

KOESTLER ARTS - ART AID

Koestler Arts produces monthly Art Aid sheets featuring creative tasks that can be done in cell and with just paper and a pencil.

Although the 2023 Koestler Awards deadline passed on 6 April, we hope these sheets will inspire you to remain creative and perhaps try something new. New Art Aid sheets are available from the first Monday of every month.

SEPTEMBER 2023

For each Art Aid sheet, we commission an artist or writer who has engaged with Koestler Arts to set a creative task and share their experience with creativity. This month we asked Koestler Award winner, exhibited artist, and former mentee, Mark, who has set a writing and illustration task inspired by the title of our upcoming 2023 national exhibition, 'IN CASE OF EMERGENCY'.

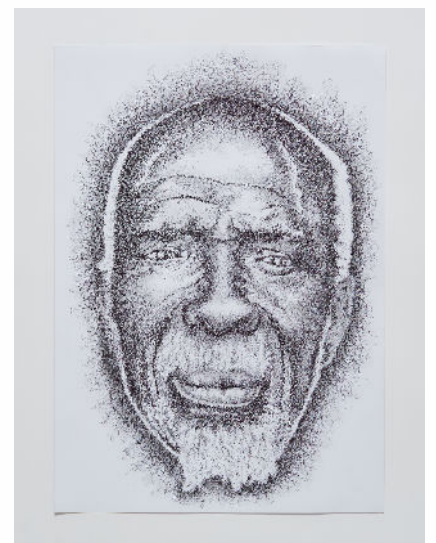
My Story

It's never a good idea to talk out loud about having an 'escape' while you're in prison but art and writing were the perfect escapes for me. I hadn't done any kind of art since I was at school (which at the time was 25 years ago) except for being a bit of a compulsive doodler, but I joined the art class and that was it. I was hooked. I had the time and opportunity to do what I'd always wished I could do - draw a face and make it look like the person that it was supposed to be. I got advice and encouragement and I could see myself improve.

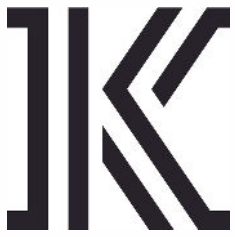
Then I entered the Koestler Awards and one of my proudest moments was to win the Platinum Award for Portraiture (I was extra proud when I won it for the second time). I also found out how much I enjoyed writing and was lucky enough to get a great Koestler mentor called Nick who I'm still in touch with.

You can't beat creating something... whatever it is. There's always a sense of purpose and achievement. Even if you've never done anything 'artistic' in your life, everyone has a talent for something. It's why Koestler Arts is so important an organisation. You'll get nothing but encouragement and there is such a wide range of categories that you can enter.

Get involved - you won't regret it.



Kossula, West Bromwich Probation,
Portrait, 2022



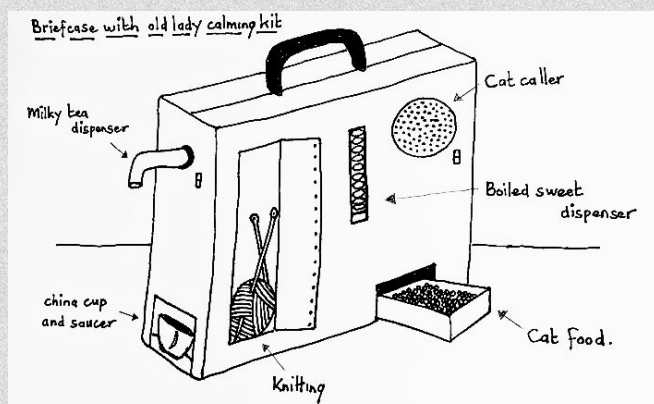
My Task: What If?

Think of a problem or emergency you've experienced or create an imaginary one - it might be something catastrophic or an everyday problem people face. Write what happens from your perspective or that of your fictional narrator. This could be a short story, part of a longer piece, or a diary entry. Describe you or your character's thought processes and actions, and how the situation pans out.

Now think up a device that would have helped or changed the outcome of that situation and draw it to go alongside your writing. Don't be concerned about making your drawings realistic or accurate, something cartoonish will work well for this task, and a bizarre device will bring humour and open up narrative possibilities. Have fun with it!

You might want to then write another piece incorporating your invention - an alternate story in which your character has access to it, or a next section or chapter in which they come across or create it. Write about how things change course and turn out differently. I've had a go at the task myself below, which I hope will spark some ideas for you.

The old lady was getting more and more anxious and emotional despite my efforts to calm her. Or perhaps it was because of my efforts? I've never been very good at the old 'shoulder to cry on' business as I'm more of a 'stop whining and get on with it' kind of bloke. This is why I didn't bother asking how she'd managed to leave her key inside the house and why I wasn't interested in finding out why she didn't want to go and sit with one of her neighbours until her son arrived either. Those kind of enquiries always tend to lead to lengthy, complicated and usually incredibly boring tales and I really needed to get away. I'd just had a phone call telling me that my wife had just gone into labour and I was cursing myself for pulling over to post a letter in the post box just outside the old lady's house; which was the kind of house that probably had a croquet lawn out the back by the way. I had nearly got away. Nearly. I'd just opened the car door when I heard a "young man!" from behind a rhododendron bush in a voice that had 'retired headmistress at a posh school' written all over it. It filled me with dread. Five minutes later and she's sitting on the green bench outside her front door with her shopping trolley and I couldn't help feeling sorry for her but with a good sized measure of irritation thrown in. "At least your son should be here soon?" I said, hoping to change the mood. "Yes, he comes to tea every Wednesday."



She almost smiled and I realised that I was rapidly running out of small talk. "It's nice that he comes to see you. Does he live.....hold on. Did you say 'for tea?'" "Yes, why?" she replied in a way that clearly showed that the significance of the above had escaped her. I took a deep breath. "It's only ten thirty in the morning. What time do you have tea?" "Four o'clock of course." My next sentence was one that I certainly wouldn't have repeated in front of my own headmistress for fear of six of the best, a lengthy detention and a phone call to my parents.

You don't need to send your responses to these tasks to us at Koestler, we just hope you'll enjoy giving them a go. If you do we'll be very happy to see and read them but please note they won't be entered into this year's Koestler Awards and we won't be able to return them to you.