

Symmetry Shellebration: Facilitator Guide



This activity uses the traditional art of pysanky, or “egg writing”, to explore the geometric concept of symmetry. The activity includes a short reading passage and an egg-shaped template that youth can use to create a symmetrical design of their own.

You could let youth explore the concept of wax resist by using crayons and watercolors or by trying batik dye techniques on fabric. There are also many resources online if you want to try your hand at pysanky.

If you want to extend the reading component of this activity, here are some books you could use:

Chicken Sunday by Patricia Polacco. Puffin Books (February 9, 1998). **ISBN: 978-0698116153**

Acclaimed children’s author shares a story from her childhood. She and her friends would love to buy Miss Eula an Easter hat from Mr. Kodinski, but they don’t have enough money. After he mistakenly accuses them of vandalism, will they ever be able to earn his trust?

Rechenka’s Eggs by Patricia Polacco. Puffin Books (March 19, 1996). **ISBN: 978-0698113855**

Old Babushka has taken in an injured goose. When the goose accidentally breaks the basket of eggs that Old Babushka had been painting for the Easter fair, it seems like all is lost. But then, a miracle happens.

The Egg Tree by Katherine Milhous. Aladdin (February 28, 1992). **ISBN: 978-0689715686**

Katy and Carl are at their very first Easter egg hunt, but poor Katy can’t find any eggs at all. She tries her luck in the attic, where she makes a surprising discovery. The Caldecott winner from 1951, *The Egg Tree* showcases traditional Pennsylvania Dutch egg painting.

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Have you ever seen a **pysanka** (pih-zin-kah)? For centuries in countries like Ukraine, Poland, and Romania, people have been hand-painting eggs to celebrate Easter. The designs are famous for their **symmetry** (sim-mih-tree). Something has symmetry if it can be folded exactly in half. A snowflake is a good example of symmetry.



Mizikar, Alisa. Pixabay, pysanka. 9 Dec, 2016. <https://pixabay.com/photos/pysanky-easter-eggs-traditional-1893035/>. Accessed 16 Mar, 2022.

It can take 8 hours or longer to make a traditional pysanka. To start, the artist uses beeswax to draw a design on a white eggshell. Then, the egg is dipped into yellow dye. The eggshell turns yellow—except for where the beeswax covers it. The beeswax resists (ree-zists) the dye, so the eggshell under the beeswax will stay white.

When the egg dries, the artist adds more beeswax to the places where the design should stay yellow. Then the egg is dipped into the next dye color. The artist continues adding layers of beeswax and dipping the egg into darker and darker colors of dye until the design is complete. Once the egg is completely dry, the artist warms up the wax. The artist gently rubs off the wax to reveal all the different colors in the design. The finished pysanky (pih-zin-key) are given as special gifts to family and friends.

Key words to know:

- **Pysanka:** a hand-painted egg made using layers of beeswax resist and colored dyes.
- **Pysanky:** more than one pysanka
- **Resist:** push away
- **Symmetry:** one side is the same as the other



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