

# Drawing Our Water Stories

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## Abstract

As living beings, we are united by our universal dependence on water. We cannot live without it. Whether it is an innate connection or a deep-seated fear, we all have a water story to share. Drawing our water stories can generate empathy with one another and the non-human world.

## Keywords

art, active listening, sharing, interdependence, empathy, kinship

## Introduction

Water unites us in our humanity and as living beings on this planet. We each have our own personal water stories. Those stories may be of immigration, with water serving as a pathway to freedom and a new life. It may be a story of trauma of knowing how your ancestors were transported across seas. It may be a story loss due to flooding or drowning. It may be a story of scarcity and need, or a story of recreation, sustenance, joy, relief, calm, or celebration. There are so many ways that water intersects with our lives.

Drawing Our Water Stories serves as an exercise in reflection and connection. It asks participants to reflect on at least one aspect of their personal water story and share it with someone else who is actively listening and recording. We find there is

something deeply intimate in sharing a story in this way that allows for a moment of deep empathy and care, for both the water and for another human.

We also find it fascinating to observe people engaging in this activity—an activity that requires participants to be vulnerable in both sharing and in recording. There is no need to be an excellent artist, as participants can include words and draw symbols to convey the story. It is not expected to be a full illustration. Simplicity and creativity are key.

### Overview

Drawing Our Water Stories is an active listening exercise that fosters deeper personal, interpersonal, and environmental connections to water through reflection and active listening. Participants pair up and take turns sharing their water story while the other draws it. These drawings are not meant to be masterpieces but rather serve to promote active listening. Afterward, pairs can report out to the larger group, with each person sharing their partner's story and how they chose to depict it.

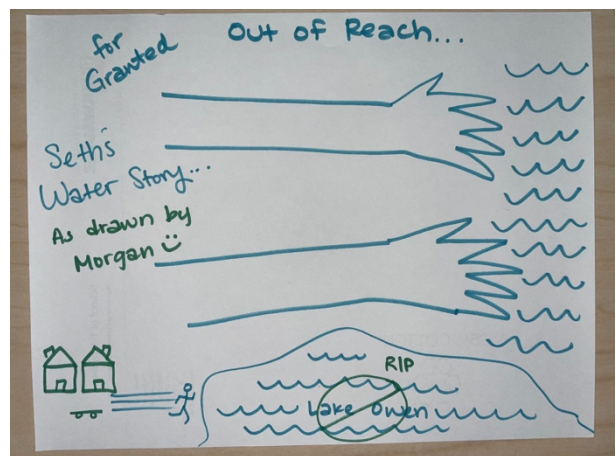
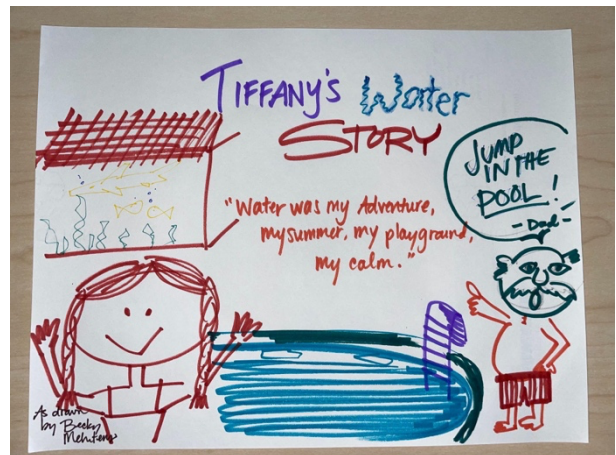
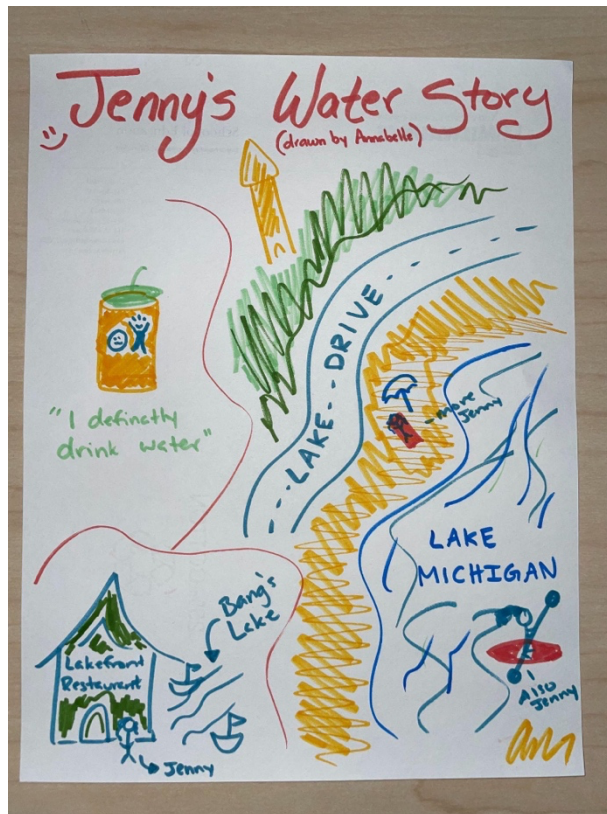
This exercise could also be done as a group exercise with a visual note-taker asking the group to share their water stories and drawing or painting them on a big banner. In short, Drawing Our Water Stories:

- Creates a collection of personal or community water stories
- Invites conversation
- Generates confidence in talking about water and their experiences

<b>Title</b>	Drawing our Water Stories
<b>Unit Time</b>	30 minutes-50 minutes. (10-15) minutes for each drawing, followed by sharing out to the group)
<b>Grade Level(s)</b>	6th grade to adult
<b>Climate Literacy Terms</b>	Water, dependence, resource, necessity, understanding

Objectives	Deeper personal and environmental connections, confidence in sharing and communicating.
Materials and Resources	Blank Paper, colored markers, colored pencils

Examples: Fostering Kinship



## Acknowledgments

[Milwaukee Water Commons](#) is a cross-city network that fosters connection, collaboration and broad community leadership on behalf of our waters. We promote stewardship of, equitable access to, and shared decision-making for our common waters. We recognize that:

- Water is an essential element for all life on Earth.
- Water belongs to no one and cannot be owned.
- We recognize the gift of the Great Lakes; they have nurtured our ancestors and shaped us as a people and as a community. They continue to sustain us.

