

Tree of Life: Traditional Paper Cutting, Nostalgia, and Life Review



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Activity, Time and Materials

ACTIVITY:

This activity consists of sharing life experiences and family stories in small group settings, as well as one-on-one. Inspired by these directed conversations, the elders collaboratively will create an elaborate, seven-foot-tall “Tree of Life” from colored paper. Multiple sessions will be used to discuss and share significant moments in the life cycle, from the roots of our family trees to the possibility of life after death. Each moment will be represented with paper cuttings, such as apples for children or doves for love and marriage. After each session, the paper cuttings will be added to the tree so that the residents will see the tree slowly grow and bloom into life. Activities coordinators, volunteers, counselors, and artists can all help to direct the activity.

TIME:

Eleven and a half hours (approximately) over one preparatory period, five post-session periods, and six activity sessions. (The time involved is dependent upon the complexity of design, fullness of the tree, the capacity level of the residents, and the number of volunteers available to help the residents. This does not include the time spent in gathering and preparing materials and designs by the artists prior to each session. Nor does it include the one-on-one sessions with individual residents in their rooms.)

MATERIALS:

- Scrapbooking or fadeless craft paper (8 ½" x 11") of various colors based on the designs to be created in each session
- Painter’s drop cloth canvas cut to 7' x 7', onto which the trunk and branches of a tree will be painted or formed from cut paper
- Mod Podge (to adhere the paper cuttings to the canvas at the end of the activity)
- Adaptive scissors, such as electric or spring-loaded
- Scrapbooking implements (Simple push or squeeze cutting utensils to cut various shapes, designs, edges, holes, and corners are good for residents who may not have hand strength or dexterity. Use of these tools will allow people to be involved more effectively and creatively. If smaller, individual “Tree of Life” projects are made, squeeze punches or ink stamps for butterflies, leaves, birds, and fruit can be purchased and utilized.)
- Glue pens (not glue sticks, for residents to layer and attach paper in creating their designs. Do not use liquid glue, as it will cause the paper to wrinkle.)
- Markers (to draw or trace the outline of the art piece to be created, as well as for residents to write on the backs of their paper art)
- Designs representing each stage of life as discussed herein (to be created ahead of each session and distributed to the participants to cut out and assemble based on their own individual color preferences)
- The book *Sundogs and Sunflowers: Folklore and Folk Art of the Northern Great Plains*

Note: The colored paper and paper cutting implements can be found at hobby shops and online.

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

This activity is to take place within small group settings conducive to personal conversations, as well as through one-on-one interactions. The group setting encourages collaboration, interaction, and conversation with others to make personal connections and help to address a sense of loneliness. Both loneliness and boredom are also alleviated by the time spent together creating and reminiscing about the residents’ lives and family experiences. Many personal and familial anecdotes may be triggered by readings and discussions of the entries from the book *Sundogs and Sunflowers*.

The person directing this activity also should identify those individuals who infrequently leave their rooms and seldom interact with others. These isolated individuals should be approached in their rooms, told about the collaborative art activity, and encouraged to create something right there in their rooms that can be added to the group “Tree of Life.” They also should be encouraged to join in the next group session. If they do not attend, continue to include them through one-on-one interaction in their rooms.

The elders involved may have varying capacities. It is important for the person directing this plan to know those varying capacities and adjust the activity accordingly. Some people may not be able to cut with scissors very well, so they should be given

the simpler things to cut. This does not mean we should settle for simplicity. Look at obtaining push or squeeze paper cutting implements that are used to create designs, edges, holes, and corners. Those participants with a wider field of capacity can use scissors, while those with less capacity to manipulate scissors can use paper punches and other implements to add beautiful and ornate accents to the paper, in this way addressing a sense of helplessness.

By focusing on a large art piece with large paper cuttings, people with mobility issues are better able to see and manipulate the material. This also helps to address a sense of helplessness. Creating a collaborative art piece allows people of varying capacities to do more together than they could individually. Completing a large, impressive art piece in this way helps instill a sense of accomplishment.

Having the art piece on display throughout the creation process with paper cuttings added to the “Tree of Life” after each session builds a sense of both anticipation and curiosity. Residents will be interested in seeing how the tree grows and blooms from one session to the next, further encouraging them to leave their rooms and observe the progress.

ASSOCIATED MEDICAL STUDIES:

“The negative view of old age with its outworn stereotypes (particularly ‘senility’) must be changed if the elderly are to have more opportunities for successful aging. It is time for a more balanced attitude. Health in old age involves mental and social as well as physical well-being. There is a distinct difference between the intrinsic features of aging and the reactions of the elderly to their lives. Old age is a period in which unique developmental work can be accomplished. Life review therapy and life-cycle group therapy are effective aids in this direction.” [Abstract]

--Butler, Robert N., M.D. “Successful Aging and the Role of the Life Review.” Journal of the American Geriatrics Society 22, no. 12 (December 1974): 529-535.

“The study of reminiscence needs to focus more on the characteristics of a good life story, the processes involved in creating one, and the obstacles to its creation. Coherence, assimilation, structure, and truth are important dimensions of a life story. They involve owning important life themes, working through traumatic events, solving unsatisfactory beginnings and disappointing endings, and finding genuine and lasting commitments. Reminiscence should seek reconciliation, not just remembering for its own sake.” [Abstract]

--Coleman, Peter G. “Creating a Life Story: The Task of Reconciliation.” The Gerontologist 39, no. 2 (1999): 133-139.

Cover photo: Seven-foot-tall “Tree of Life” paper cutting created by elders and artists at Ave Maria Village and Heritage Centre, care facilities in Jamestown, ND.

Activity Plan

PREP WORK (1 HOUR):

Cut a painter's drop cloth canvas so that it measures 7' x 7'. The top of the canvas should be folded over a few inches and sewn to form a long sleeve through which a metal or wooden pole can be inserted. The canvas thus can be hung on a wall during the creation process and ultimately for display when it is finished. The bottom also should be folded over a few inches and sewn to form a long sleeve through which a metal or wooden pole can be inserted to provide weight and to prevent the canvas from curling at the bottom corners. Paint the trunk and branches of a tree onto the canvas, or cut pieces of fadeless craft paper to form the trunk and branches of a tree and Mod Podge it to the canvas. The tree should be symmetrical or balanced on both sides, as is the tradition within both Polish and German paper cutting.



The bare trunk and branches of a "Tree of Life." Design provided herein.

POST-SESSION WORK (2 1/2 HOURS):

(Thirty minutes after each of the first five sessions, plus two hours for the final composition and Mod Podging of the "Tree of Life.")

The person conducting the activity or an artist should be the one to arrange and compose the individual paper cuttings after each session in the creation of the large tree. It is recommended that the paper cuttings be attached to the tree with tape or glue on the back. The artist or artists responsible for creating the composition of the tree will want to be able to rearrange the paper cuttings as the activity progresses so that there is both symmetry and balance. The tree should be on display so that the residents can see it slowly bloom into life.

The entire "Tree of Life" should be Mod Podged only after the fifth session's paper cuttings are arranged on the tree. Do not Mod Podge the paper cuttings after every session, as it would create too many layers.

SESSION 1 (1 HOUR):

1. Prior to meeting, the person directing this activity should review the book *Sundogs and Sunflowers* and bookmark the pages referenced in this session so that the identified folkloric text can be accessed and read both easily and quickly. The person directing the activity and the elder participants should sit around a table to create an atmosphere conducive to group discussion.

Keep each group small, with four to five people and one to two artists or volunteers at each table. The volunteers and artists at each table should direct the discussion and activity. It would be helpful to have at least two people at each table who are directing and helping the residents in their creations. However, do remind the volunteers that they should refrain from taking over the residents' work and doing it for them. As in physical therapy, it is the person who does the hard work that ultimately reaps the greatest benefit.

Explain to the participants that they will meet over a number of sessions to create a large, seven-foot-tall, paper "Tree of Life" art piece based on conversations about their personal and familial life experiences. Ask the participants if they know what is meant by the term "Tree of Life" and discuss the phrase with them by reading from the following passage:

- Trees are prominent motifs and symbols in traditions, mythologies, and folk cultures around the world. We have all heard the generic phrases "Tree of Knowledge," "Tree of Life," and "Family Tree." In ancient Norse mythology, there are nine worlds, each connected by the immense, eternally green ash tree *Yggdrasil*. The lives of humans, gods, and mythic animals play out within these nine realms and all are connected by this "World Tree." In Buddhist mythology, Buddha sat under the Bodhi tree, "the tree of enlightenment," when he received his legendary insight. The Hindu god Vishnu, too, sat under the Banyan tree as he taught humanity philosophy and the sciences. American Indians of the Great

Plains receive wisdom as they perform the Sun Dance around the sacred cottonwood tree. It is said that the 17th Century English mathematician and physicist Sir Isaac Newton was inspired with The Universal Law of Gravitation when an apple fell on his head while sitting under an apple tree. In the Bible's Garden of Eden there grew two trees, "The Tree of Life" and "The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil." Today, Christmas and everlasting life is represented by the evergreen tree. All of these examples are illustrative of the tree as a symbol for life's journey, spirituality, and enlightenment.

Then introduce the participants to the folk art of paper cutting, explaining that they will use paper, the material that comes from trees, to create a large, collaborative "Tree of Life" art piece, and in so doing share their lives' journeys and wisdom:

- Paper cutting is a traditional art found in many cultures of the world. This is an art form whereby different kinds of designs are cut into paper and arranged on a colored background for contrast. To speed the process of cutting, sometimes the paper is folded in such a way as to create an image as it is cut and unfolded, much like in the making of paper dolls. German paper cutting is called *scherensnitte* and often involves black on white color contrast. Dakotah Sioux and other American Indian groups use paper cuts as patterns for beadwork and other arts. One of the most colorful and decorative paper cutting traditions is that of the Polish *wycinanki*. This Polish paper cutting process involves the use of many colors of

paper layered over each other in ever decreasing size so as to contrast with the colors found beneath.

- For visual examples, show the pictures and read the captions for the paper cuttings on pages 131, 146, and 238 of *Sundogs and Sunflowers*.

2. The person directing the activity should begin by telling the group that they will talk about family roots. Initiate the discussion by reading and sharing entries from *Sundogs and Sunflowers* to stimulate both conversation and thoughts. From Chapter 10, read folklore items “52. Not a Barrel of Fun” and “53. Following Behind” on page 273, as well as folklore items “54. He Survived the Titanic” and “55. A Gypsy Woman’s Prediction” on page 274.

The persons directing the activity at each table should set an example and break the ice by sharing a family story themselves. Stimulate a conversation, not a classroom question-and-answer environment. Then encourage those in attendance to share stories about the roots of their family tree by asking such questions as:

- Where did your family come from? Were they immigrants? How did they get here? Do you have any family stories you can share about their experiences?

Then ask the participants:

- If you were to share words of wisdom, advice, or thoughts with your children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, or

others about the importance of family and knowing one’s roots, what would you say? Why is family important? Why is it important to know where and from whom you come from? When you think of family, what words come to mind?

Have a volunteer or someone else write the words of wisdom, advice, or thoughts on a piece of paper. After the meeting, compile and record the responses in a legible format under a heading such as “Family and Roots.” When the “Tree of Life” art piece is completed, post the list of these thoughts and words of advice alongside the tree for others to read. This list, too, can also be decorated.

3. Since trees come from seeds, explain that the first images to be made and added to the “Tree of Life” will be acorns and flowers. The acorns represent the roots and birth of the participants’ family trees. The flowers represent the participants’ families blooming.

Hand out different shades of complementary as well as contrasting colored paper to create acorns and flowers. Explain that often in folk art oversized images of flowers and fruit are common and represent an abundant, productive life. While disproportionately sized flowers or fruit can be created, the person directing this activity must still think about and help shape the symmetry and flow of the overall design of the tree’s composition. Explain also that by the time the tree is complete it will have many different kinds of flowers, fruit, and other images on it. In each session, encourage the participants to use their personal preferences in selecting colors and color combinations. People with poor vision may have better results

by using colored paper that contrasts more strongly.

4. Samples and patterns of the designs to be created in this session should be made ahead of time and distributed to those in attendance. The person directing the activity should demonstrate how to fold and cut the paper to create the base outline of the image. Even simple cuttings can be accentuated with an even simpler design layered over the top of it. Three or four layers can be used, if so desired.

Next, show how to fold and cut the smaller pieces of paper to add layers of color to the base outline, thereby creating contrast and accents to the image. Demonstrate how to use other paper cutting and scrapbooking implements to easily add accents and complexity to the different layers of paper. Simple hole punches, push or squeeze border punches, push or squeeze corner punches, and push or squeeze edge punches can be used. For participants with mobility issues who cannot use scissors effectively, these implements allow them to be involved. If need be, delegate the group activity based on what each person is capable of doing. Show how these implements add a flourish to the design and how they allow color to show through the holes when the paper is layered. The residents may need to be guided at first in how and where accentuated cuts or punches would add to the beauty of their work. This can be done by marking with a pencil where the punches may be used.



Visual examples of acorns illustrate how different color arrangements can be used effectively. Show the participants these images. Samples are 5 13/16" tall x 4 1/4" wide.



Examples of tulips are 5 1/8" tall x 5 1/4" wide.

5. Ask the residents to create as many acorns and flowers as they wish and to write the names of family members who came before them on the back of each acorn and flower. After each session, tell them that their work will be added to the larger art piece, as well as where the tree will be on display so that they can visit and watch it grow and bloom over time.

Remember that the person or persons directing this activity also should visit and work with individuals in their own rooms, focusing on those individuals who seldom participate in group activities, who isolate themselves, or who may be having a difficult time. Notify them of the next group gathering and encourage them to attend to help with the project. This one-on-one interaction can occur anytime between the scheduled group sessions.

6. At the end of each session, set a time and place for the next meeting. Encourage everyone to attend and to invite their family members and friends to actively participate in that session. Explain that different designs will be made at each session. Invite those who wish to create additional cuttings from the current session to do so.

Note 1: Triggering as many of the five senses (taste, smell, touch, sight, and hearing) as possible is important in stimulating the elders' creativity. Sensory stimuli can initiate physiologic and emotional responses. For instance, taste and smell can help them to recall memories and excite physiologic and emotional responses. Visual observations can aid in color selection in artwork, and so on. It is thus important to provide coffee, tea, other beverages, and snacks

as part of the sharing, especially if they can be connected to the focus of this specific session. Specific to this session are paper cuttings of flowers and acorns, so consider setting flowers on the table for people to smell and view. Provide acorns to observe or other types of nuts to eat.

Note 2: The person directing the activity, prior to each session, should select a range of colored paper to be used as appropriate to the images to be created in that specific session.

SESSION 2 (75 MINUTES):

1. Prior to meeting, the person directing this activity should review and mark the folkloric text from *Sundogs and Sunflowers* that will be used in this session. Create an atmosphere conducive to group discussion. Provide beverages and snacks as part of the sharing.

Reintroduce the project's goal to create, over a number of meetings, a large, paper "Tree of Life" based on conversations about personal and familial life experiences. Remind participants of the focus of discussion from the previous session.

2. The person directing the activity should begin by telling the group that this session's conversation will focus on folk traditions and experiences involving weddings and wedding anniversaries. Stimulate conversational sharing and thoughts by reading related entries from *Sundogs and Sunflowers*. Suggested texts include folklore item "43. A Blizzard Wedding" on page 81, various entries from the section "Love, Courtship & Marriage" on pages 133-134,

and entries from the “Anniversaries” section on pages 219-221. Be sure to show the pictures from and read the caption about “Repoussé: An Armenian Tradition” on page 134, as well as the article “Mock Weddings: Folk Drama and Traditional Role Reversals” on page 220.

Read aloud the folkloric texts, a few at a time, and stimulate conversations related to them. Set an example to initiate these discussions by sharing experiences from your own wedding or from a wedding you have experienced. Prompt those in attendance to share wedding experiences and traditions with which they are familiar by asking such questions as:

- Which of you are or were married? What is the name of your spouse? In what year did you marry? (If the specific day and year is not remembered, a general decade will suffice.) In what town and state did you marry?
- Did an unusual, dramatic, or humorous event occur at your wedding or at a wedding you attended? If so, tell us about it. What kind of traditions did you have at your wedding or at one you attended? Did people sell the garter? Was a bouquet of flowers thrown? What kind of gifts were given? Did any of you experience a “shivaree”? If so, tell us about it.
- How long have you been or were married? Did you ever have or attend a big anniversary party or a “mock wedding”? Tell us about it. What images are good symbols of love and marriage?

Then ask the participants:

- If you were to share words of wisdom, advice, or thoughts about marriage with newlyweds, what would you say? What is the most important thing for a happy marriage? What kind of things do you have to watch out for in a marriage? What makes a successful marriage? When you think of a wedding or marriage, what words or thoughts come to mind?

Have a volunteer write the words of wisdom, advice, or thoughts on a piece of paper. Compile and record the responses in a legible format under a heading such as “Weddings and Marriage.” When the “Tree of Life” is completed, post the thoughts and words of advice alongside the tree for others to read.

3. The person directing this activity should state that flowers and doves are quintessential emblems of love and marriage. Inform the participants that they will make decorative doves and flowers out of paper to represent their love, marriage, and spouses, or the marriage of loved ones like parents, children, or friends. Mention that their dove paper cuttings will be added to the collaborative “Tree of Life.” Continue the conversation as the residents work on their art.

Distribute different complementing shades as well as contrasting colored paper appropriate to the images to be created in this session. Encourage the participants to use their personal preferences in creating doves with different color combinations. In case white doves are the primary choice, be sure to have different

shades of white, like cream or light pink, that when layered will result in defining the bird.

4. Samples and patterns of the designs to be created in this session should be made ahead of time and distributed to those in attendance. The person directing the activity should demonstrate how to fold and cut the paper to create the base outline of the chosen image. The image may be a pair of doves facing one another and attached at the beak as the paper is unfolded. Or the same folding process can be used, but the unfolded pair of birds could be cut at the beak to create two separate doves that can be dispersed in a more balanced way throughout the “Tree of Life” art piece. The same process can be used to create multiple flowers.

As in Session 1, show participants how to fold and cut the smaller pieces of paper to add multiple layers of color to the base outline, in this way creating contrast. Demonstrate how to use other paper cutting and scrapbooking implements, such as push or squeeze border punches, to easily add accents and complexity to the different layers of paper. Delegate group activity based on capacity. If need be, guide residents in how and where accentuated cuts or punches would add to the beauty of their work.



Visual examples of doves illustrate how different color arrangements can be used effectively. Show the participants these images. Samples are 5 3/4" tall x 5 3/8" wide.



*Examples of flowers with stems are
7" tall x 7 ½" wide.*

5. Ask the residents to create as many pieces of artwork as they wish to, afterwards writing their names and their spouses' names, as well as the date of their marriage, on the back of each dove or pair of doves and/or on the back of the flowers. (For people who have never married or are divorced, they can list the names of their married parents, children, nephews, or nieces.)

Remember to also go to the rooms of individuals who seldom participate in group activities to work with them and to encourage them to attend the next group session.

6. Set a time and place for the next meeting.

Note: To stimulate as many of the five senses as possible that connect to this session's theme, consider setting out a bouquet of flowers to smell and observe and a wedding cake to eat.

SESSION 3 (75 MINUTES):

1. Prior to meeting, the person directing this activity should review and mark the folkloric text from *Sundogs and Sunflowers* that will be used in this session. Create an atmosphere conducive to group discussion. Provide beverages and snacks as part of the sharing.

Reintroduce the project's goal to create, over a number of meetings, a large, paper "Tree of Life" based on conversations about personal and familial life experiences. Remind participants of the focus of discussion from the previous session.

2. The person directing the activity should begin by telling the group that this session's conversation will focus on folk beliefs involving conception, birth, infancy, and children. Begin the discussion by reading and sharing entries from *Sundogs and Sunflowers*, which will help to stimulate conversational sharing and thoughts. From Chapter 6, read the folklore items from the section titled "Conception, Birth & Infancy" on pages 130-132. Again, show participants the paper cutting on page 131 and read aloud from the caption. Some of the folkloric texts in these pages are quite humorous and should help to lighten people's moods.

Read aloud the folkloric texts, a few at a time, and stimulate conversations related to them. Set an example to initiate these discussions by sharing your own personal examples. Prompt those in attendance to share childbirth and infancy traditions and beliefs from their families and to talk about their children by asking such questions as:

- Have you heard of these folk beliefs before or others like them? If so, what are they? Did you know of any midwives? Do you know how to discern the gender of a baby in the womb? If so, how? From whom did you learn this?
- Do or did you have children? (Ask both the men and the women.) Moms, when you were pregnant, did you carry the baby high or low? Did you give birth to a boy if you carried low? Did you give birth to a girl if you carried high? How many children did you have? What are their names? Are there any special stories or events that happened when you gave birth, like being stuck in a blizzard or arriving late at the hospital?

- What images are symbols for children? Have you heard the phrase, “Apple of my eye,” or that “the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree”?

Then ask the participants:

- If you were to share words of wisdom, advice, or thoughts about having and raising children, what would you say? What kinds of things are important when you have and raise a child? What advice do you have about raising children? What kind of things should one look out for when raising a child? When you think of a baby, of children, of your own children, what feelings or words come to mind?

Have a volunteer write the words of wisdom, advice, or thoughts on a piece of paper. Compile and record the responses in a legible format under a heading such as “Having and Raising a Child.” When the “Tree of Life” is completed, post the thoughts and words of advice alongside the tree for others to read.

3. Explain that red apples will be made to represent children and peacocks will be made to represent the beauty of life and family. Leaves also will be made to help fill out the “Tree of Life” and to represent the fulfillment of life. Inform the participants that they can decide what they wish to make—red apples, peacocks, or leaves—and that their paper cuttings will be added to the collaborative “Tree of Life.” Encourage some people who have mobility issues to make apples. Enlist other people with more flexible mobility to make peacocks. Encourage everyone to make leaves, as lots of leaves will

be needed to fill out the tree.

Distribute different complementing shades as well as contrasting colored paper appropriate to the images to be created in this session. Encourage the participants to use their personal preferences for color and cutting accents in their creations.

4. Samples and patterns of the designs to be created in this session should be made ahead of time and distributed to those in attendance. As in Session 1, show participants how to fold and cut the smaller pieces of paper to add multiple layers of color to the base outline, in this way creating contrast. Demonstrate how to use other paper cutting and scrapbooking implements, such as push or squeeze border punches, to easily add accents and complexity to the different layers of paper. Delegate group activity based on capacity. If need be, guide residents in how and where accentuated cuts or punches would add to the beauty of their work.

Do not settle for a simple red apple of one solid color. The use of other smaller pieces of different shades of red or other colors could be used to create shadows or contrast for the apple. Leaves, too, can be simple, but don’t settle for a single green leaf. Perhaps the base of the leaf is green. Then a smaller half-leaf shape cut out of a lighter shade of green, yellow, or orange paper could be applied on top. An edging punch could be used on the edge of the paper to create the ridges of the leaf. Think creatively and be open to the possibility that the participating elders may have a greater capacity than we or even they themselves realize.



Visual examples of apples illustrate how different color arrangements can be used effectively. Show the participants these images. Samples are 6 1/4" tall x 5 1/2" wide.



Examples of peacocks are 6 ½" tall x 8" wide. Look closely to see the added detail, made by a decorative push punch, near the tips of the feathers of the peacock in the upper left.

5. Ask the residents to create as many pieces of artwork as they wish, perhaps one for each of their children, and to write the names, and if remembered, the birthdates, of their children, nephews, or nieces on the back. (It is important to mention nephews and nieces for those people who may not have had children.) While the residents are creating, continue to have a conversation with them based on this session's theme and the related folklore examples from *Sundogs and Sunflowers*.

Remember to also go to the rooms of individuals who seldom participate in group activities to work with them and to encourage them to attend the next group session.

6. Set a time and place for the next meeting.

Note: To stimulate as many of the five senses as possible that connect to this session's theme, consider setting apples, leaves, and peacock feathers on the table to observe and touch. Provide apples, apple juice, or apple pie to smell and to eat.

SESSION 4 (60 MINUTES):

1. Prior to meeting, the person directing this activity should review and mark the folkloric text from *Sundogs and Sunflowers* that will be used in this session. Create an atmosphere conducive to group discussion. Provide beverages and snacks as part of the sharing.

Reintroduce the project's goal to create, over a number of meetings, a large, paper "Tree of Life" based on conversations about

personal and familial life experiences. Remind participants of the focus of discussion from the previous session.

2. Begin by telling the group that this session's conversation will focus on birthday celebrations. The person directing the activity should set an example to initiate conversation by sharing birthday customs from his or her own family. Prompt those in attendance to share their own examples through a series of questions, such as:

- How did you celebrate birthdays? Did you have cake? What kind of cake did you always have for your birthday—German chocolate, angel food, or some other? Sometimes a special meal of the birthday boy's or birthday girl's favorite foods was made for the celebration. What was your favorite meal for your birthday?
- Were gifts given? If so, what was the gift you most remember receiving? What is the gift you most wished for but never received?

Then ask the participants:

- If you were to share words of wisdom, advice, or thoughts about life and growing older, what would you say? How does getting older change how you look at the world? How does growing older make you better able to help others who are younger? What kind of things would you advise people to look out for as they age? How did your parents and grandparents help prepare you for your life and growing

older? When you think about the positive things of growing older, what feelings or words come to mind?

Have a volunteer write the words of wisdom, advice, or thoughts on a piece of paper. Compile and record the responses in a legible format under a heading such as “Growing Older.” When the “Tree of Life” is completed, post the thoughts and words of advice alongside the tree for others to read.

3. State that sometimes toasts are given at celebrations like birthdays. Then read the folklore entries in the “Drinking Toasts” category on pages 269-270 of *Sundogs and Sunflowers*. Ask the people in attendance if they ever gave toasts, and if so, where? Ask if they know any toasts they can perhaps relay.

4. Then, from page 221 of *Sundogs and Sunflowers*, read folklore entry “54. Golden Birthdays.” Inquire of those in attendance if they ever heard of Golden Birthdays and if they ever had a special celebration for that particular birthday. If so, ask how it was celebrated. Go around the room and ask how old each person would have been on his or her Golden Birthday. The person leading the activity should set an example by sharing how old he or she would have been on his or her Golden Birthday. For example, “I was born on January 15. So I would have celebrated my Golden Birthday when I was fifteen years old.”

5. The person leading the activity should now tell the people in attendance that red apples were made in the last session to represent

the birthdays of their children. Elaborate by saying golden apples, golden pears, and leaves will be made in this session to commemorate the participants’ Golden Birthdays. Leaves also will be made to help fill out the “Tree of Life” and to represent the fulfillment of life.

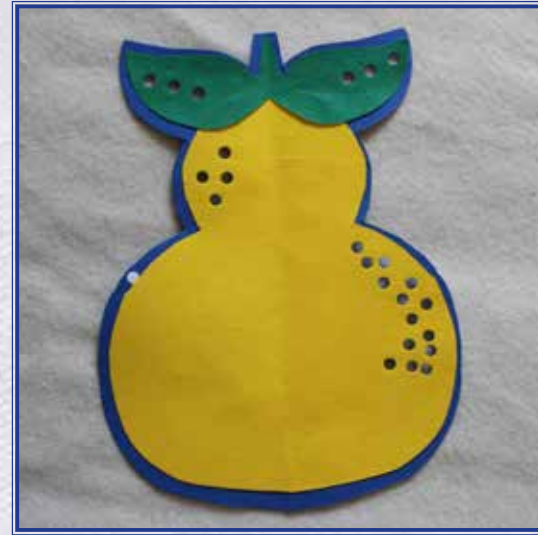
Distribute different complementing shades as well as contrasting colored paper appropriate to the images to be created in this session. Encourage the participants to use their personal preferences for color and cutting accents in their creations.

6. Samples and patterns of the designs to be created in this session should be made ahead of time and distributed to those in attendance. As in Session 1, show participants how to fold and cut the smaller pieces of paper to add multiple layers of color to the base outline, in this way creating contrast. Demonstrate how to use other paper cutting and scrapbooking implements, such as push or squeeze border punches, to easily add accents and complexity to the different layers of paper. Delegate group activity based on capacity. If need be, guide residents in how and where accentuated cuts or punches would add to the beauty of their work.

Do not settle for a simple golden apple, golden pear, or leaf of one solid color. (To make golden apples, use the same process and general pattern described earlier but with hues of yellow and gold.) The use of other smaller pieces of different shades or contrasting colors could be used to create shadows or contrast for the images. Leaves, too, can be simple, but don’t settle for a single green leaf. Perhaps the base of the leaf is green. Then a smaller half-leaf shape

cut out of a lighter shade of green, yellow, or orange paper could be applied on top. An edging punch could be used on the edge of the paper to create the ridges of the leaf.

While the residents are creating, continue to have a conversation with them based on this session's theme and the related folklore examples from *Sundogs and Sunflowers*.



Visual examples of golden pears illustrate how different color arrangements can be used effectively. Show the participants these images. Look closely to see the added detail, made by push punches and cuts, in the pears. Samples are 5 3/8" tall x 3 3/4" wide.



Examples of oak leaves are 6 1/2" tall x 3 1/2" wide. The other leaf is 7 3/4" tall x 4 3/4" wide.

7. Ask the residents to create as many pieces of artwork as they wish to, perhaps one for themselves and others for loved ones, and to write their name or the names of their loved ones along with the year they would have celebrated a Golden Birthday.

Remember to also go to the rooms of individuals who seldom participate in group activities to work with them and to encourage them to attend the next group session.

8. Then serve a piece of birthday cake or cupcakes with a single lit candle to everyone in attendance. With the cake, also serve everyone apple juice or pear juice in a plastic shot glass. Lead everyone in singing happy birthday. Then the person who is directing the activity should raise his or her shot glass and make a toast by reading folklore entry “55. A Birthday Verse” from page 221 of *Sundogs and Sunflowers*. Ask everyone to make a wish and blow out their candles.

9. Set a time and place for the next meeting.

Note: To stimulate as many of the five senses as possible that connect to this session’s theme, consider setting golden apples, golden pears, and leaves on the table to observe, touch, or eat. Provide birthday cake or cupcakes with lit candles.

SESSION 5 (75 MINUTES):

I. Prior to meeting, the person directing this activity should review and mark the folkloric text from *Sundogs and Sunflowers* that will be used in this session. Create an atmosphere conducive to group

discussion. Provide beverages and snacks as part of the sharing.

Reintroduce the project’s goal to create, over a number of meetings, a large, paper “Tree of Life” based on conversations about personal and familial life experiences. Remind participants of the focus of discussion from the previous session.

2. The person directing the activity should begin by telling the group that this session’s conversation will focus on folk beliefs involving the afterlife and life after death. Set an example by being the first to share a story, belief, or custom you have heard that involves life after death or the afterlife. Encourage a conversation, not a classroom question-and-answer environment.

From *Sundogs and Sunflowers*, read the following folklore items: “53. The Girl by the River” on page 21, “54. A Close Call” and “55. The Promise” on page 22, and “58. A Visit by a Spirit” and “60. Pennies” on page 23. Ask if anyone knows similar stories or has had similar experiences involving the afterlife. If so, ask them to please share their stories.

From *Sundogs and Sunflowers*, read the following jokes: “93. Ole and St. Peter” on page 291, “105. Henpecked in Heaven” on page 293, and “108. Softball in Heaven?” on page 294. Urge everyone in attendance to share any jokes they may know.

Then ask the participants:

- If you were to share words of wisdom, advice, or thoughts about the afterlife or the leaving of a legacy, what would you say? What legacy would you want to leave for your family? How would you want your family or loved ones to remember you? What do you think an afterlife would be like? How will it be there? Close your eyes and imagine what it would be like in an afterlife. When you visualize that, what words, feelings, or images come to mind?

Have a volunteer write the words of wisdom, advice, or thoughts on a piece of paper. Compile and record the responses in a legible format under a heading such as “Life after Death.” When the “Tree of Life” is completed, post the thoughts and words of advice alongside the tree for others to read.

3. Then, from *Sundogs and Sunflowers*, show the picture and read the caption of the German paper cutting on page 131 while pointing out the roosters. Show the picture and read the caption of the Polish paper cutting showing roosters on page 146. Also, show the picture and read the caption of the phoenix on page 136.

4. Explain to the residents that roosters, phoenixes, and butterflies all represent rebirth and the dawn of a new day. Roosters, for instance, announce the new day with the rising of the sun. Caterpillars create cocoons from which they reemerge as beautiful butterflies. Phoenixes rise anew from the ashes.

Inform the participants that they can decide what they wish to make—either roosters or butterflies—and that their paper cuttings will be added to the collaborative “Tree of Life.” Encourage them to make multiple paper cuttings if there is time.

Distribute different complementing shades as well as contrasting colored paper appropriate to the images to be created in this session. Encourage the participants to use their personal preferences for color and cutting accents in their creations.

5. Samples and patterns of the designs to be created in this session should be made ahead of time and distributed to those in attendance. As in Session 1, show participants how to fold and cut the smaller pieces of paper to add multiple layers of color to the base outline, in this way creating contrast. Demonstrate how to use other paper cutting and scrapbooking implements, such as push or squeeze border punches, to easily add accents and complexity to the different layers of paper. Delegate group activity based on capacity. If need be, guide residents in how and where accentuated cuts or punches would add to the beauty of their work.

While the residents are creating, continue to have a conversation with them based on this session’s theme and the related folklore examples from *Sundogs and Sunflowers*.



Visual examples of butterflies illustrate how different color arrangements can be used effectively. Show the participants these images. Look closely to see the added detail, such as jagged edges with decorative edging scissors, or hearts and circles with push punches (which can also be cut by hand). Samples are 5 7/8" tall x 6" wide.



*Examples of roosters are 8 ½"
tall x 7 ½" wide.*

6. Ask the residents to create as many pieces of artwork as they wish to. Tell them that their work is to commemorate the names of loved ones who are no longer with us. Upon completion of the work, ask the participants to write on the back of their art the names of loved ones who have already passed on. Remind everyone that their work will be added to the finished “Tree of Life.”

Remember to also go to the rooms of individuals who seldom participate in group activities to work with them and to encourage them to attend the next group session.

7. At the end of the session, set a time and place for the grand unveiling of the completed “Tree of Life.”

Note: To stimulate as many of the five senses as possible that connect to this session’s theme, consider setting pictures of butterflies, roosters, and phoenixes on the table for the elders to observe. Provide coffee, tea, other beverages, and snacks as part of the experience.

SESSION 6 (1 HOUR):

I. Hold a grand unveiling of and reception for the completed “Tree of Life.” Invite project participants, elder care facility residents, facility staff, and especially the family members of the activity participants. Provide food and drink, featuring items like peanuts, walnuts, and other nuts to represent the acorn paper cuttings, red and golden apples and apple juice to represent the apple paper cuttings, and golden pears and pear juice to represent the pear paper cuttings. Having bouquets of flowers would work to represent the flower paper cuttings.

OPTIONAL SUGGESTIONS:

I. The residents of the care facility may want to create and keep their own smaller “Tree of Life.” It is recommended that the paper upon which the cuttings are glued be 14” high x 11” wide. It might be difficult, especially for people with mobility issues, to cut designs small enough to place upon paper of this size. However, this still can be accomplished fairly easily by using scrapbooking supplies, such as simple hole punches, squeeze or push punches of different designs and shapes, squeeze or push border punches, squeeze or push edge punches, and squeeze or push corner punches. These implements can be found in hobby and craft stores, or online at dedicated scrapbooking sites. They are easily used and allow people who cannot use scissors effectively to create detailed images. If smaller, individual “Tree of Life” projects are made, squeeze punches or ink stamps for butterflies, leaves, birds, and fruit can all be purchased and utilized.

2. Consider working with a teacher and schoolchildren in elementary school. Fourth grade is especially recommended for an activity such as this one. The same kind of conversational focus and related images could be used as part of a family tree activity. The children's paper cuttings could be added to the collaborative "Tree of Life" of the elders.

3. If the collaborative "Tree of Life" looks sparse, arrange for additional sessions to make the tree look fuller. The sessions should focus on what the tree needs, for example, more flowers, birds, or leaves.



Examples of other flower designs that could be used. Show the participants these images, and those on the next page, and ask them if they would be interested in creating something similar.



Additional examples of other flower designs that could be used. Sizes range from 5 3/4" to 5" to 4 3/4" across.

AUTHOR • MERIDEE ERICKSON-STOWMAN:

Meridee is a gifted and dedicated folk and traditional artist who also has degrees in Composite Art and Education. She has lived in small-town North Dakota her entire life and worked as a para-educator in Special Education for over twenty years, using creativity to help students learn. Her heritage is German and Danish. Meridee participated three times as an apprentice in the North Dakota Council on the Arts' *Folk and Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program*. From Leona Wojcik Barthle, she learned the folk art of wycinanki (Polish paper cutting); from Gladys Faiman, Czech *slamenky* (egg decorating); and from LeRoy Graber, a National Endowment for the Arts *National Heritage Fellowship* recipient, German willow basketry. Meridee states, "I treasure all of these experiences, for through them I have had the honor of working with true masters. Their passion for their craft and tradition has inspired me to want to learn more and share what I have learned with as many people as possible." Years later, Meridee now is a true master in her own right, teaching apprentices herself and demonstrating and conducting workshops in folk festivals across the state. She concludes, "I believe my experience working with children with special needs will help with the teaching of elders who may have similar limitations."

AUTHOR • SABRINA HORNUNG:

Born in Jamestown, North Dakota, Sabrina is a contemporary and folk artist. She attended Minnesota State University-Moorhead in pursuit of photography. Her roots play an integral role in her work, which serves as an ode to the Dakota prairie. When not wandering the prairie with her camera, she serves as editor-in-chief at the *High Plains Reader*, a weekly publication based out of Fargo-Moorhead. She has received multiple awards for her mixed media work and has participated in multiple group exhibitions, including a three-woman exhibition entitled *Prairie Trifecta*. She has participated in the Rourke Art Museum Midwestern Invitational since 2008, and has had solo exhibitions at Gallery 13, The Spirit Room Gallery, the Plains Art Museum, and the Joachim Museum. Her solo show, *Trail Dust and Sentiment*, toured the Midwest through the North Dakota Art Gallery Association. Her pieces are featured in collections as diverse as the Würst Bier Hall in Fargo, North Dakota, and the Oskar Hornung Haus and Museum in Stutensee, Germany. Her folk art centers on *wycinanki* and *scherschnitte*, the traditional arts of Polish and German paper cutting. She apprenticed to learn these beautifully ornate and delicate arts from master folk artist Meridee Erickson-Stowman.

AUTHOR • TROYD GEIST:

Troyd is the state folklorist with the North Dakota Council on the Arts who is charged with encouraging the preservation and continuation of folk and traditional arts, heritage, and culture. He holds a Master of Arts degree in Sociology/Anthropology from North Dakota State University, and has participated in and conducted projects involving the impact of folk art and folk traditions on personal health and well-being. Those efforts include traditional storytellers working with fetal alcohol research and prevention programs, Bell's palsy as viewed and treated in traditional cultures, familial Alzheimer's disease tracking using anthropological methods, and the use of culturally infused narrative and traditional music for guided imagery. He directed the original *Art for Life* pilot project in 2001-2003, which measured the effects of long-term folk arts and artist interaction on combating the negative impact of the "Three Plagues" (loneliness, boredom, and helplessness) that many residents in elder care facilities experience. Subsequently, he developed the *Art for Life Program*. With Dr. Timothy J. Kloberdanz, Troyd co-edited, co-compiled, and co-authored the book *Sundogs and Sunflowers: Folklore and Folk Art of the Northern Great Plains*.

(All artwork by elders and staff at Ave Maria Village and Heritage Centre, care facilities in Jamestown, ND, with artists Meridee Erickson-Stowman and Sabrina Hornung. "Tree of Life" patterns provided by Meridee Erickson-Stowman and Sabrina Hornung. Photos by Troyd Geist, North Dakota Council on the Arts.)

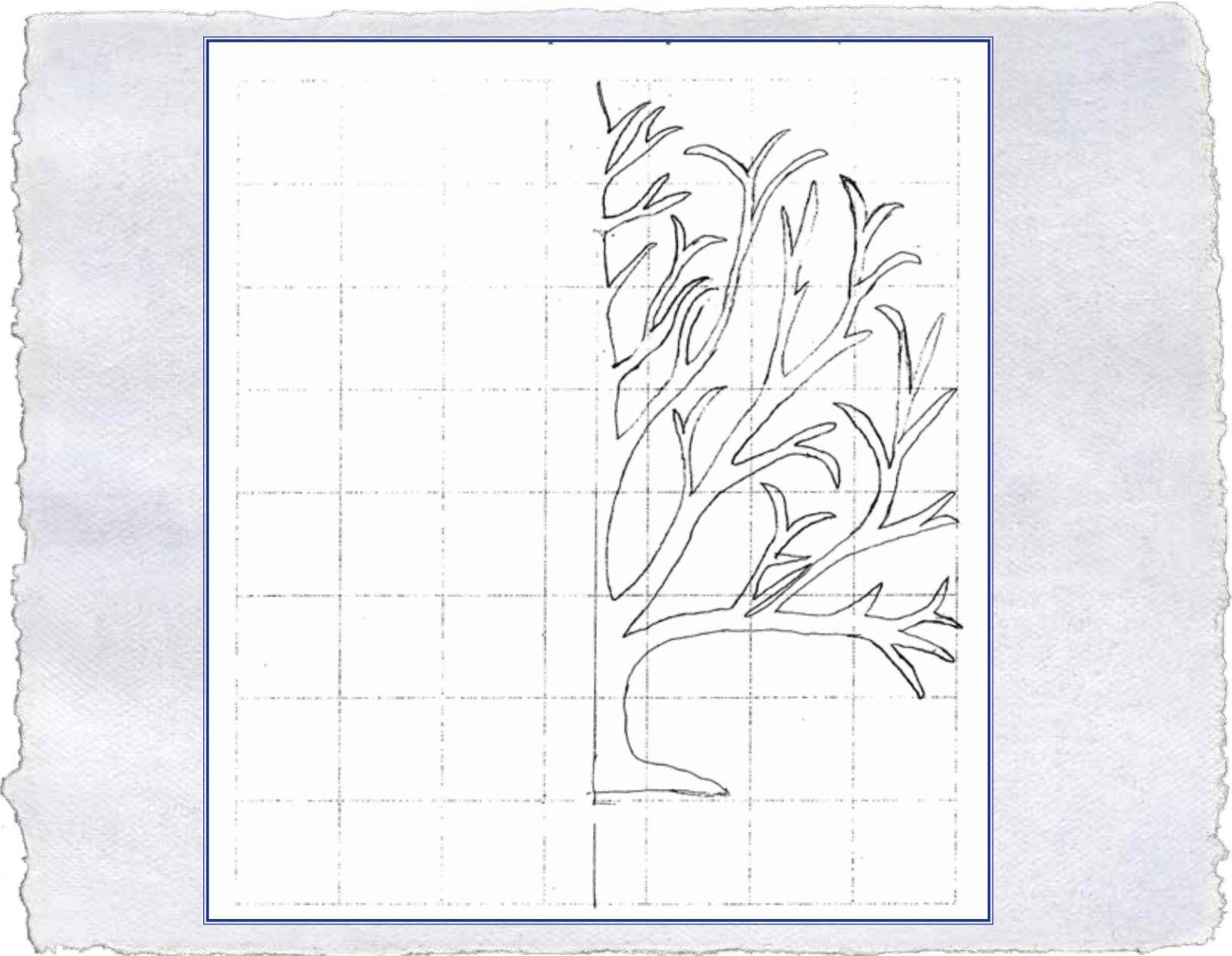
Sample Patterns

The following patterns are those used in the activity plan. Start with the largest, base outline and layer with successively smaller pieces until finished. Feel free to further decorate pieces of cut paper with decorative push or squeeze punches as the layers of paper are applied. The patterns indicate the order of cutting and layering with increasing numerical digits.

For symmetrical patterns, fold the paper in half and draw half of the design, afterwards cutting along the lines. Unfold, and the full image will be apparent.

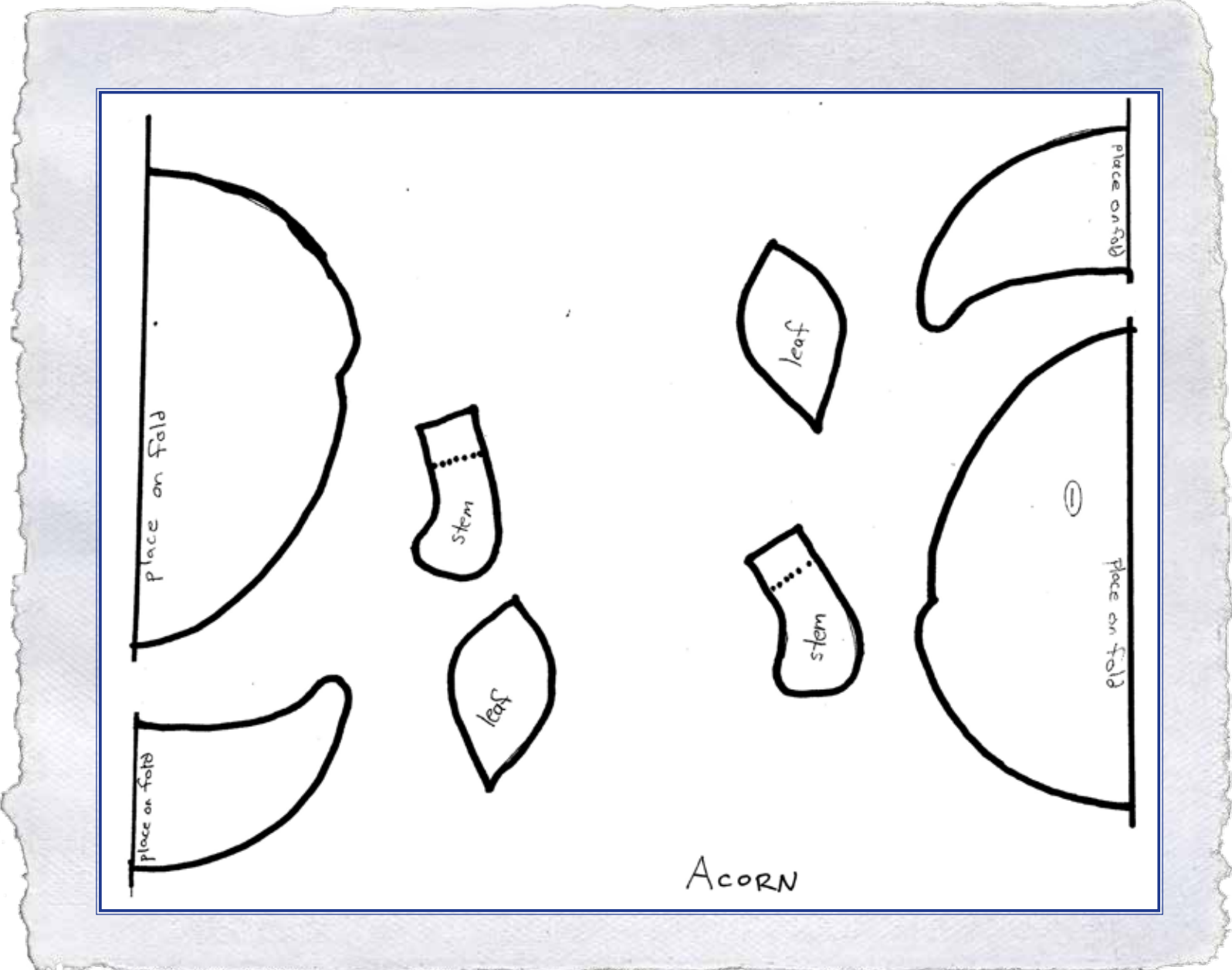
This plan calls for a tree that is seven-feet-tall. All pattern measurements are based upon a seven-foot tree, and the sample patterns contained herein should be enlarged as needed when duplicating so that the size of the largest pattern item is close to the dimensions noted. Smaller trees and designs for the tree can be made by proportionately decreasing the size of the designs.

“Tree of Life” Pattern: Starting design consists of a seven-foot-tall paper cutting of a bare tree trunk and branches. Each square represents one foot.



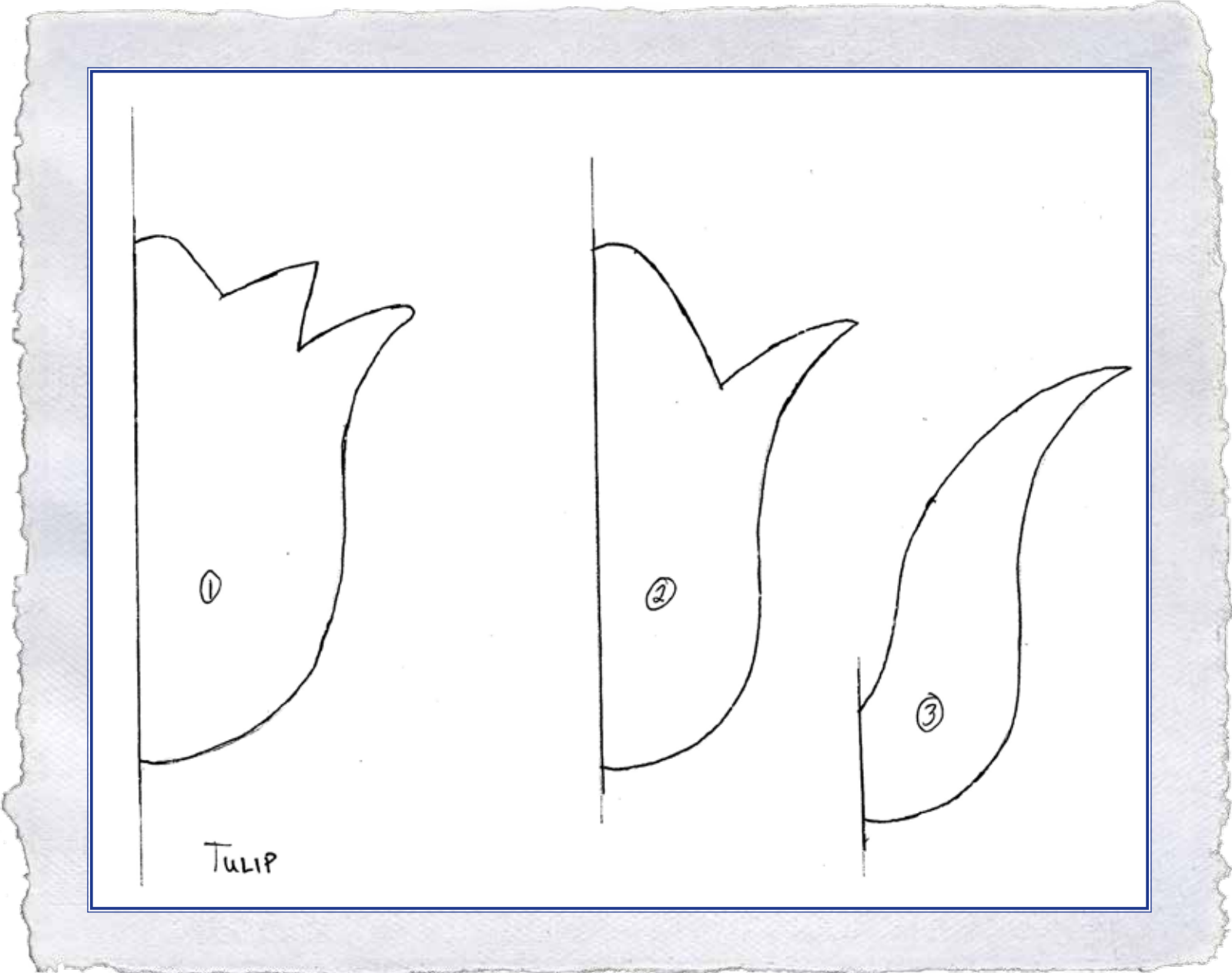
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Acorn Pattern: 5 13/16" tall x 4 1/4" wide

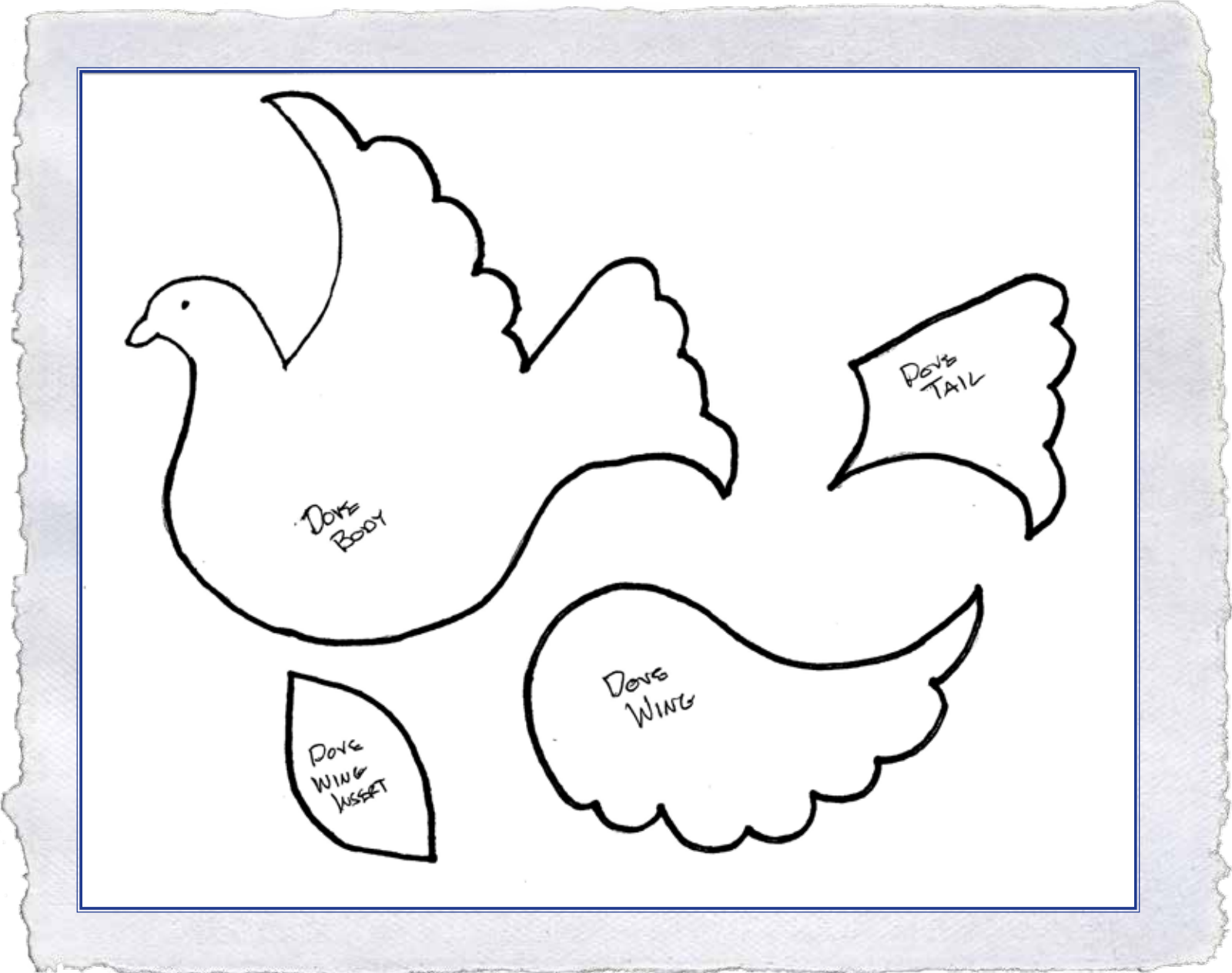


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Tulip Pattern: 5 1/8" tall x 5 1/4" wide

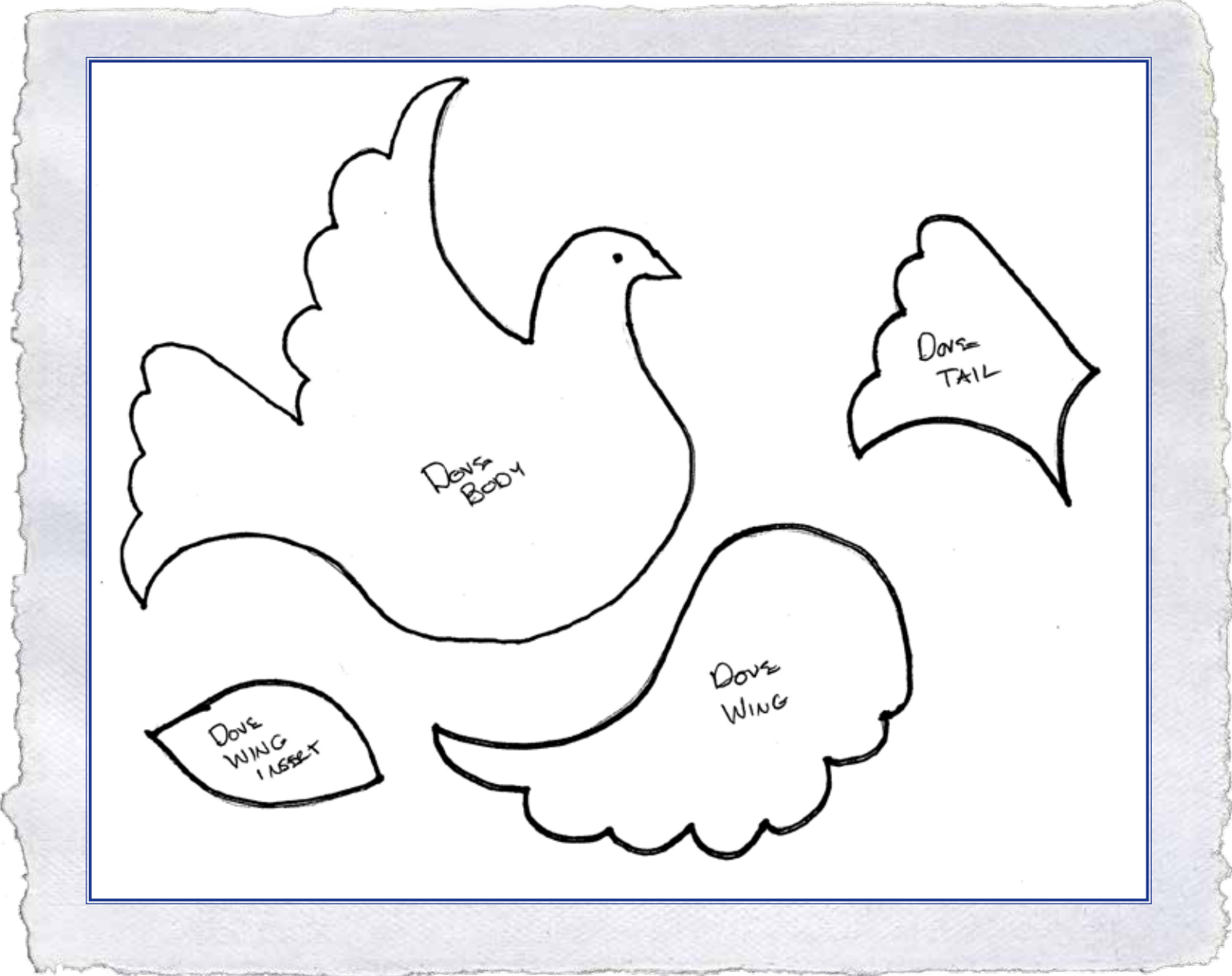


Dove 1 Pattern: 5 3/4" tall x 5 3/8" wide



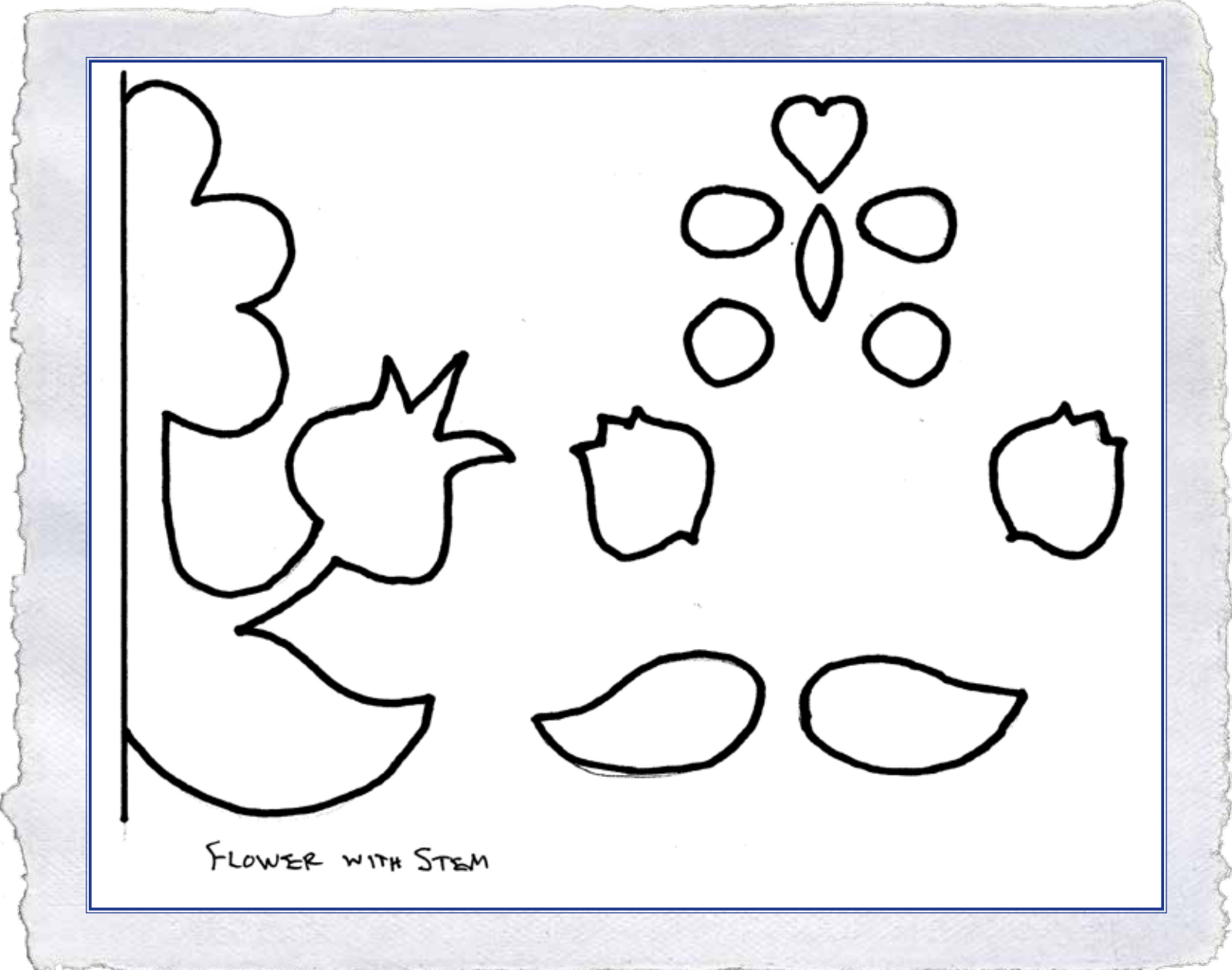
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Dove 2 Pattern: 5 3/4" tall x 5 3/8" wide



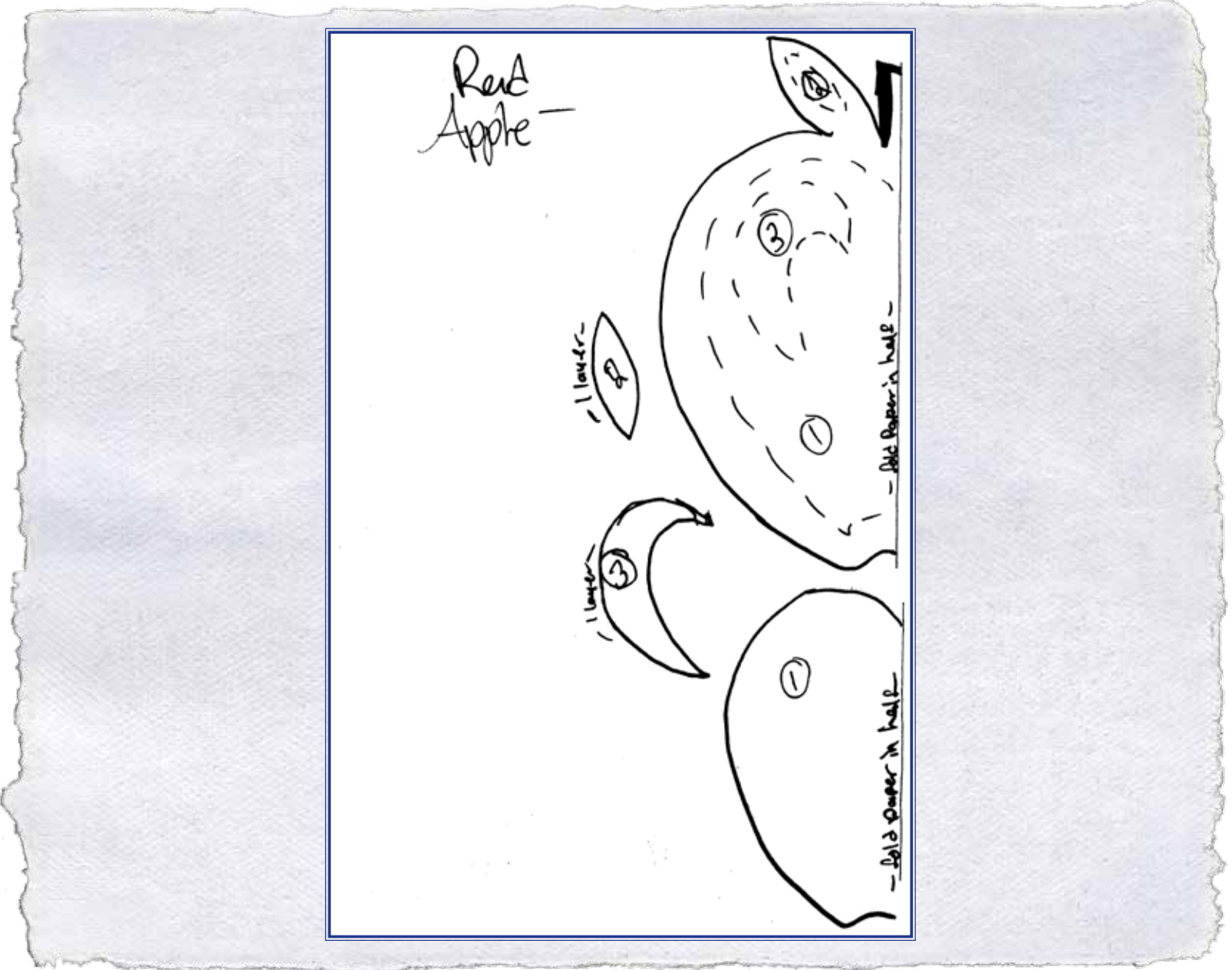
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Flower with Stem Pattern: 7" tall x 7 1/2" wide

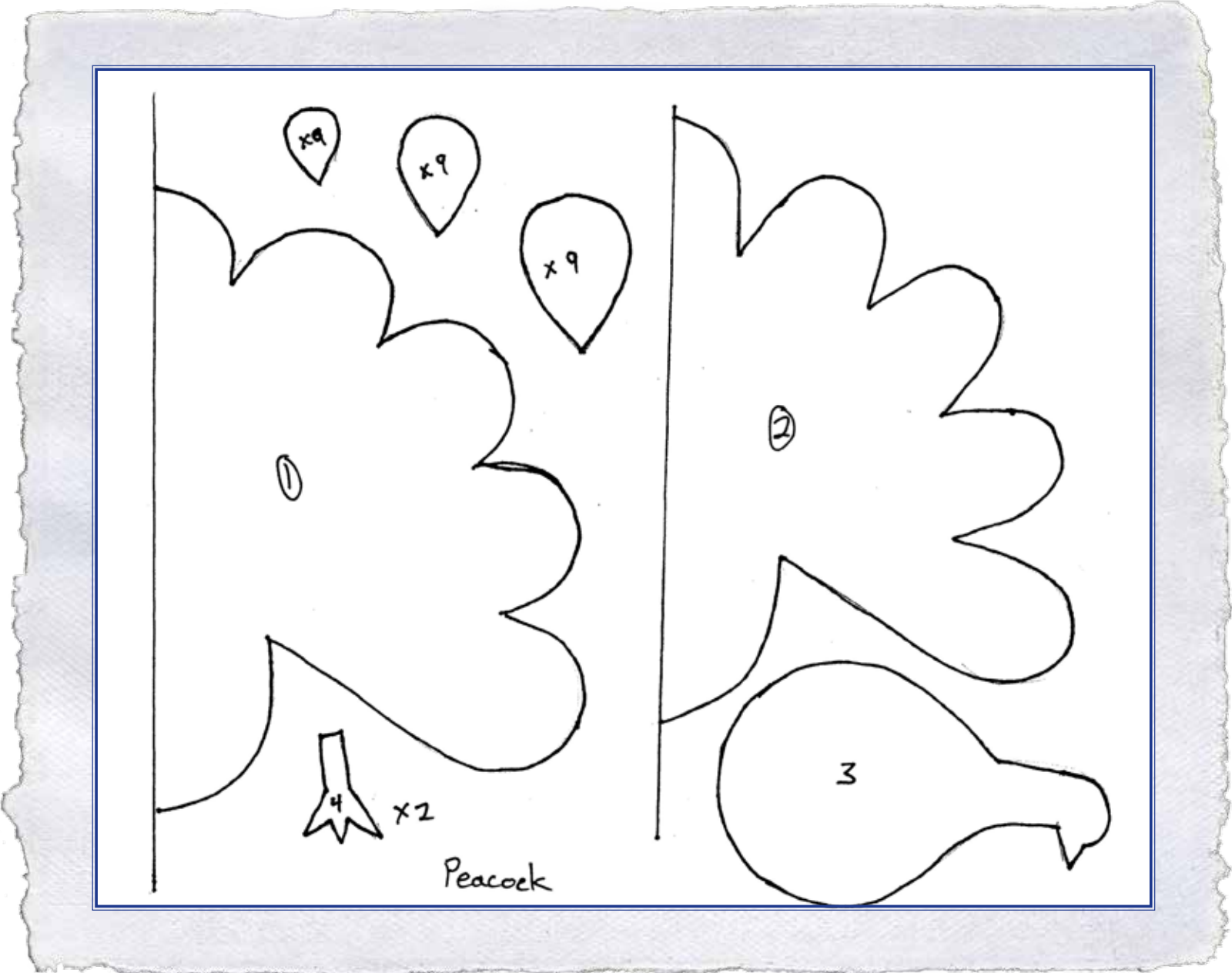


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Apple Pattern: 6 ¼" tall x 5 ½" wide

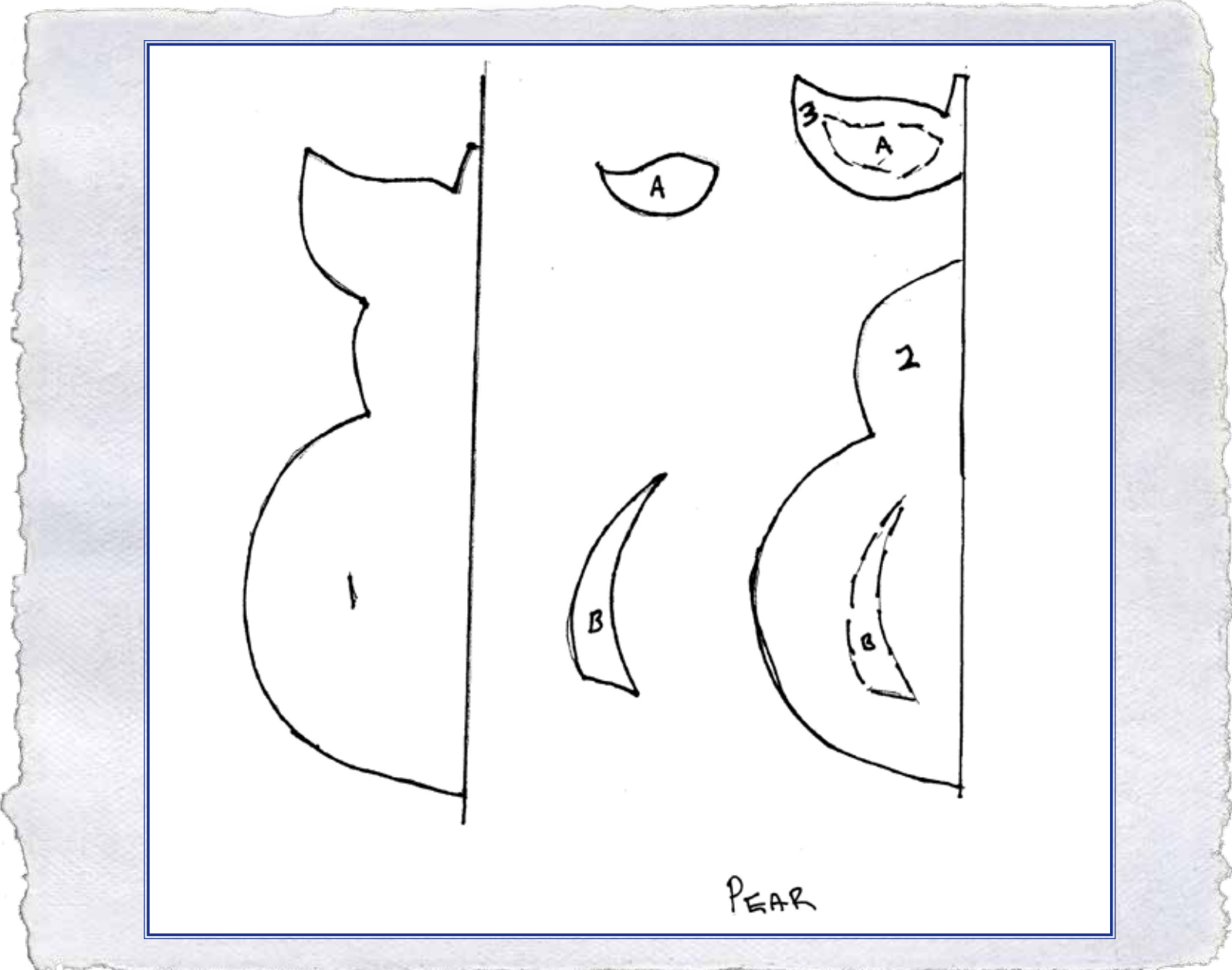


Peacock Pattern: 6 1/2" tall x 8" wide



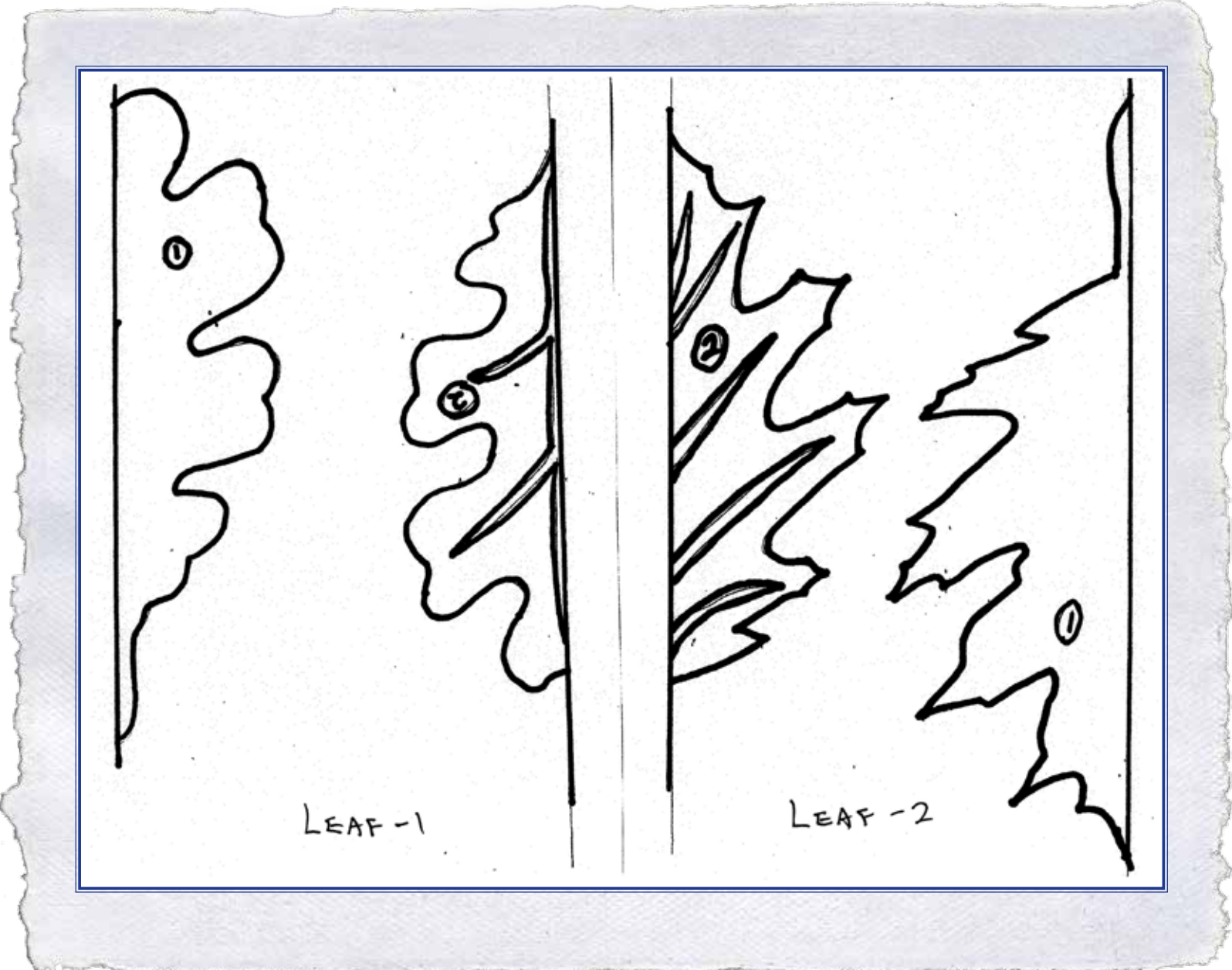
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Pear Pattern: 5 3/8" tall x 3 3/4" wide

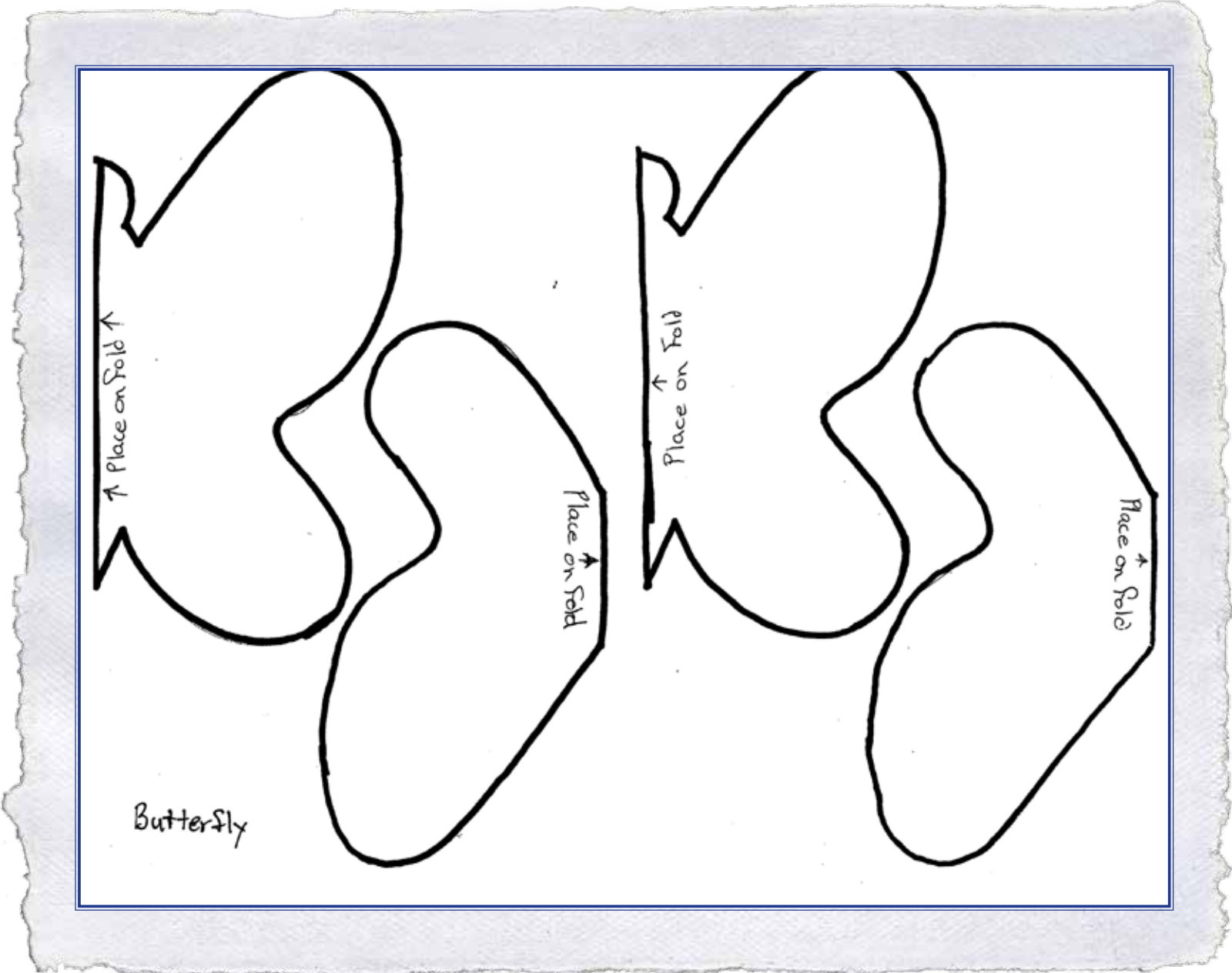


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Leaf Pattern: 6 1/2" tall x 3 1/2" wide

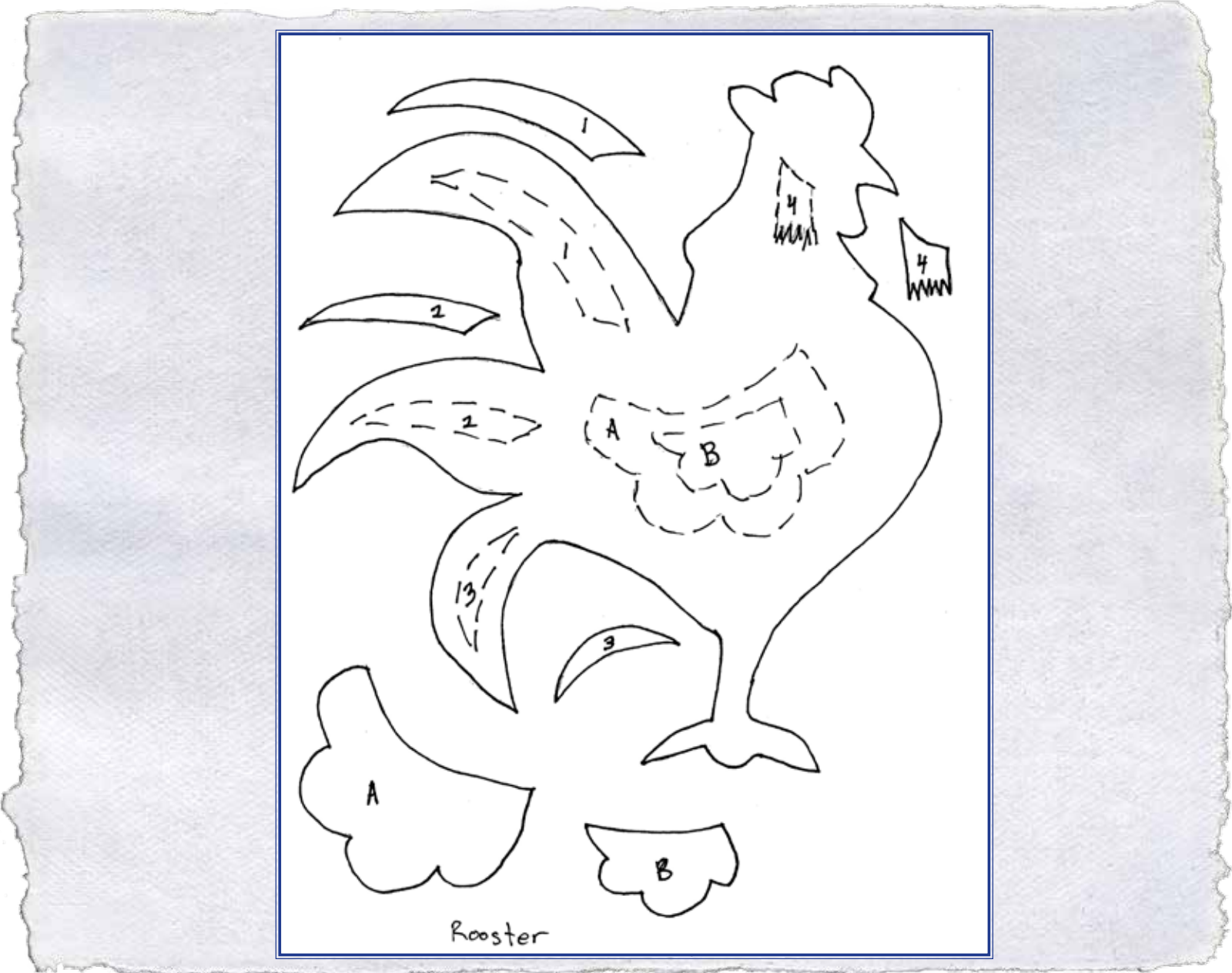


Butterfly Pattern: 5 7/8" tall x 6" wide



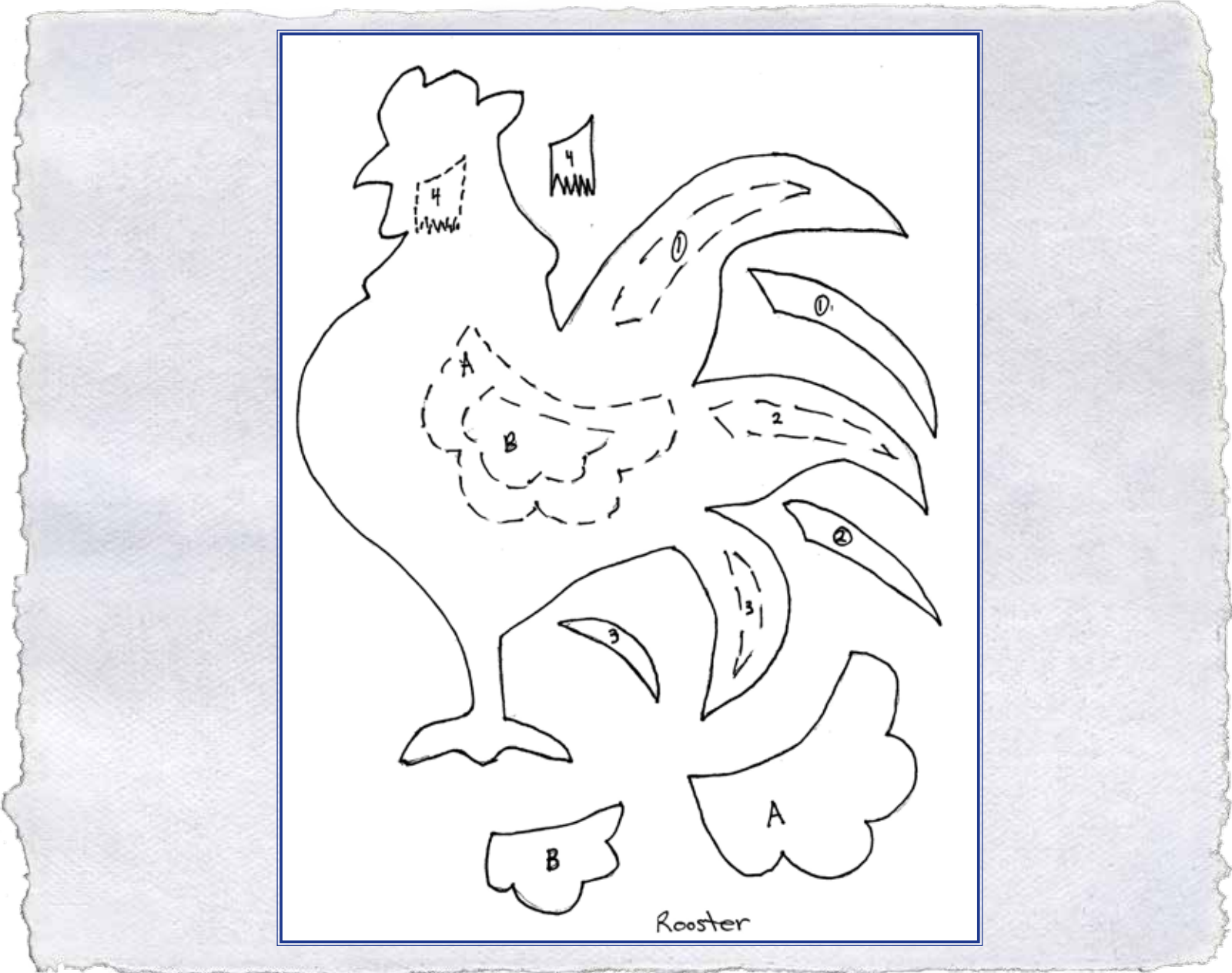
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Rooster 1 Pattern: 8 ½" tall x 7 ½" wide



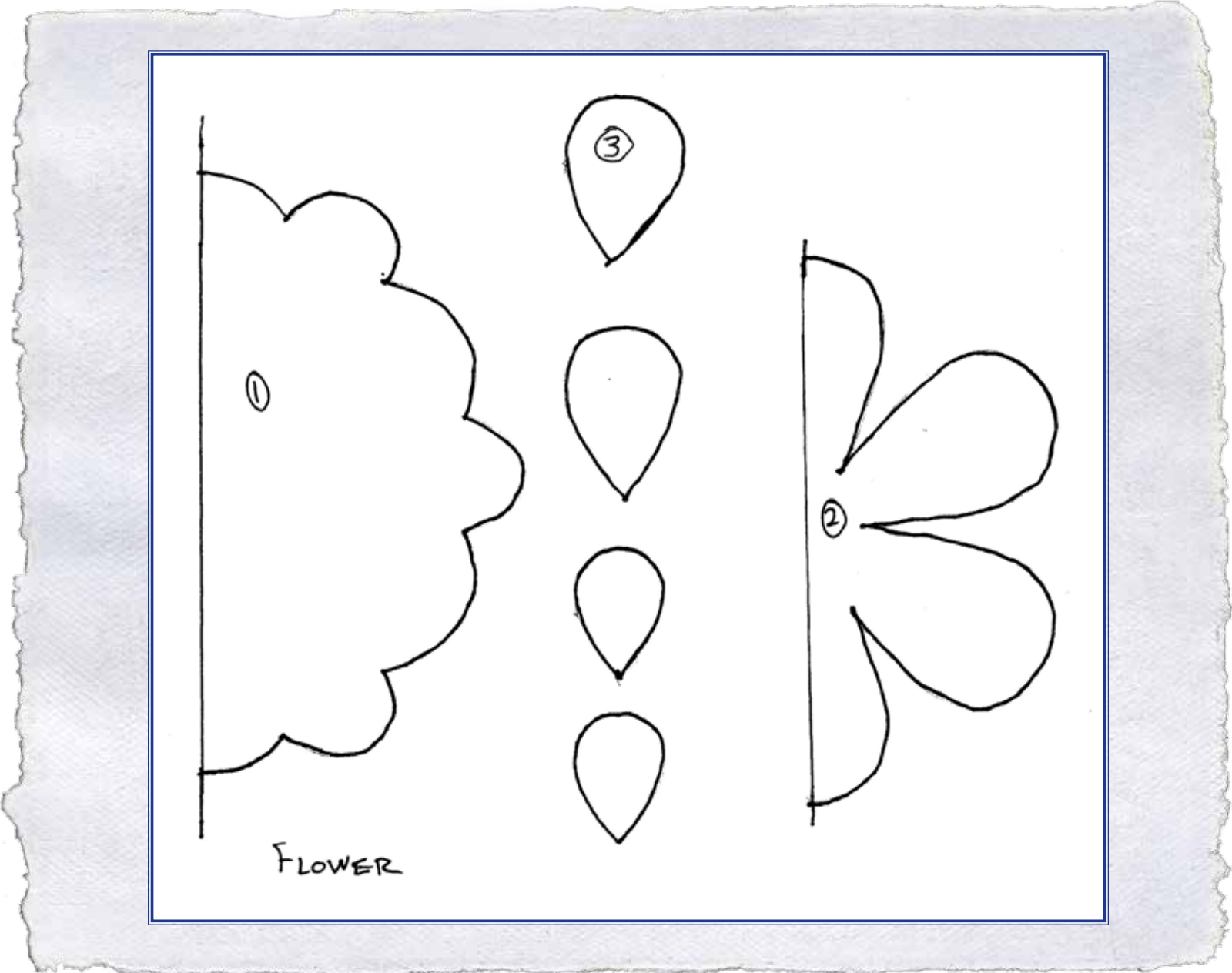
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Rooster 2 Pattern: 8 ½" tall x 7 ½" wide



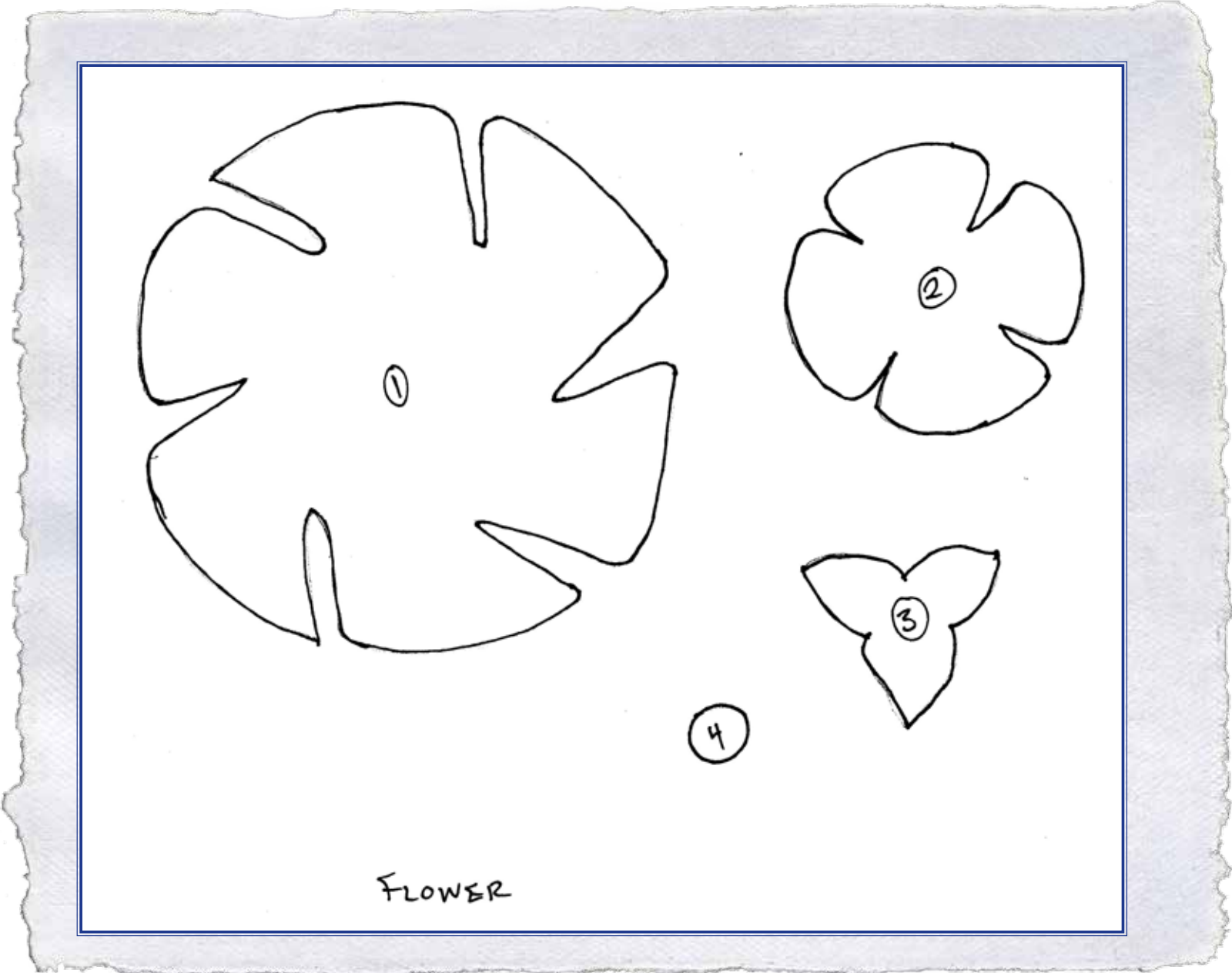
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Flower 1 Pattern: 5 3/4" across



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Flower 2 Pattern: 5" across



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Flower 3 Pattern: 4 3/4" across

