

# Fraktur Class For The Distelfink Crafters

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## A bit of history of the art of fraktur

- Began with monks in medieval Europe (since they were often the only ones that could read or write) as a way to record the history of their parishes
- Eventually, as more people learned to write, schoolmasters and notaries began to create highly decorative commemorations of marriages and births, as well as small gifts for high-achieving students.
- This folk art migrated to America, particularly with the German settlers who populated our area in Pennsylvania, and evolved into what is now known as Pennsylvania Dutch Fraktur.
- The word *fraktur* is German, and a derivative of the Latin word, *fractura*, which means “broken letter.” *Fraktur* refers to how the letters are made, not with one continuous stroke, but with several strokes, so the letter appears broken.

## Recurring Decorative Elements in Fraktur

Pennsylvania Dutch fraktur uses recurring motifs, all of which represent a variety of different elements. See the attached sheet for more information.

## Colors in Fraktur

Colors were made with readily available natural elements, and certain colors, like blue, were scarce and not used frequently. The most common colors in fraktur are red, yellow ochre, green, brown, and black and variations made by mixing these colors (possibilities are endless!!).

**NOTE: See the Project Directions for step-by-step instructions on this project.**

## Basic Information on paper, brushes, and paint

- Use paper designed for watercolor use. It's thick and able to hold up when wet. You can tape down your paper on all 4 sides (use painter's tape – the less sticky kind) to prevent warping, but I don't think you'll need to do that for this project – we aren't going to get the paper really wet. I use Cranson watercolor paper, cold press/ 140 lb. most of the time.
- Your brushes should be soft and pliable, not stiff – and you don't need many. If you have a small liner, a smallish round and a larger round, and a very small detail brush, you will be fine. The best brushes are made from sable and are expensive, but you can get good brushes for much less. Types of brushes vary:
  - Rounds are for general painting and are used most often – I have many sizes, but I use only 3 most of the time (#2, #0, #10/0).
  - Liners do just that – they're used to draw lines – you just need a steady hand!
  - Angulars have slanted bristles and are used for fill-ins and keeping a sharp edge.
  - Flats have bristles that are straight across – I use them for filling in large spaces.
  - NEVER store your brushes in your water, and NEVER put them brush-end down – you'll distort the bristles and render the brush useless.
- Any watercolor paints will work, but some work better than others because their colors are more intense. My preferred brand is Winsor and Newton, but they're expensive. Their Cotman brand is much more affordable, and that's the one I work with. You can get them either in tubes or in little squares (called pans). The tube paints are wet; the pan paints are dry. I like working with the pans

because the color is easier to control, but it's easier to mix the wet paint from the tubes if you're going to use a lot of a particular color. If you have tubes, I'd suggest you put some of every color you think you'll use on a palette (or plate, paper or otherwise) to dry the day before you paint.. This is when you should also mix the colors you want.

**The nitty-gritty of actually painting with watercolors. You'll already have the outline of the design you're using. Make ABSOLUTELY sure the fine-line marker you used is waterproof!!**

- Use clean water. Change it often so your colors aren't influenced by the color of the water. Some artists use 2 containers of water: one to wash brushes and one to actually paint with.
- If you're using dry paints, put a few drops of water on your paints before using them. They have to "ripen" and soften up for best use.
- Mix colors before painting with them – they'll look muddy if you try to mix them on the paper. And a little watercolor goes a long way – don't mix a lot.
- If you want a color to look antique, put a little brown in it.
- Colors appear darker when wet.
- Paint light-colored elements of the design **FIRST** – it's easier to go over mistakes with darker colors than it is to try to apply light colors over dark.
- Don't make your brush too wet or you'll lose control and get big blobs of watery paint on your paper. Just put the paint on the end of the brush. If you **DO** get blobs, you can "suck" them up using a clean brush or the corner of a paper towel or tissue.
- Dab your paint-filled brush on a paper towel before painting on the paper to rid it of excess water and paint. Sometimes water droplets cling to the area above the hairs and will drop down and ruin your work. To prevent that from happening, dab your brush sideways – almost like it's lying down.
- Don't use too much color at first. Get an idea of what the design will look like by applying a thin coat of color. You can always build up later.
- Make sure a recently painted area is dry before applying paint to an adjacent area; otherwise, your colors will bleed into each other.
- If you make a mistake, you can often erase it with a clean brush dipped in clean water. Apply the water sparingly to the mistake, blot with a tissue or paper towel – continue this process until all vestiges of your mistake are gone. Don't rub, though—just blot, or the paper will get roughed up.
- When you're finished, keep your painting flat until it dries, and clean your brushes with clear water. If the paper is crinkled from all the water and your paint is dry, you can flatten it by spraying the **BACK** of the painting with a bit of water (use sparingly!!), sandwiching it between several sheets of absorbent paper (paper towels work well), then putting weight on it (like a heavy book).

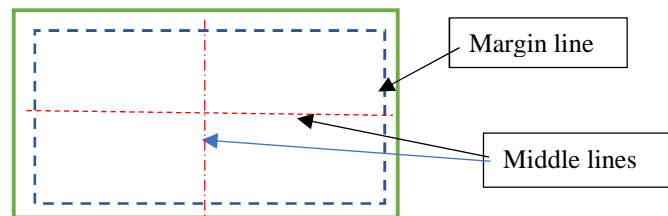
## **The Project Directions**

Supplies needed:

- Watercolor paint
- Brushes in various sizes
- Watercolor paper
- Tracing paper
- Soft lead pencil (#2 is fine)
- Very thin **WATERPROOF** fine-line black marker

- Glass for water
- Tissues and paper towels
- Art eraser – do NOT use a pencil eraser – it will smudge your work; gum erasers or white erasers work best.

FIRST, CENTER YOUR DESIGN: with your pencil, draw a 5" x 7" rectangle on the watercolor paper – on the diagram, it's the green line. (make sure the corners are square!). Then, measure and draw very light lines (you'll erase them later) marking the middles of that rectangle from both top to bottom and from side to side – the red lines. I also always draw a very light half-inch margin completely around the paper as well (the blue dashes line)– that's what the frame will cover, and I don't want my design to be hidden by the frame.



1. CHOOSE YOUR DESIGN and tape it to a hard surface, then place the tracing paper over the design you want to paint. Tape it down, too – a small piece on all sides will be fine. To make the tape less sticky, stick it on your clothing a couple of times first.
2. TRACE THE DESIGN ONTO TRACING PAPER: With a soft lead pencil, trace the design onto the tracing paper. Make sure your pencil marks are fairly heavy. If you don't have tracing paper, you can hold the design up to a window, put the watercolor paper over it, and trace it directly onto the watercolor paper that way. You can also use a light box, if you have one.
3. TRANSFER THE DESIGN TO WATERCOLOR PAPER: When you are finished, turn the tracing paper **facedown**, center the design on the blank 5x7 rectangle on the watercolor paper, tape it down again – just catch the edges of the watercolor paper, and trace the design once more on the back of the tracing paper, which will transfer the design onto the watercolor paper.
4. OUTLINE YOUR DESIGN: With a fine line black marker, go over the transferred pencil lines on the watercolor paper. You can add any details you want at this point, but do them in pencil first, then when you're satisfied, go over the pencil with the waterproof marker. A word of caution: don't make your design too busy.
5. ERASE PENCIL MARKS: With the art eraser (try to avoid using a pencil eraser – it will leave marks and / or smears), remove all pencil marks from the watercolor paper. You can't erase the marks after the paint is on them.
6. ADD COLOR!! (FINALLY!!!) Begin painting – remember -- light colors FIRST, and let the paint dry before you add another color adjacent to the just-painted section.
7. When you are finished, sign and date your work with the fine-line marker.

- Hopefully, we will be able to vinegar-grain frames for your picture, so keep the painting in a safe place until then, or you can frame it now. Try not to hang the picture in direct sunlight – it will fade unless you use conservation glass or museum glass on it.

## TA—DAH!! YOU'RE A FRAKTUR ARTIST!!

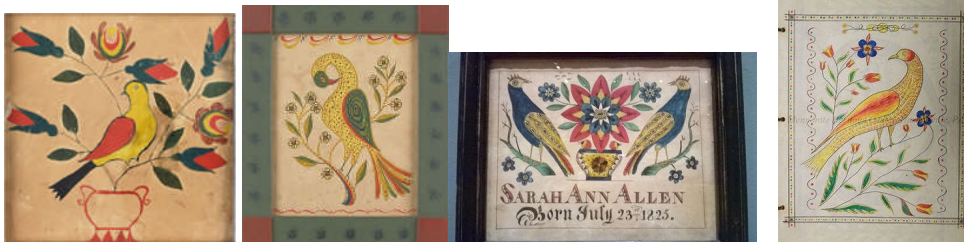
### Common Symbols in PA Dutch Folk Art

- Bird of Paradise (often the peacock)* – beauty, wonder and mystery of life. Some Examples:



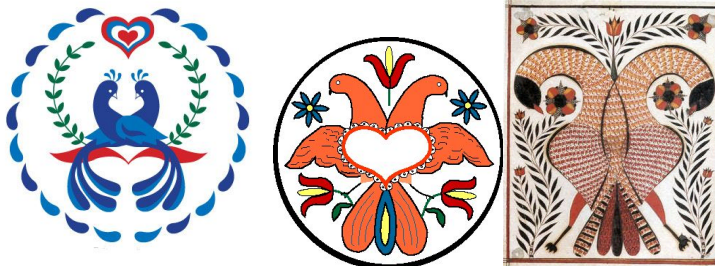
- Circle* – eternity or infinity

- Distelfink* – good luck and happiness – almost always yellow. Some examples:



- Double Distelfink* – double good luck and happiness

- Two Crossed Distelfinks* – true friendship, and happiness. Some examples (not old ones):



6. *Dove* – friendship, peace, purity. Some examples:



7. *Crescent moons* – fertility, birth, four seasons

8. *Eagle* – strength, courage, clarity of vision

9. *Heart* – heart of God, hope for future life, true love, lasting love, charity, love for others. Often drawn with a compass. Some examples:



10. *Oak leaf* – long life, endurance, strength of body, mind, and character

11. *Pineapple* – welcome, friendship, hospitality

12. *Raindrops* – water, fertility, crop abundance. Examples:



13. *Rosettes* – good luck. Some examples:



14. *Scallops* – smooth sailing in life

15. *Stars* – **5-pointed**: protection from fire and lightning, good fortune, hope, love, fertility, energy, and harmony; **8-pointed**: good will, good omens, light and protection – usually blue; **triple star**: good luck, happiness, success
16. *Tulip* – faith, trust in man, hope, and clarity; **3 tulips**: the Holy Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, faith in self and others, hope and charity



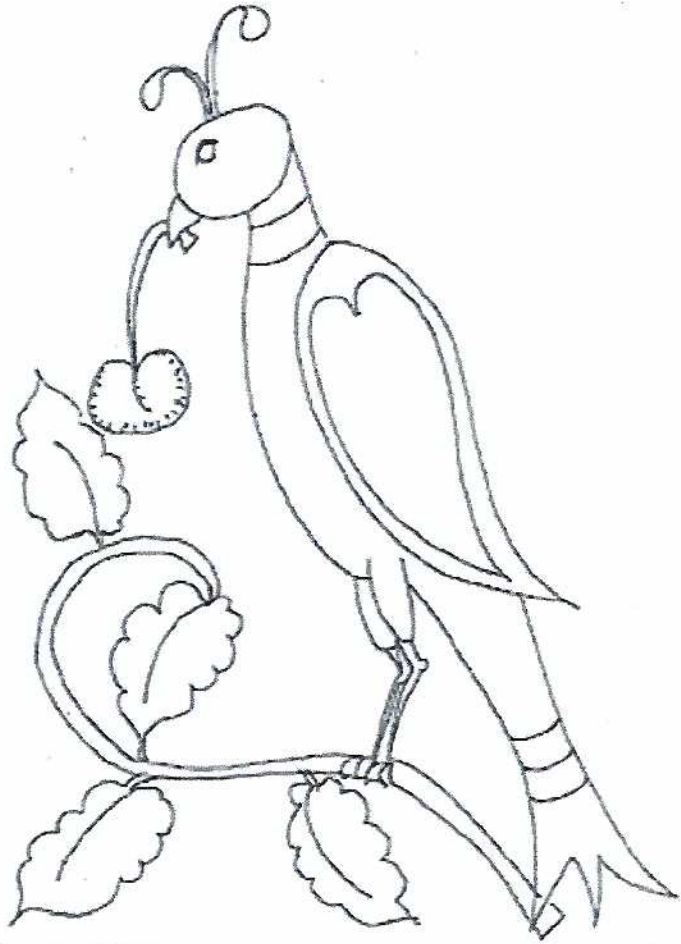
17. *Unicorn* – piety, peace, virtue, contentment



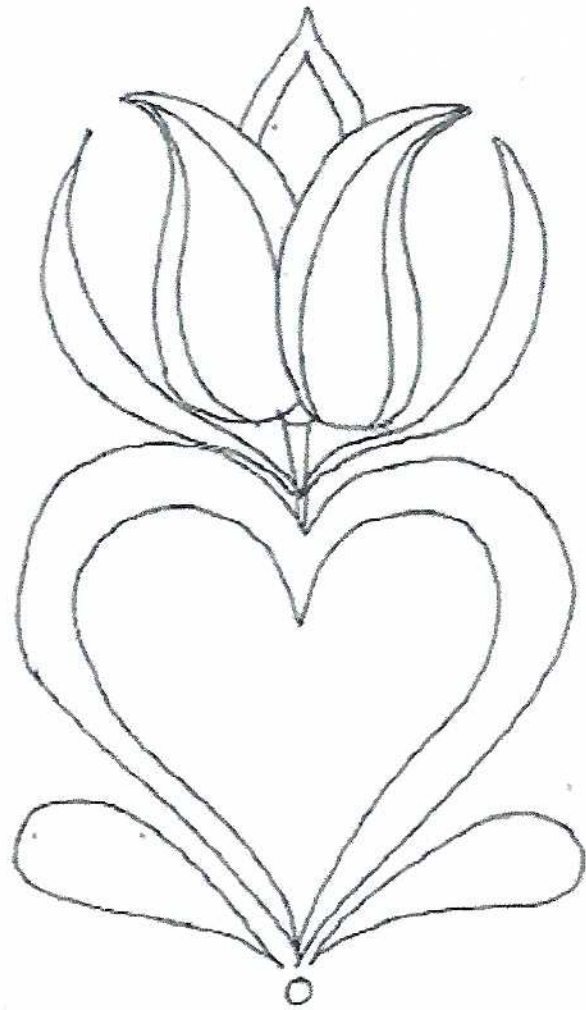
18. *Wheat* – abundance and goodwill

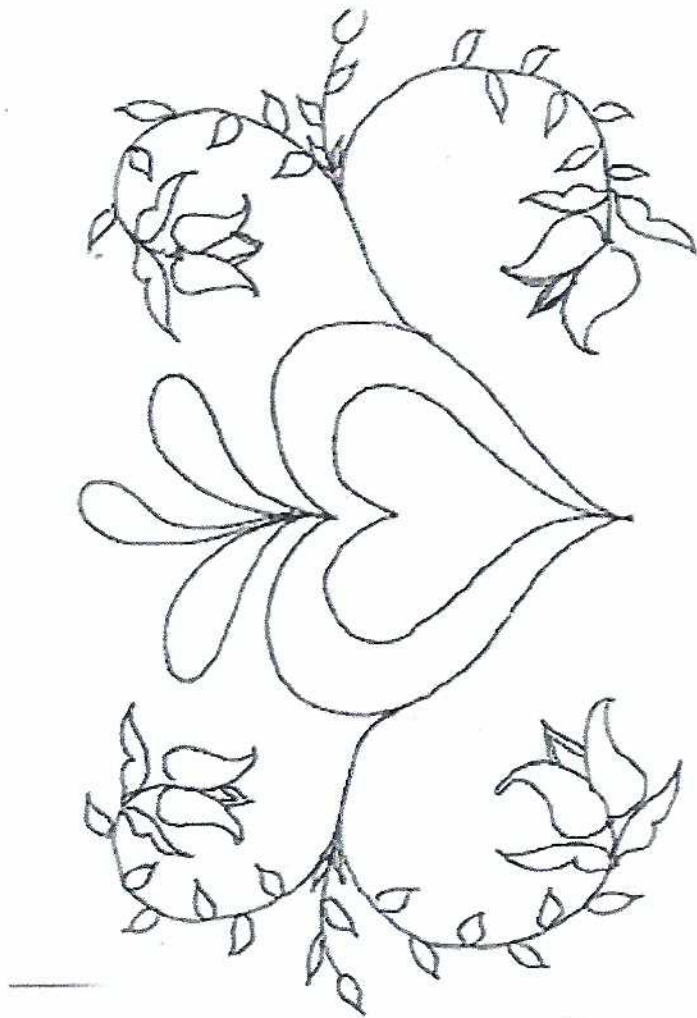
## Necessary Supplies for the Class

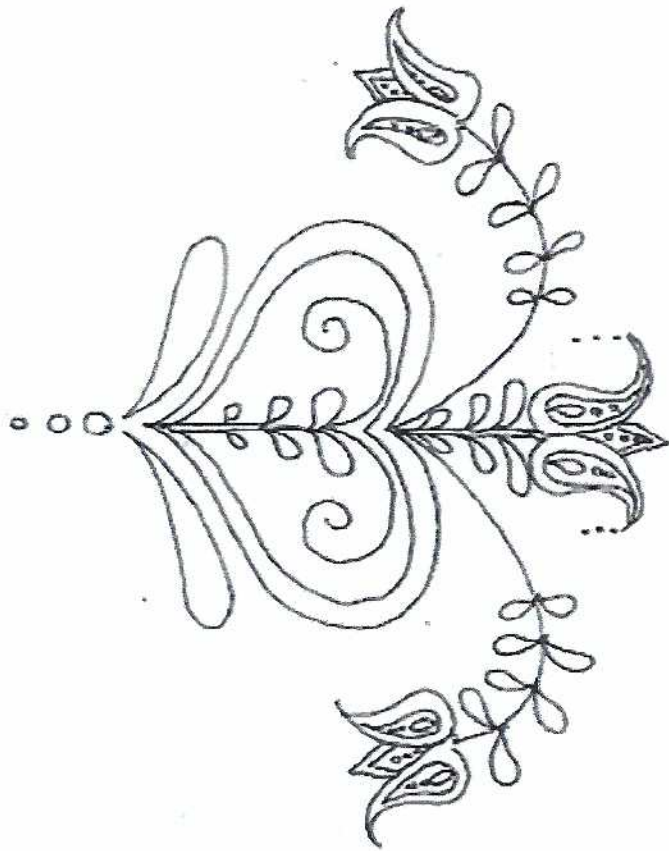
1. Paper
  - a. Tracing paper
  - b. Watercolor paper (I use Cranson's cold press 140 lb. paper)
  - c. Paper towels or tissues for blotting your brushes and / or paper
2. Soft lead pencil for tracing
3. Soft art eraser (NOT a pencil eraser, which smudges and tears up the paper)
4. Ultra-thin waterproof black marker (I use Micron 003 or 005)
5. Watercolors – start with the primary colors (red, blue, yellow); you can make all other colors from these three.
  - a. Red – add a bit of brown to make it more antique-y
  - b. Brown
  - c. Blue
  - d. Yellow ochre (repeated layers make it darker; a thin wash is pretty yellow)
  - e. Green – again, add brown and maybe a bit of yellow
6. Brushes – soft, not stiff; I use #2 round; #0 round, and #10/0 liner
  - a. Liner brush for drawing stems and other very thin lines
  - b. Small brush for details
  - c. Larger brush for wider areas
7. Plastic palette, glass plate, or plastic picnic plate for mixing colors
8. Jar / glass of clean water for painting

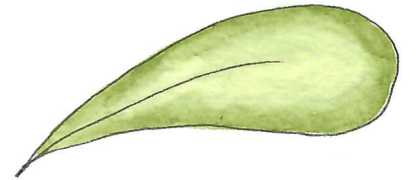
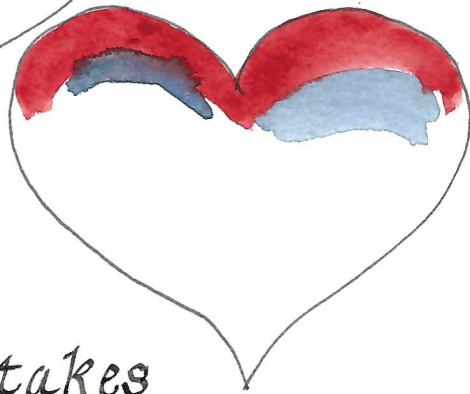
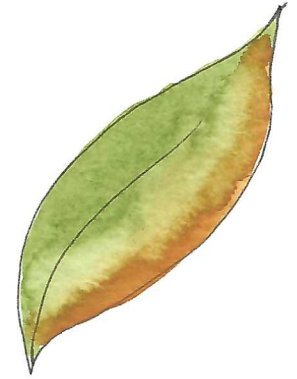
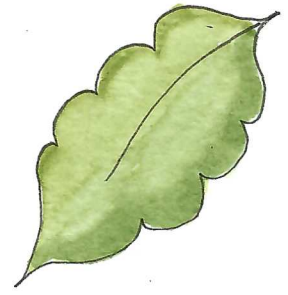


2.









#10 Fixing mistakes

#9 Filling in and shading

#7 Adding details #1

