

# DOODLES

Ruth Rostron

*This article was written as an introduction to the book  
'National Doodle Day – Celebrating five years of Celebrity Doodling'  
published 2008 by Epilepsy Action and The Neurofibromatosis Association*

**Stuck somewhere, waiting or listening with pen in hand? Chances are you'll start doodling. Printed letters grow faces and legs, an underlined word turns into a pile of boxes, or a decorative border appears round the edge. Wait long enough and the whole thing may get blocked out or scribbled over!**

## **WHAT ARE DOODLES?**

Doodles may be shapes, patterns, drawings or scribbles - anything we produce in an idle moment while the focus of our attention is elsewhere. It's amazing how creative we can be without even trying! Strangely, doodles seem to take shape of their own accord, as if they had a life of their own in a parallel world. So you may suddenly find a circled word transformed into a sun beaming down on a desert island, punctuation turned into arrows or flowers, or a lover's name emerging bold as brass from a memo.

**Because we doodle without thinking our doodles can be very revealing - like Freudian slips or body-language that we are not aware of.**

Your doodles may meander round the page or be gone over so intensely that you've made a hole in the paper. They may be precise, slapdash, complex or childlike, but they are unlikely to look like works of art. Doodles are a form of drawing, but the more contrived they look, the greater the conscious effort that has gone into them. So, strictly speaking, some wonderful 'doodles' are not really doodles at all because they have been given a lot of thought. Not that this makes them any less intriguing!

## **WHY DO PEOPLE DOODLE?**

Meetings and phone calls can be very tedious and some people hate doing nothing. They get tense and frustrated if they are short of time or have no opportunity to voice their opinions, so they while away dead time by doodling.

**Doodling helps relieve boredom and frustration and the urge to doodle gets stronger as stress levels rise.**

Doodling is like a safety valve that allows pressure to be dispelled in a playful and creative way. Doodling has been defined as 'to scribble or draw aimlessly, to play or improvise idly'. The word 'play' is interesting because we now know that play helps children deal with situations they find difficult. For example, playing 'doctors and nurses' can help a child cope with anxiety relating to illness.

When you are on automatic pilot and only half attending to what you are doing, you may find yourself thinking of something that has been at the back of your mind. Underlying preoccupations surface and, before you know it, take shape as doodles. Doodling maps the wandering of your mind as you plan a new venture, worry about money, or dream of a lover or holiday. At an unconscious level this seemingly aimless pastime may actually be helping people sort out their problems.

**Doodles are like fragments of a map that shows how someone's mind works.**

### ***WHAT CAN A DOODLE TELL US?***

A doodle can tell you a great deal about someone, once you know what to look for. The subject will give you some clues, but the way the drawing has been done will tell you even more. For example, if six people draw a cat, every cat will be different – in size, shape, colour, position, expression etc. All six doodlers may be home-loving cat owners, but the particular features of the drawing will reflect qualities that relate to the individual.

**Doodles can tell you what people are like and where their special talents lie.**

Doodles show what kind of people we are because we are free to doodle what and how we like, and we show our individuality through all the choices we make in life. Our clothes, friends, work and interests all say something about us, and so do the language and gestures we use. Doodling is an uninhibited form of self-expression.

**Doodles vary as much as the people who have done them.**

Some are bold and fill up all the space while others are tiny and sit in a corner. Some are all curves and swirls while others look stiff and mechanical. Some are brightly coloured while others are dark or empty-looking, and some look painstaking while others are dashed off.

Just as one person will dominate a room full of people while another goes unnoticed, or one seems always in a rush while another is calm, so you get a sense of people's different temperaments, moods, talents and lifestyles from their doodles.

### ***HOW DO YOU INTERPRET A DOODLE?***

One of the strangest things about doodling is that no-one tells us what we should be doing yet many of us end up doodling similar things. Subjects such as the sun, stars, boxes, arrows, hearts, flowers or waves keep cropping up, apparently because they have special significance for us as human beings. These images have become symbols that represent our aspirations, needs and feelings.

When somebody doodles one of these common symbols it suggests what motivates them and what they feel is important in life. It is impossible to know whether the image has a personal association, but it does give an indication of what they are hankering for at that particular time.

## **Subjects that keep reappearing in doodles symbolise important human concerns.**

If a doodle contains a well-known image you can interpret its significance in a general way by using a dictionary of symbols or dreams to help you. But what do you do if someone has just done a scribble, or drawn something mundane like a beer mug or a coat hanger? What do you do then?

**To interpret doodles look at the basic shapes, the size and spacing of the objects and the style of the drawing.**

### **SHAPES**

Are the lines mainly straight or curved? These represent opposite aspects of our nature: masculine and feminine, mental and physical, willpower and emotion. People who prefer straight lines tend to have strong willpower and self-control and like facts, while those who prefer curved strokes are more flexible, imaginative and emotional.

**Straight or curved lines represent masculine or feminine characteristics.**

Circles, squares and triangles often appear in doodles. These shapes are hugely symbolic and can be linked with our basic needs for love, security, sex and survival. Look out for curves and spirals, also right-angled or angular shapes that are parts of squares or triangles.

**Circles, squares and triangles show needs and motivation.**

Emotional people who want harmony and love tend to draw things with circular or rounded shapes, or symbols of love and femininity (circles, spirals, suns, flowers, hearts, faces, lips, eyes, small animals, cups, jugs, balloons, rings, wheels, shoes, clocks, loops, fluffy clouds, rounded trees, hills, fruit, waves, pools etc.).

Down-to-earth, practical people who need security and like to be in control tend to draw things with square shapes or flat surfaces, or symbols of material security (squares, boxes, houses, doors, windows, walls, fences, ladders, stairs, tables, chairs, chessboards, books, forts, towers, fireplaces, money, numbers, block letters, punctuation marks etc.).

Determined people who need an outlet for their mental and physical energy tend to draw things with triangular or pointed shapes, or symbols of masculinity (stars, arrows, zigzags, spires, diamonds, stick figures, crowns, weapons, trains, aeroplanes, motorbikes, speed boats, warships, lighthouses, dartboards, lightning, kites, birds with beaks, mountains, Christmas trees etc.).

### **SIZE and SPACING**

**Everything in a doodle relates in some way to the person who has drawn it.**

A single object represents himself (or herself) while the background scene or space represents the world around. Several objects may represent people who are important to him, different aspects of a situation, or parts of himself.

If a doodle consists of a single object or pattern, consider how big it is in relation to the space. Does it fill it up, look balanced, or is it tiny? This reflects the person's activity level, sense of importance and enjoyment of attention, and shows how they tend to dominate situations or relationships. A large object shows they are outgoing, appear confident and have a busy life, while a small one suggests they observe more than they participate, like their personal space and prefer a quiet life. Good balance shows mature give and take, clear thinking and good organisation.

### **Size and spacing reflect lifestyle and balance in relationships.**

The position on the page is also significant. The top of the page is associated with dreams and aspirations, the bottom with security and material concerns, the right with the future and the outside world, and the left with past and family. Where a doodle or objects in a scene are placed, or appear to be moving towards, can therefore tell you something about someone's interests and priorities as well as their attitudes, fears and feelings.

### **Directional trends indicate attitudes and priorities.**

## **STYLE and STROKES**

The mood and sense of movement (lively, peaceful, static, rushed, disturbed etc.) reflect a person's temperament, dynamism and well-being at the time, while the strength of the strokes indicates what energy went into the doodling. People who are sensitive or hesitant tend to draw with short, light or sketchy lines, while determined people who feel strongly about things use longer, firmer strokes. Digging into the paper or going over and over something are signs that someone is frustrated, obsessed or stuck with a problem. Heavy shading or criss-crossing of strokes suggest depression or worry.

Drawing lines or objects in rows shows good organisation, a methodical approach and a liking for order and control. More disorderly-looking doodles are done by lively people who like freedom to do things on the spur of the moment but have a tendency to get side-tracked. Chaotic doodles suggest problems coping with life or possibly some mental disturbance.

### **Style and strokes show temperament, energy, drive and strength of feeling.**

## **COLOURS**

Dark colours or heavily shaded areas in a doodle convey a sombre mood of serious thought or possibly depression. Pale or light-coloured doodles look timid, indecisive or sensitive, while bright colours look more lively and cheerful. Different colours actually emit light waves of various lengths that affect our bodies in different ways.

### **Liking a certain colour means being in tune with its vibrations.**

<b>Red</b>	speeds up the pulse and is connected with energy, activity and strong feelings: anger, love and hate.
<b>Pink</b>	is in tune with soft feelings: affection, warmth, compassion and sensitivity.
<b>Orange</b>	is a powerful, intense, stimulating and disturbing colour associated with dynamic energy.
<b>Yellow</b>	is a bright, sharp colour that stimulates the mind and creates excitement, as well as fear.
<b>Green</b>	is linked with natural renewal and change, relaxation, dissatisfaction and growth.
<b>Turquoise</b>	is a cool colour associated with calm detachment, self-control and pride.
<b>Blue</b>	slows the breathing and is linked with peace, trust, self-discipline, loyalty and spirituality.
<b>Purple</b>	or indigo is rich and deep with insight, integrity, dignity and authority.
<b>Violet</b>	has the power to heal, associated with intuition, inspiration and spirituality.
<b>Brown</b>	is the colour of down-to-earth practicality and reliability.
<b>Black</b>	is associated with facts, discipline and what is serious or gloomy.

***AND FINALLY....***

Doodles are puzzling because they are often enigmatic, full of bizarre images or seem to make no sense, rather like dreams. As in dreams, issues and concerns that preoccupy us are transformed and represented in symbolic ways. Thoughts that we tend to inhibit slip out in disguise when our guard is down and take shape as doodles.

**Interpreting doodles is not an exact science, but speculating about their deeper significance is fascinating and can be rewarding if it gives insight into ourselves, our friends, family or people we work with.**