

# The Sketchbook Challenge: Techniques, Prompts, and Inspiration for Achieving Your Creative Goals

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**WORKING WITH THEMES**

I love working with themes in my sketchbooks. Having a framework to work within takes the stress out of trying to decide what to do when I open my sketchbook. The theme acts as a guide and helps narrow my focus when it comes to which techniques I want to explore, especially when it is time to start the process of translating what's on the pages into a new piece of artwork. There's no right or wrong way to choose a theme to work with, and not all themes will speak to every artist. Personally I like to work in more abstract word themes such as those related to texture and structure because that's the style I like, but you may find that a more literal theme, such as houses, birds, or flowers, is more appealing. When I sat down to create the list of themes to use for this book, I tried not to think too hard about it and created a list of random words to use very quickly because I wasn't thinking about what each theme represented or meant to me. The goal was just to create a list of words I could present to the artists in the book to choose from. It would be the artists' job to explore the meaning of the themes and how it spoke to them. Don't dismiss a theme because nothing comes to mind when you first glance at it: give yourself time to think about it first and see where it leads you.

So how do you decide on a theme? Well, the idea for a theme can come from anywhere! What do you see when you look out the window? The natural world is filled with ideas for themes. Do you see trees, birds, bugs, flowers, a vegetable garden, leaves, animals, a snowy landscape? Any of those would make a great theme to explore. Take a walk around the neighborhood and see if something sparks your imagination. Notice how each house has a different entryway or door, suggesting the theme of passages or journeys. Looking at a mailbox

**Stuck for Ideas? Try These**

Pull out some old magazines or newspapers and cut out interesting words or phrases. Toss them into a paper bag, pull one out at random, and paste it onto your sketchbook page. Sketch whatever comes to mind when you read it. You could do a series of pages inspired by the same phrase, or pull a new one for each.



*Phrases cut from magazines*

- Google the phrase "random word generator" and let the computer generate one for you.
- Open the dictionary to a random page and pick a word from there.
- Take a trip to a local museum and spend some time looking at art, or visit the library and browse the art book section.
- Use a favorite quote, poem, childhood memory, or song.
- Are you a collector of teapots, figurines, stamps, vintage textiles, etc.? Use one of those as your theme.
- Or you can always visit the Sketchbook Challenge site for one of our monthly themes.

Getting Started

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