

This exercise will guide you through an observation/reflection process to think through how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected you, and translate what you notice into a design that can be stitched. Feel free to use this exercise as many times as you like.

I recommend finding a quiet place to do this exercise. Whether you prefer privacy or having someone nearby for support, create a space that feels comforting for you. Have tissues nearby, especially if this pandemic has been particularly difficult. This exercise may bring up uncomfortable thoughts or feelings, and making a safe space to experience them is helpful. If you at any time feel overwhelmed, take a break and come back when you feel settled.

1- Using the COVID Impact Worksheet, go through each category and fill in the “My circumstance is” column. Write down how you describe yourself/your story within each category. Fill all the categories before you move on to the second column.

For ex: Age: 35; Place; US, GA, Atlanta, rent an apartment, live alone; etc.

2- Fill out each box under “How this circumstance impacts my COVID experience,” taking as much time as you need. Consider how each has uniquely shaped or informed the way the pandemic has impacted you. It may be hard to separate each category’s impact out neatly, say if you’re 35 and also have bad asthma, or work in a high-risk field like the ER, etc. Do your best, and write it all out. These impacts do not need to be solely related to COVID, but rather how the fact of COVID and the pandemic have impacted life in general, in all sorts of ways.

For ex: Age - 35 - As a 35 year old, I was not in the first round of vaccinations. Risk of a bad COVID infection is lower. Place - US, GA, etc - Race/ethnicity - Asian, Japanese
In GA we have had high case numbers at times; as someone who lives alone, it has been lonely and some depression b/c family isn’t nearby and I don’t see friends often. I’m glad I have my dog to keep me company. As an Asian American, especially living in ATL this year, the shooting here was really hard. Seeing so many people who look like me being attacked is scary, and I’ve had people say awful things to me because the virus originated in an Asian country, even though I’m not Chinese.

3- As you see how various categories overlap, (Ex: how being young but with bad asthma living in an area that has had high numbers while living alone and not feeling safe going out much) notice the connections and how some factors help and others complicate, how some factors may have taught you about how other people are experiencing the world, even outside of COVID, how COVID has confirmed or challenged your thoughts/perspectives on how the world supports you or is difficult for you to find support, and how those might play out for others.

4- Take a little time to think through what really stands out, what sticks in your mind, as well as what might make you tense up or relax in your body. Take a deep breath and pay attention to how your body is reacting. Is your neck tense? Is your stomach tight or upset? Is there a ball in your throat? Tears in your eyes? Is your foot wiggling? Brow furrowed? Take another deep breath and let it out slowly. Let any tears that rise spill out—they are literally stress and grief exiting your body. Take as much time as you need.

5- When you're ready, take the parts that stood out and write them down on the COVID Personal Impact Reflection sheet. Follow the instructions at the top, and if part of thinking/feeling your way through is moving your body, do what you need to do to process these thoughts and feelings, jotting them down as they come, or doodling, etc. 5 min is a minimum— if you need more time and space, go for it.

6- Take a break! Get a drink or a snack, restroom, shake out your arms, move around your space a little, get the blood flowing. Look out a window, pet your dog, etc. Take a nap if you need to!

7- Read through your Reflection sheet, notice what is there. Are there words that stand out? A doodle/image? Is there an image in your mind when you look this page over? A person that comes to mind? A song? A place? A memory? If you were to represent this in an image, which could include text/language, what would it look like?

8- Grab another piece of paper and sketch it out. Write words you would like to include. If there's a memory, look for a photo that might correlate. Do an internet image search if that might help. Feel free to use digital means to sketch/make notes if that's easier for you. As you work out a design, consider what colors and tones might emphasize something you want to stand out, how different shades create contrast. Consider scale, and what imagery or text should be big or small. How close together should the elements be? What's at the top, in the middle, on the bottom? How do you wish to organize the space—overlapped imagery, gridded, evenly spaced, etc.

9- Once you've got your design figured out, you can either sketch it directly onto your fabric with a washable marker, pencil, or water erasable fabric marker, or draw it out on gridded paper. The grid is likely a larger size (each box will be a stitch) than your fabric, so pay careful attention to how that scales down to your fabric size. Graph paper is usually 4 or 5 stitches per inch, where our fabric is 14-sts per inch (or 8-sts per inch).

You can also scan or take a photo of your design and upload it to a pattern creation software like pixelstitch.com and choose thread colors. You can also use stitchfiddle.com to manually draw with pixels, if you prefer (like drawing on gridded paper by filling in each little box).

Keep your worksheets, and use them as a reference for potential future opportunities to write about your experience, either as part of this project (I plan to make a book at some point in the future), or for your own memories, etc. If you are willing, you can also return them (or a copy of them) with your stitched piece to be part of the project archive. You can remain anonymous, or include your name if you wish.