: A style of tattooing that does not use a tattoo machine, but rather a needle dipped into ink and manually pushed into the skin to leave a permanent mark.

Flash: The terminology used for pre-designed tattoos offered by artists, typically displayed and advertised digitally on platforms or physically in a studio.



Abby Nowakowski's tattoo art on Jessica Endress. Photo: Charlotte Gagnier