

# Sharpening the Mind's Eye

**Ages:** 8+ (Grades 3–12)

**Duration:** 20 minutes

**Materials needed:**

- Paper
- Pencil, marker, crayon, or pen

**Introduction:**

Visual artists use close observation skills in their work, both before they create and in the act of creating. Artists have to closely observe another person’s face, features, **expressions, stance**, and surroundings when creating a portrait so they can tell the most detailed story possible about that person through imagery.

**Blind contour drawing** is a method of observing a subject closely while warming up your drawing hand. Just like practicing catching a ball, this activity will help you strengthen your eye-mind connection, and artists never stop working out this “muscle”! In a contour drawing, you are focusing on the main shapes and outline of your subject versus small details and the background setting. You also try NOT to look at your paper while you draw, and the drawing should be quick!

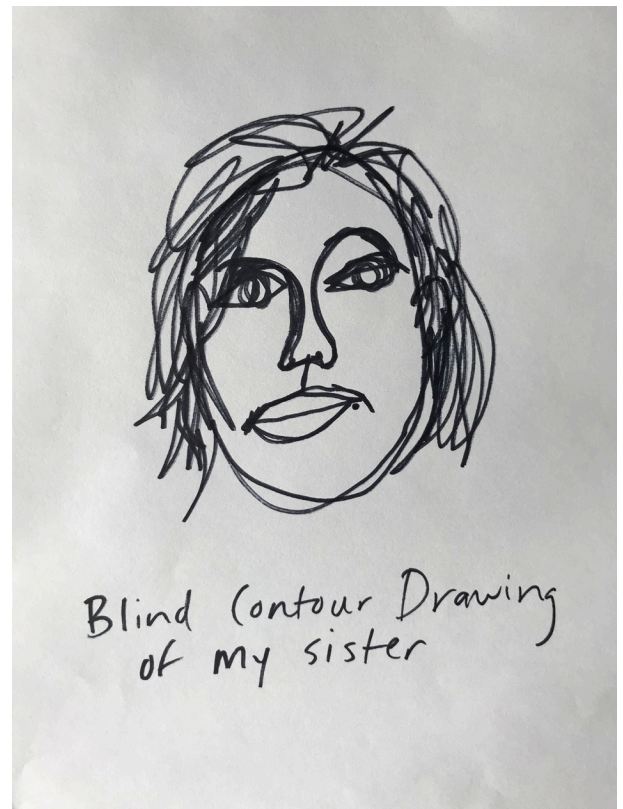
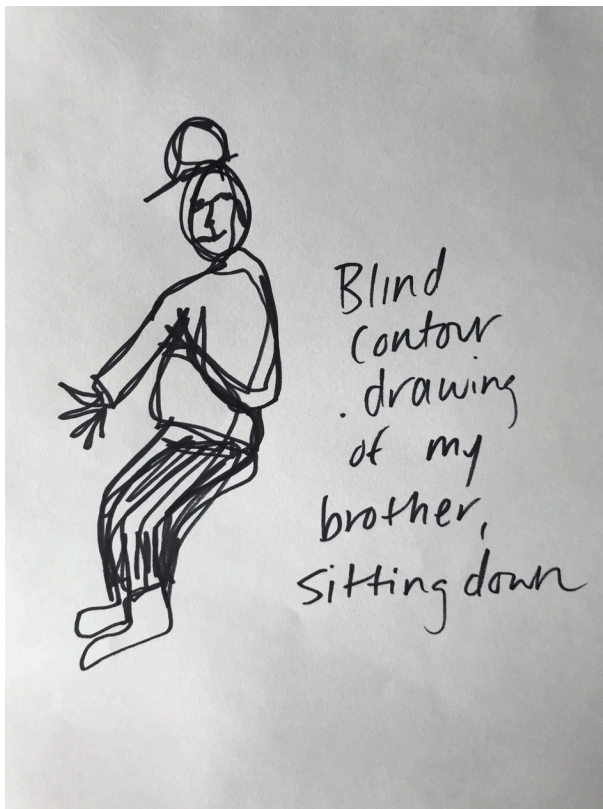
**Procedure:**

1. Find someone in your home who can be the subject of your contour drawing. If no one is available, you can look at a photograph of someone or even use an image of a character in a book or graphic novel.
2. Ask your subject to sit or stand, and find a comfortable place for yourself to work.
3. Use your pencil, pen, marker, or crayon to draw your subject’s face. Look closely at your subject, not at your paper! Try to look at your paper no more than THREE TIMES during your whole drawing exercise.
4. For an additional challenge, try to draw your subject using only one continuous line—don’t lift your pencil from the paper at all!

5. Your blind contour drawing portrait does not have to look exactly like your subject, and probably won't. Don't worry—this is to help you with your mind-hand muscle development.
6. Make as many contour drawings as you like. You can ask your subject to experiment with different facial expressions or **body language**. What do they look like when they feel happy? What do they look like when they feel bored? What about when they are confused, sad, or excited? Try doing a contour drawing of the face first, and then try one that includes the rest of your subject's body.

### Share your work:

Take a photo of your contour drawing(s) and post to Instagram using the hashtags #MuseumFromHome and #Portraiture, and tag @HudsonRiverMuseum.



Left: *Blind Contour Drawing of My Brother Sitting Down* by Bridget McCormick

Right: *Blind Contour Drawing of My Sister* by Bridget McCormick