



LITTLE
Ways
to LIVE a
BIG LIFE

HOW TO
DRAW ANYTHING



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CHAPTER 1

Why Draw?

I think of myself as a visual person...but I really can't draw.



The first part of that statement is probably true; after all, something made you pick up this book. Many of us find pictures accessible and engaging, we interpret them instinctively and they're crucial to how we navigate the world around us. They can make us feel more connected to a subject, and help us to understand and remember it. A lot of people would say that they think visually too – that mental images form in their minds automatically when they're developing ideas.

But the second part of the statement definitely isn't true. You can draw – we promise. OK, you might never be a Michelangelo or a Rembrandt. But if you want to use drawing to explain, to plan, to problem-solve, to tell stories or to make others think or laugh, then we're willing to bet that it's well within your capabilities. And the good news is, if you consider yourself to be a visual person, then the day on which you're drawing freely and confidently is much closer than you might think. The hard work's already being done in your head. Now, in order to get it down on paper, you just need to regain your confidence and focus, and get back into the habit of drawing.



But how can I regain my confidence – I’ve never been any good at drawing?

Are you sure about that? Let’s take you back to your childhood. You’re six years old and you’re sitting at the kitchen table; Mum’s making dinner and light is streaming through the window. You’re drawing! Animals, spaceships, dinosaurs, family or a something concocted entirely from your imagination. Your pencil moves busily around the page, describing the thoughts in your head.

Back then, drawing came naturally to you. Not necessarily in the sense that you had a natural talent for it, but in the sense that you had an instinct for it. You didn’t hesitate, you didn’t overthink, you didn’t worry about being good enough – you just did it, enjoying the feeling of giving your ideas shape and colour on the page.



So, when did it all go wrong?

It was probably around the age of nine or ten. That’s when your ability for self-appraisal developed, and, more than likely, it’s when your spontaneous approach to drawing started to tighten up. You noticed that there were rules to follow in order to make a drawing look ‘correct’, and discovered that applying those rules was tricky. At the same time, the ideas that flowed so easily from your young imagination were becoming more measured and rational. Hesitation and doubt crept in and, suddenly, you weren’t so sure what to draw, let alone how to draw it.



Looking across the classroom to that kid who was brilliant at drawing, and at all those lovely illustrated books around you might have left you feeling inadequate in comparison. You might have been told (or perhaps you concluded by yourself), that drawing wasn't your 'thing'. And pretty soon, your relationship with it was reaching the end of the line. It was time to focus on other skills. Without a backward glance you left drawing behind, before giving yourself the chance to discover what a fun – and fantastically useful – skill it is to keep up your sleeve.



But realising the things you're not good at is part of growing up, isn't it?

Hang on a minute. Nobody ever suggests we should give up writing if we're not showing early signs of literary greatness, do they? We all know it's possible to get your message across perfectly well in writing, without having a Booker or Pulitzer Prize on your mantelpiece. We do it every day – on our Facebook pages, in our emails, in birthday cards and so on. It may not be a work of genius, but it gets the job done – a thought has been launched into the world in a form that others can understand. When we learn to write, we gain an important life skill – a practical means of communicating.



Drawing should be no different. It's also an incredibly practical way of turning what's inside your head into something more tangible and shareable. Yet we've lost sight of drawing as a functional means of expression and have become fixed on the idea that it's something very refined that requires a special talent. And if you don't have that talent, why fight it? Better to leave it to those that are good at it, right?

Wrong! Not every drawing needs to be framed and hung on a wall. Some drawings, including some truly world-changing drawings, just do enough to get the message across. They allow us to see what is meant and that's where they stop. And these powerful, wonderful, humble little drawings are well within your grasp.

Maybe, for some people, but you haven't seen my drawings – they really are terrible!

Of course they are! You wouldn't expect to smash an ace if you hadn't picked up a tennis racquet for twenty years, would you? Drawing's no different. Whether you're an artist or not, drawing is something you have to work at. But, if you give it the time and attention it deserves, it's a skill that anyone can learn.



The Victorians proved it. Back then, if you were lucky enough to get a good education, drawing was central to it. Not because they were training future artists, but because they were training future doctors, nurses, scientists, engineers, builders, cartographers, carpenters, plumbers and gardeners. They understood the importance

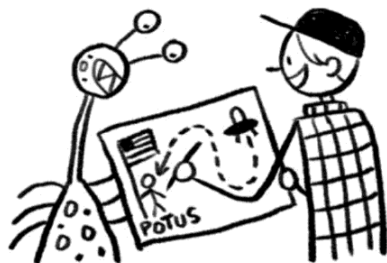
of being able to illustrate what you were thinking. They recognised the power of drawing to reveal, explain and clarify, where words alone fell short. Florence Nightingale's visualisations of mortality data in the Crimean War saved many lives. From the scruffy sketchbook pages of Alexander Graham Bell came the first telephone. Charles Darwin grabbed a scrap of paper and mapped out the tree of life.

Were they all naturally talented artists? Unlikely. Did they outsource their drawings to someone more artistically gifted? Why bother? They'd all been taught to draw and picking up a pencil to visualise their thinking felt natural to them. They understood that a good drawing is not necessarily a beautiful one, but one that does its job. Not a work of art, but art that works. As the Victorian artist, writer and social thinker, John Ruskin, wrote: 'Better the rudest work that tells a story or records a fact than the richest without meaning.'



But couldn't I just write it instead?

Drawing's not an alternative to writing, it's a complement to it. Of course, words can be incredibly versatile and effective, but there are times when they fail us, or at least, struggle to describe what a picture can do quite easily. The old saying 'a picture says a thousand words' is often true. A clear drawing can save you some serious linguistic mileage. Sometimes, even a complete non-drawer will know, instinctively, that it's better to draw something out than attempt to explain it verbally. When a set of directions gets complicated, who doesn't reach for pen and paper and scribble out a rough map?



Pictures are particularly good at showing how one thing relates to another, whether that's physically, or conceptually. How confident would you be about getting the kitchen of your dreams if you'd only read a description of it before handing over your money? Clearly, that would be far too risky, but a picture ensures everyone's expectations are aligned. Or imagine trying to explain verbally all the relationships that exist through five generations of your family. It would quickly get incredibly confusing, wouldn't it? But a family tree visualises all that complexity in a way that is simple, logical and unambiguous.



And those are just examples of the practical value of drawing. Pictures, done well, can also be more engaging and memorable than the written word; helping us grasp ideas more quickly and inspiring a greater emotional connection. In short, being able to write and draw makes you a more complete communicator. Surely, in the so-called 'age of communication', that's something worth striving for?

Well, yes – but I'm just worried my drawings might not communicate well, and if that's the case, what's the point of drawing at all?

This book tackles that concern head on. It focuses on the simple, achievable aim of creating drawings that communicate with clarity. If people can see what you mean, if the picture is legible, then you have a powerful means of expression at your pencil tip.

Obviously, we're hoping you'll soon have the confidence to share your pictures