

Dalahäst (Dala Horse): Painting and Puzzle



These materials, including images, are copyright of the North Dakota Council on the Arts, 2017.

Activity, Time and Materials

ACTIVITY:

As a group or one-on-one, discuss folklore connected to animals. Paint a *Dala* horse design on a wood-block puzzle.

TIME:

Five hours over three sessions. (Sessions 1 and 2 may be used together to combine a common theme, or individually as separate activities. Session 3 is optional and can be held separately, as well.)

MATERIALS:

- Acrylic paints
- Water bowls
- Paper towels
- Cotton swabs (Q-tips)
- Synthetic paint brushes (medium and small)
- Disposable plastic or paper plates to use as a palette
- Isopropyl alcohol (for cleaning up small problem areas)
- *Dala* horse wood-block puzzles*
- The book *Sundogs and Sunflowers: Folklore and Folk Art of the Northern Great Plains*

*Preliminary work is required to produce Fjord horse (*Dala* horse) wood-block puzzles for each participant. Consider enlisting the help of the care facility maintenance or janitorial staff, local school woodshop class, local woodcarvers group, or other individuals who

would be willing to cut individual block puzzles for this activity. The puzzles should be cut of ¾" pine wood. Each puzzle should be cut and sanded prior to the sessions taking place. The pieces for each puzzle should be placed in their own small individual plastic bags for ease of distribution to the participants.

Men tend to be less likely to participate in activities in care facilities. Working with wood may help to further encourage their attendance. If physically able, the men could be asked to sand the cut puzzle pieces. The puzzle diagram at the end of this activity plan can be used as a guide to create the wooden Fjord horses. The diagram was designed and generously provided by woodcarvers Gary Paulsen, Glenn Anderson, and Judy Anderson, all of whom are with the Sons of Norway, Kringen Lodge #25, Fargo, North Dakota.

ALTERNATE MATERIALS:

- This painting activity is designed for the wood-block puzzle, but the basic outline of the *Dala* horse pattern may be reproduced on paper and colored with acrylic paint, watercolor, color crayons, or markers.

“THREE PLAGUES” (LONELINESS, BOREDOM, HELPLESSNESS):

Each of the three plagues are addressed by increasing the social interaction between participants through the sharing of stories from a past that fosters a connection to a broader community. Those physically unable to paint may participate in the discussion, observe the activity, and provide ideas for others, in this way addressing helplessness. In addition, working a simple puzzle with thick pieces of wood is something people with limited motor skills may be more likely to be able to do. No matter how small, a sense of accomplishment can be felt over and over with the repeated assembly and disassembly of a puzzle created by the participant. The puzzles can be given to the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the elder residents. The gifting of the puzzle to a child can be a mechanism for fostering a sense of social connection.

ASSOCIATED MEDICAL STUDY:

Nicole K. Valtorta et al. states, “The influence of social relationships on morbidity is widely accepted, but the size of the risk to cardiovascular health is unclear. We undertook a systematic review and meta-analysis to investigate the association between loneliness or social isolation and incident coronary heart disease (CHD) and stroke. . . . Reports of 11 CHD studies and 8 stroke studies provided data suitable for meta-analysis. Poor social relationships were associated with a 29% increase in risk of incident of CHD. . . . and a 32% increase in risk of stroke. . . . Subgroup analyses did not identify any differences by gender. Our findings suggest that deficiencies in social relationships are associated with an increased risk of developing CHD and stroke. Future studies are needed to investigate whether interventions targeting loneliness and social isolation can help to prevent two of the leading causes of death and disability in high-income countries.” [Abstract]

--Valtorta, Nicole K., Mona Kanaan, Simon Gilbody, Sara Ronzi, and Barbara Hanratty. “Loneliness and Social Isolation as Risk Factors for Coronary Heart Disease and Stroke: Systematic Review and Meta-analysis of Longitudinal Observational Studies.” Heart 102, no. 13 (April 2016): 1009-1016.

Activity Plan

SESSION 1 (1 HOUR):

1. The person directing this activity should tell everyone in attendance that they are going to talk about animals used as symbols, after which the participants will engage in a painting activity based on the discussion. The person directing this activity should ask a series of questions to start the interaction and to stimulate discussion. This can be done either as a group or one-on-one. (Sample questions and examples are provided below. However, please engage the participants by following up on whatever examples they may offer.)

- What animals do you think of on certain holidays? (For Easter, bunnies and chicks; for Christmas, a goose for supper or nativity animals; for Thanksgiving, turkey; for Halloween, a black cat.)
- What animals do you think of as symbols of other countries or other parts of the world? (For the United States, the bald eagle; for Australia, kangaroos or koala bears; for China, dragons or pandas; for Africa, lions, zebras, or elephants; for Scandinavia, reindeer or Fjord horses.)
- What animals do you think about when imagining the American West? Ask participants to close their eyes for a minute or two and visualize in their minds “The West.” Ask people to share what they “saw.” Buffalo, bears, mountain lions, bald eagles, and horses may all come to mind.

2. The person directing the activity now should focus on the exploration of horses: what they symbolize, the relationship of people to horses, and horse-related folklore. Explain that horses are considered special by many people, especially in the American West. Then ask a series of questions, as well as read and show examples from the book *Sundogs and Sunflowers*, to start the interaction and to stimulate discussion. This can be done either as a group or one-on-one. (Sample questions and examples are provided below. However, please engage the participants by following up on whatever examples they may offer.)

- Did you farm? What animals did you have? Did you have horses? Were they raised for food or for work? (Explain that in some countries people eat horse meat, but most people in the American West would not dream of eating horse meat.)
- From *Sundogs and Sunflowers*, share the picture and read the caption on page 83 of Norwegian Fjord horses pulling a sleigh and sleds. Ask participants, “Did you ever have fun with horses, and did you name them? What did you do, and what were their names?” Ask people to share their memories or life experiences. For those with memory-related dementia and to take the pressure away from *remembering*, ask those individuals to *imagine* a recreational activity with horses and to share that instead.
- From *Sundogs and Sunflowers*, show pictures and read the text

for “Spring Roundups: An Annual Gathering of Neighbors and Livestock” on pages 202-203, and “Community Rodeos: A Celebration of Cowboy Culture” on pages 204-205. Ask participants if they ever attended or took part in a roundup or rodeo and to share those experiences with the group.

3. Again, explain to the group that many people consider horses special—not only because of their place in our work and recreational lives, but because of the belief that horses have special abilities. These abilities include finding their way when human beings are lost or predicting the weather. Now, read to the group examples such as those referenced below. Engage the participants in discussing the examples, as well as sharing their own.

- From *Sundogs and Sunflowers*, read folklore item “5. A November Storm” on page 61, folklore item “7. They Left Anyway” on page 63, and folklore item “36. Horse Sense” on page 79. (There are many other stories involving horses and blizzards in Chapter 3 of *Sundogs and Sunflowers*.)
- From *Sundogs and Sunflowers*, read folklore item “40. The Horses’ Hooves” on page 98, folklore item “67. The Horses Knew” on page 102, and show the picture and read the related caption about the horse mask on page 102. Ask such questions as the following: Have you heard of similar folklore regarding weather, especially involving horses? Could your animals tell if the weather was going to change?

SESSION 2 (1 TO 2 HOURS):

1. The person directing this activity should explain that this session is a folk art painting follow-up to the previous session that discussed horse-related folklore. (Make the explanation only if Session 1 and Session 2 are held on different days. Each session can be independent of the other, so that attendance at both is not required in order to make sense. However, attendance at both sessions makes the experience both richer and deeper.) Remind people that just as horses are a symbol of the American West, the Fjord horse is a symbol of Norway, Sweden, and Finland.

2. Introductory background information for the person directing this activity and to be read aloud to the group:

The *Dala* horse (*Dalahäst* in Sweden) has been around for centuries. These little wooden horses were originally carved by Swedish woodcutters during the long winter nights and given to their children as toys. The province of Dalarna (hence the name “*Dala* horse”) was a central hub for traditional folk arts. There, the arts of woodcarving, clock and furniture making, painting, and textiles flourished. During the 1700s, Swedish decorative painting became very popular in homes and on furniture items. The very stylized *kurbits* flower was eventually added to the plain wooden horses to create the familiar look we see today. What started as a way to use the scraps of wood left over from clock and furniture making now has become the most recognized symbol of Sweden.

3. To each participant, distribute the Fjord horse wooden puzzles. Explain to the participants that the puzzles may be kept or given as a gift to someone such as a grandchild or great-grandchild.
4. Ask each participant to choose a *Dala* horse design from the following pages, or individuals may wish to create their own design.
5. Paint each piece of the *Dala* horse wood-block puzzle the chosen color for the background. It is better to use a thin coat of paint and go over it twice, rather than a thick coat with lots of ridges. Thicker paint will be sticky when it dries, and the pieces may not fit together if there are too many ridges.

Note: Mixing paint with a little water to thin it, or adding Delta Ceramcoat gel stain medium 1:1 to your paint, will give the background an overall “wood-stained” look with one coat. To do this, brush on the thinned paint (it is okay if it is messy and drips a little) and then quickly wipe dry with a paper towel. The result is a transparent color that dries fast and will allow the pieces to fit together nicely once it is done.

6. Once the background is dry, ask participants to work on assembling the puzzle.
7. After the wooden Fjord horse is assembled, and to prevent it from moving as it is painted, secure the puzzle with modeling clay, Play-Doh, or some other such material around the edges of the puzzle and the surface of the table. Flower designs or polka dots then can

be painted on the top surface of the puzzle. If participants wish, they may incorporate their own designs or choose from some of the *kurbits* flowers shown in the paintings on pages 206 and 216-217 of *Sundogs and Sunflowers*. (Take note of the tiny orange *Dala* horse at the top of the maypole on page 206.)

Note 1: Cotton swabs can be used instead of a paintbrush to make bigger polka dots, or simply to paint with. Just dip the end in paint and press down vertically to make a perfect dot.

Note 2: Tiny dots can be made by dipping the handle end of a paintbrush or a pencil tip into a small pile of paint, then dotting it on the painting surface.

8. Once the puzzle is painted and completed, each person in attendance will have a wooden puzzle to assemble and disassemble whenever they may wish to. Working a simple puzzle with thick pieces of wood is something people with limited motor skills may be more likely to be able to do. Or the puzzle can be given to a child to help foster a sense of social connection to grandchildren or great-grandchildren.

SESSION 3 – OPTIONAL SUGGESTION

(90 MINUTES TO 2 HOURS):

I. Have a horse-related movie night the same day the activity plan is conducted. Make a special effort to invite those who attended the sessions, as well as others in the care facility. The movies could be old westerns and other well-known, horse-related movies, such as *The Horse Whisperer*, *Flicka*, *The Electric Horseman*, *Seabiscuit*, *The Black Stallion*, *War Horse*, *Black Beauty*, *The Man from Snowy River*, *Palomino*, *Sylvester*, and *Horse Crazy*.

Note: Many folk art associations, like local woodcarving clubs and quilting guilds, often are willing to work with elder care facilities. Developing partnerships with such organizations is most definitely encouraged. For example, the three woodcarvers who provided the puzzle diagram for this activity plan also are members of the Red River Valley Woodcarvers club in Fargo, North Dakota. That carving group gifts Christmas ornaments to area elder care facilities to decorate Christmas trees during the holidays.

AUTHOR • PIEPER BLOOMQUIST, BSN, REGISTERED NURSE:

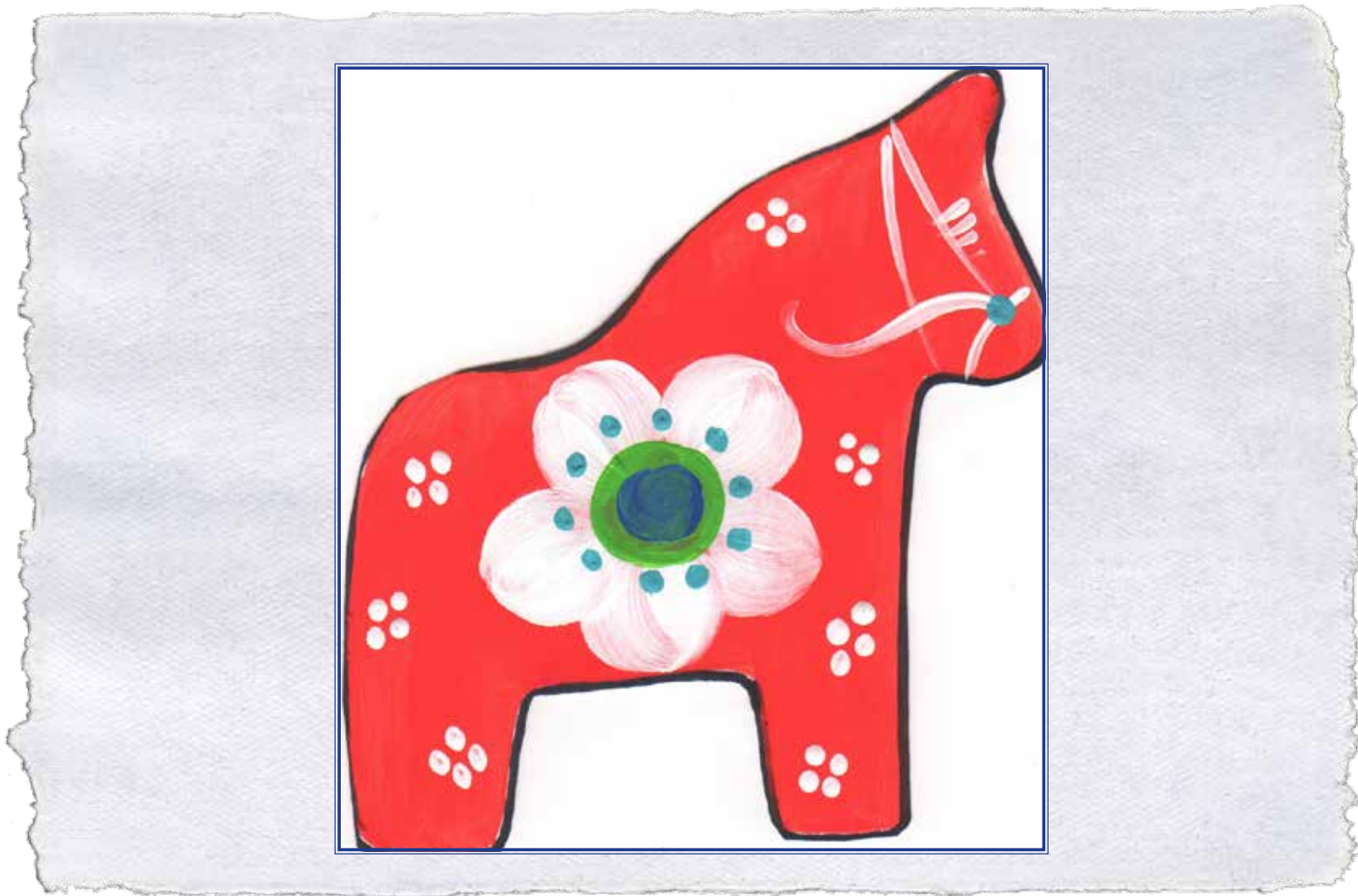
Pieper received her Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing from the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN. With over 20 years of experience caring for oncology patients, she currently works at Altru Hospital in Grand Forks, North Dakota, on the Oncology Inpatient hospital unit, as well as the Altru Cancer Center, Radiation Oncology. Pieper is also a Swedish-American *Dala* painter who has received many awards, including first place at the national Swedish painting exhibit in Scandia, Minnesota, for her eighteen-foot-long mural painted in the Southern Swedish style. Pieper was featured in the 2003 Prairie Public Television documentary *Scandinavian Traditions*. As a folk artist, and registered nurse who works in a hospital setting, she was included in the North Dakota Council on the Arts' *Art for Life* pilot project. Since then, Pieper has conducted arts programs for elder residents in various care facilities as part of the *Art for Life Program*. In these care facilities, Pieper is known for interacting with elders and incorporating ideas from them in the creation of large wall murals in the Swedish *Dala* painting style.

(All artwork and images provided by Pieper Bloomquist.)

Examples of *Dala* Horse Designs

The following examples can be photocopied, distributed, and displayed to help inspire people who are painting their puzzles.

(However, they may not be sold, and proper credit to the artist and the North Dakota Council on the Arts must be given.)



These materials, including images, are copyright of the North Dakota Council on the Arts, 2017.

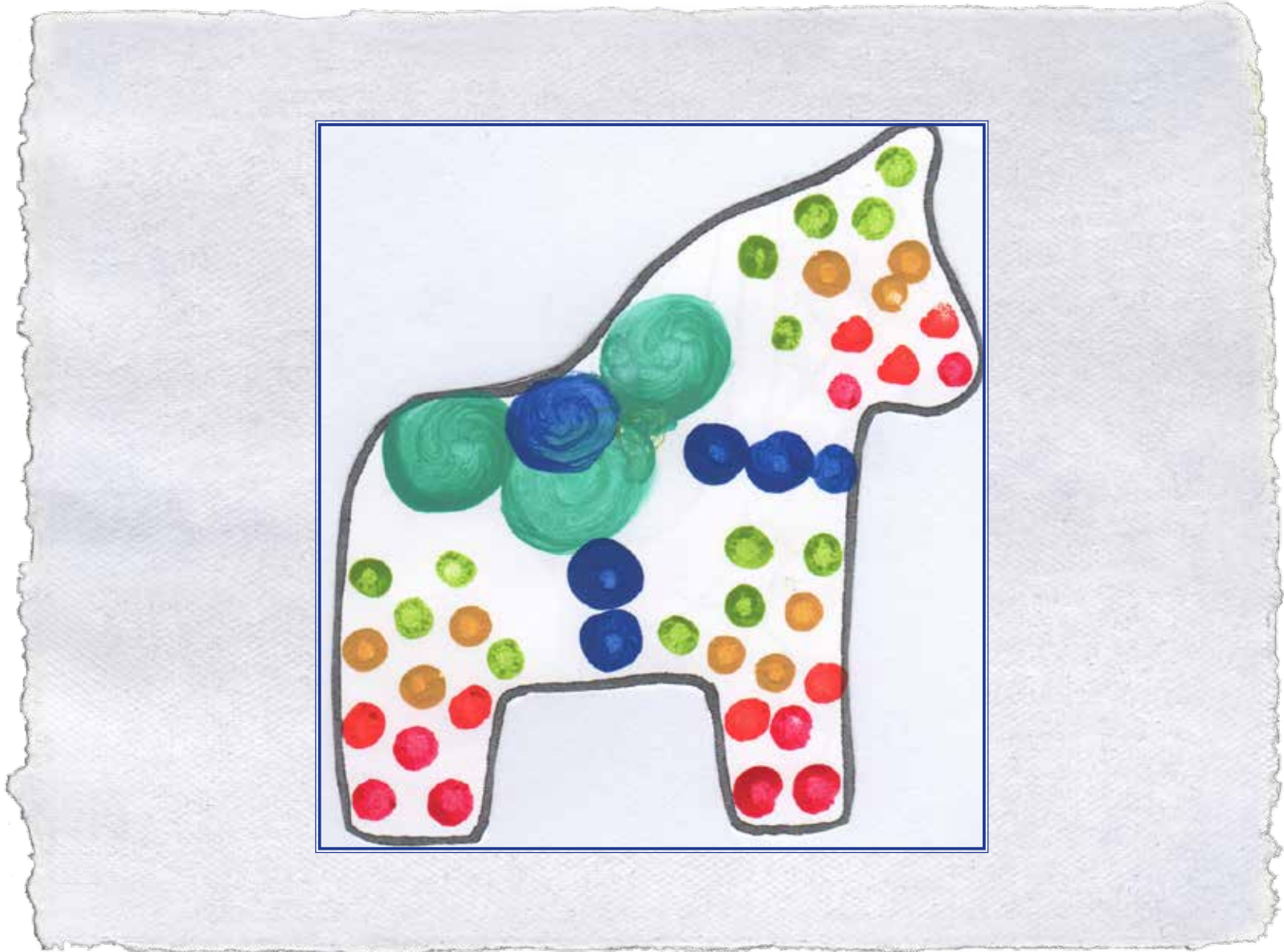


These materials, including images, are copyright of the North Dakota Council on the Arts, 2017.

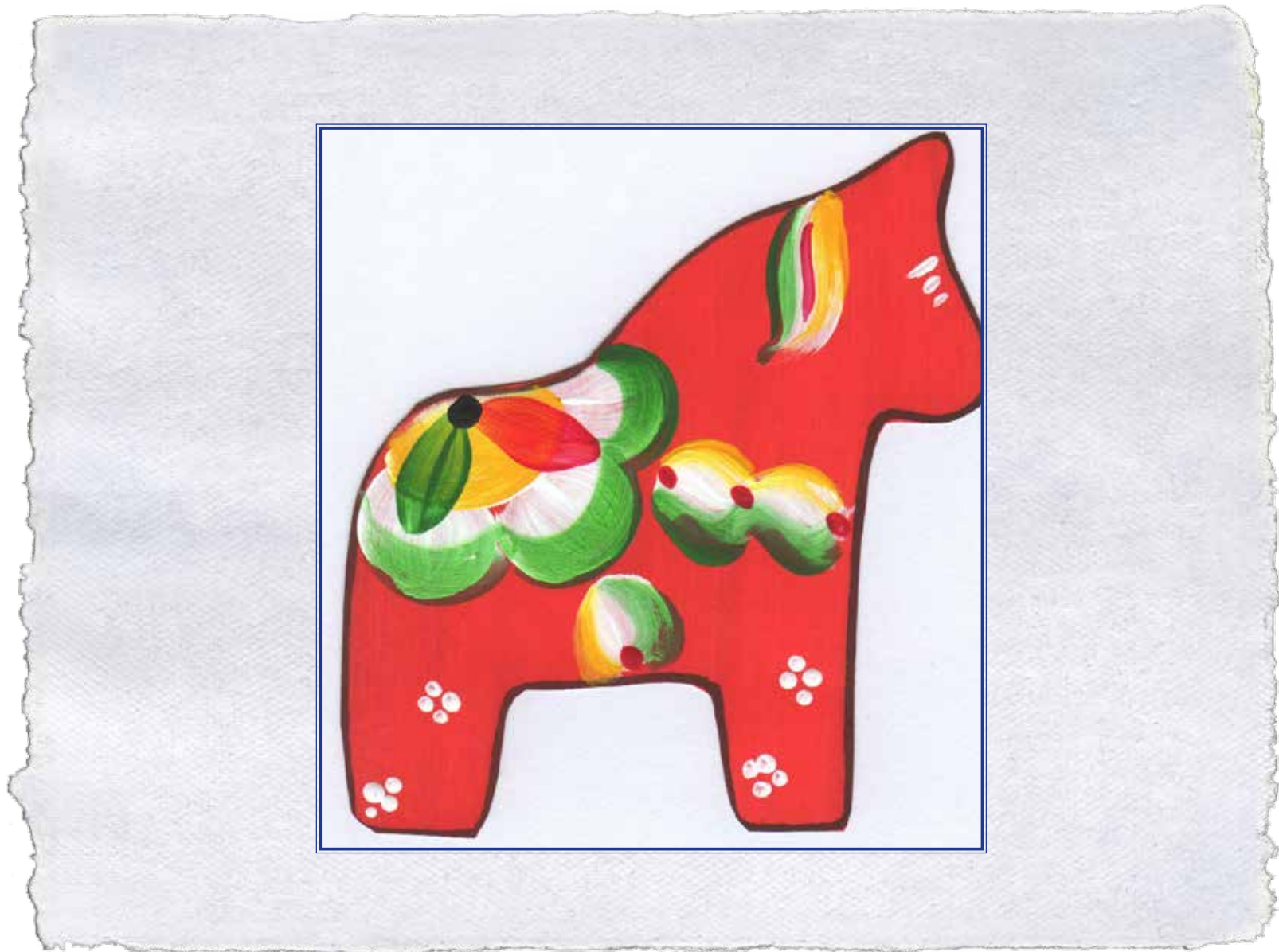




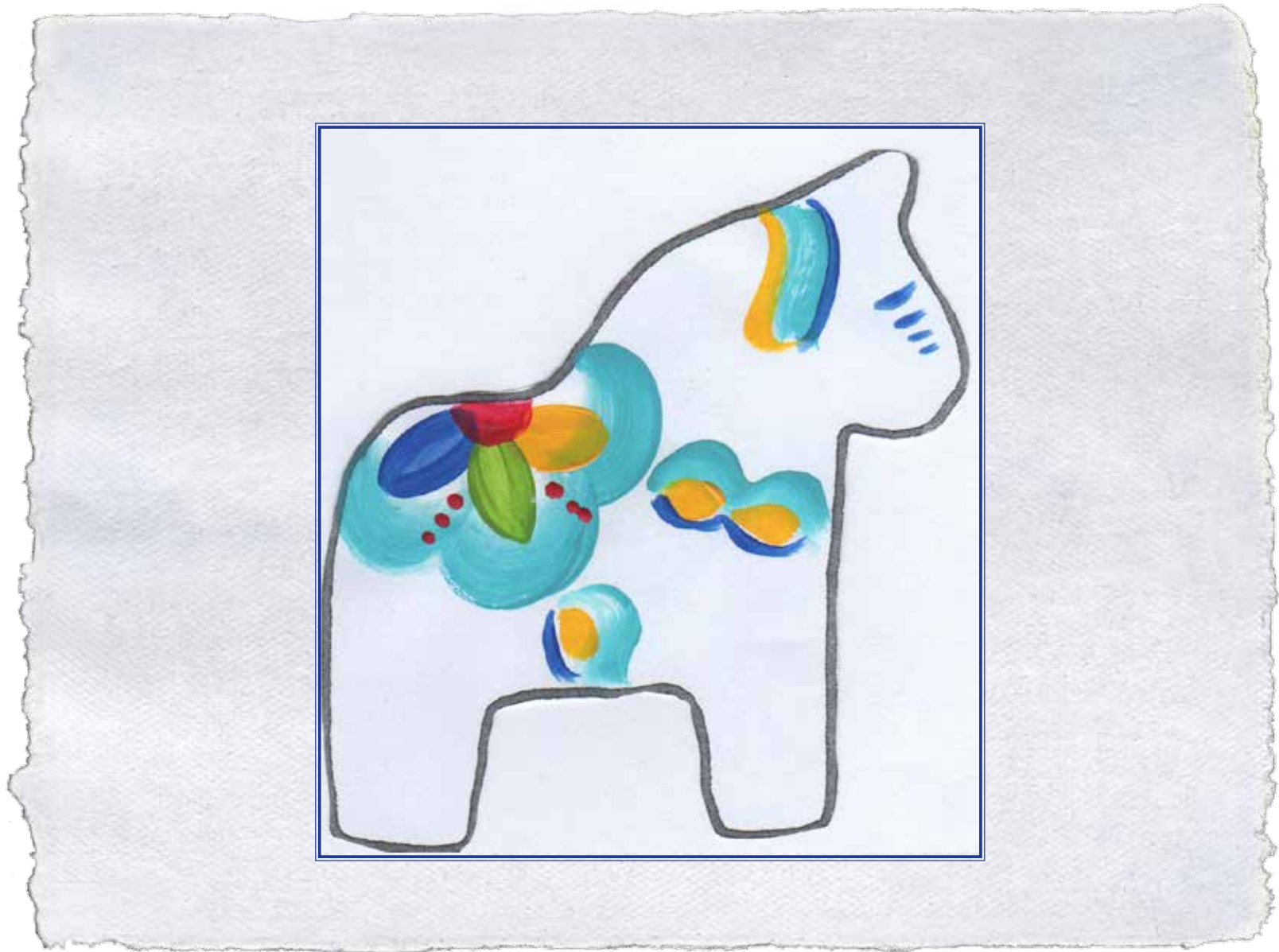
These materials, including images, are copyright of the North Dakota Council on the Arts, 2017.



These materials, including images, are copyright of the North Dakota Council on the Arts, 2017.



These materials, including images, are copyright of the North Dakota Council on the Arts, 2017.



These materials, including images, are copyright of the North Dakota Council on the Arts, 2017.

Dala Horse Puzzle Design

This diagram may be photocopied and used as a pattern in the creation of a wooden *Dala* horse puzzle. Adjust the size of the pattern based on the capacity of those involved. Large puzzle pieces may be better for people with limited mobility. The outline and pieces should be cut and sanded prior to the activity taking place.

This diagram was designed and generously provided by woodcarvers Gary Paulsen, Glenn Anderson, and Judy Anderson, all of whom are with the Sons of Norway, Kringen Lodge #25 in Fargo, North Dakota. (Credit to the woodcarvers and the North Dakota Council on the Arts must be given when making copies.)

