



Inspired by Blessings to the Seven Directions by artist Emily Mcllroy, displayed as part of *All is a Circle Within Me*, exhibited fall 2024 at the Holter MOA. Not on display: *Above and Below*

## Blessings to the Seven Directions

*Blessings to the Seven Directions* looks to sacred geometry and varying lineages of wisdom traditions that recognize both a horizontal and vertical structure of lived experience. The series consists of six works: *East/Spring*, *South/Summer*, *West/Fall*, *North/Winter*, *Above*, and *Below*. The design of each piece is structured around a Celtic infinity knot, a looped pattern that has no beginning and no end. The horizontal axis of existence is represented by the cardinal directions of east, south, west, and north, and the corresponding seasons of spring, summer, fall, and winter. It refers to the temporal plane of life in which time is chronological and space is particular. The vertical axis is represented by the directions above and below. It refers to the eternal plane in which time and space are unbounded. The human heart, situated at the intersection of the two axes, represents the seventh direction of center. Together with the viewer, these works constitute a symbolic sphere that embodies and blesses all dimensions and cycles of existence.

Symbolizing the interconnectedness of life and eternity, the loops, overlaps, and pathways of a Celtic knot can take on meditative practice in their creation.

## Celtic Knot Art

### Materials:

Paper  
Drawing pencil  
Charcoal pencil  
Eraser  
Colored pencils  
Blending pencil

### Vocabulary:

**Celtic Knots** are a symbolic, intricate, and decorative pattern of interlocking loops that has no beginning or end. They are thought to symbolize the interconnectedness of life and eternity.

**Blending pencils** blend in the same way color pencils do, as they contain the same wax and binder, but no pigment is added. The result is a tool that allows artists to accomplish several effects, like merging neighboring colors, softening edges, and creating unique color blends.

## Lesson Plan:

1. Students will start by folding their piece of paper in half. Make a mark along the fold on opposite ends of the paper.
2. Starting at one of the marks, draw a line that goes across one side of the paper and connects with the other mark. As you draw your line, make loop de loops, squares, “v”s,



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and other shapes. Important: While making your design, lines and shapes can not overlap more than once, i.e. a loop de loop cannot be inside another loop de loop.

3. Once your line is complete, take a charcoal pencil and outline your line.
  - a. Start by drawing circles in the interiors of your loop de loops that follow their shapes.
  - b. Next, draw another line below your original line and another line above it. Make sure these lines follow the shape of your original line. These lines will become your outline.
4. Erase your original line.
5. Where your outline loop de loops, decide which line goes under and which line goes over. Also known as your underlaps and overlaps.
6. Fold your paper back in half, pressing the 2 halves together so that your charcoal outline transfers to the other side of the paper. If needed, place your folded paper on a flat surface and use the backside of a spoon to apply pressure to the paper.
7. Once your design has transferred, open the paper back. Use an eraser to lightly erase your charcoal lines, making sure the lines are still visible for when you got back over them later but that the charcoal is picked up off the paper.
8. Go back over your lines with a pencil, marker, or darker colored pencil.
9. Add color!
  - a. Helpful tricks: wherever there is an underpass, add darker colors to mimic a shadow in that spot. Wherever there is an overpass, add lighter colors to mimic a highlight.
  - b. You can use any colors you want for this project. It can be a fun added challenge to use a color scheme: trying working with complimentary colors, analogous colors, or even monochromatic colors.
10. Once you are satisfied with your color, use a blender pencil to combine and blend the colors more evenly.

## Variations:

No charcoal pencils on-hand? Use a soft yellow for your original line and make your outlines with a graphite pencil.

Color outside the lines! Instead of coloring inside your lines, use your color scheme to color outside the lines. Turn the art up a notch by coloring outside the lines in one color scheme and inside the lines with another color scheme.

Try drawing your name or the name of a loved one in cursive. Treat the name like your original line, outlining above and below it as well as inside the loop de loops with a different material from your original line.

Color association assignment: choose colors that you associate with an emotion or feeling, a memory, or a person. Use those colors to create a knot associated with that person.

## Further connections

<https://www.emilymcilroy.com/>

<https://holtermuseum.org/exhibitions/all-is-a-circle-within-me/>

<https://www.theirishroadtrip.com/celtic-symbols-and-meanings/>



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[https://realirish.com/blogs/news/unseen-ties-that-bind-us-to-a-common-history-and-culture-a-little-about-celtic-knots-and-their-significance-for-us-all?srltid=AfmBOopvUzWywX4POSd-MBzoRFk\\_MtIx6iwsCXqMUsFU7KU5NbePFfH](https://realirish.com/blogs/news/unseen-ties-that-bind-us-to-a-common-history-and-culture-a-little-about-celtic-knots-and-their-significance-for-us-all?srltid=AfmBOopvUzWywX4POSd-MBzoRFk_MtIx6iwsCXqMUsFU7KU5NbePFfH)

This lesson plan was originally written for **Survivors of Suicide Loss** at the Montana State Capital November 2024.

Resources for grief:

<https://afsp.org/international-survivors-of-suicide-loss-day/>

<https://good-grief.org/resources/>