

# BUYING DRAWING SUPPLIES

*Brenda Hoddinott*

**A-03 GETTING STARTED:** With so many different products available, it's easy to feel overwhelmed. Actually, you need very little to get started! This article offers practical guidance for buying drawing materials.



This article discusses the following:

- ✚ **DRAWING BOOKS AND PAPERS:** Experiment with a broad range of different types of sketch books and drawing papers.
- ✚ **PENCILS AND OTHER DRAWING MEDIA:** Some types of drawing media are very similar and others are quite unique.
- ✚ **SOME OTHER MEDIA TO CONSIDER:** As your skills improve, you may want to add to your selection of drawing materials.
- ✚ **PORTFOLIO CASE:** You need a hard-sided case to keep your drawings safe.
- ✚ **TOOLS FOR ERASING:** Vinyl and kneaded erasers are incredibly effective.
- ✚ **TOOLS FOR SHARPENING:** If you use any type of pencil media, you need a pencil sharpener.
- ✚ **TOOLS FOR BLENDING:** Blending tools distribute the drawing medium over the surface of the paper, to achieve a silky smooth graduation of values.
- ✚ **SKETCHING WITH PAPER ON A DRAWING BOARD:** A portable surface is perfect for drawing with sheets of paper.
- ✚ **ADDING TO THE BASICS:** In addition to the basics, you may want to check out other drawing supplies.

## 11 PAGES – 14 ILLUSTRATIONS

This article is recommended for artists of all ages and abilities, as well as home schooling, academic and recreational fine art educators.

**Published by Hoddinott Fine Art Publishers, Halifax, NS, Canada – Revised 2005**



## INTRODUCTION

With so many different products available, it's easy to feel overwhelmed. Actually, you need very little to get started! This article offers practical guidance for buying drawing materials.

You could probably find a few pencils and sheets of paper lying around your home. However, keep in mind that they may be designed for purposes other than drawing. You need to begin your drawing journey with professional materials that are designed specifically for artists. As with most activities, the better your tools the happier you'll be with the outcomes.

ILLUSTRATION 03-01

Even though you may be able to economize on some drawing materials, don't try to scrimp and save money on the three most important items - sketchbooks, pencils, and erasers. Plan to go shopping at a reputable art store and buy the best quality you can comfortably afford.

Time to make your shopping list! The old expression "You get what you pay for" definitely applies to art supplies.



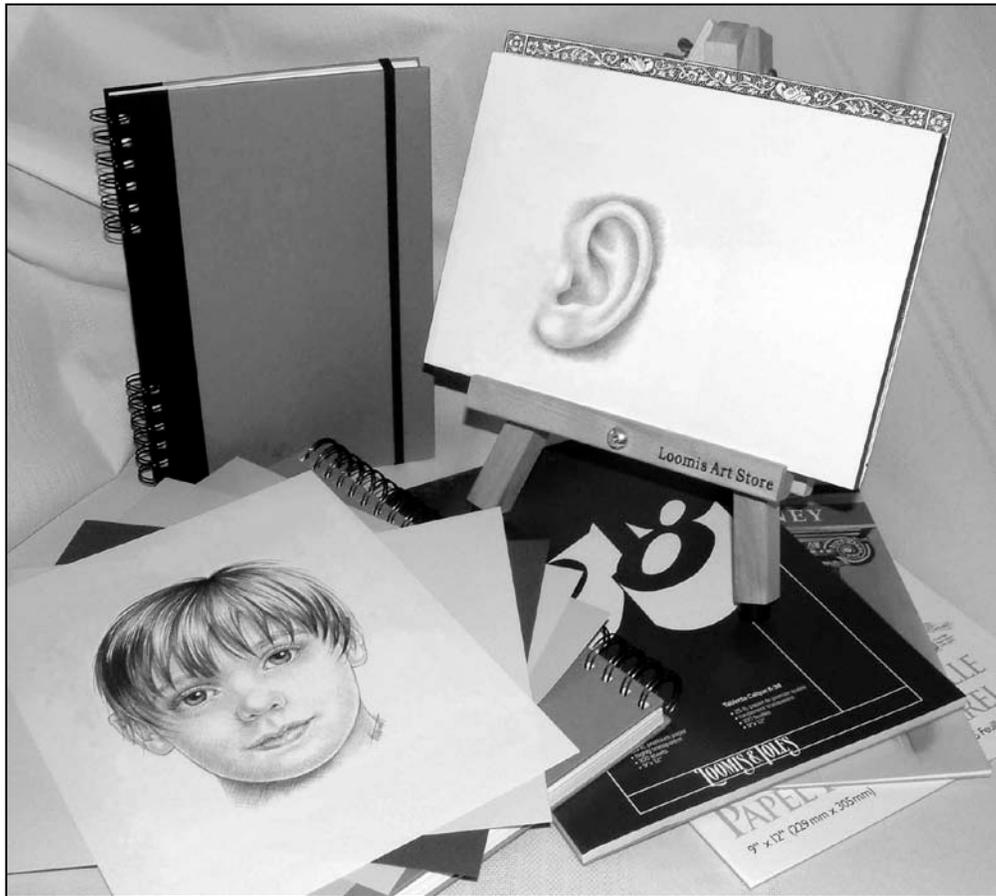
## DRAWING BOOKS AND PAPERS

Treat yourself to the luxury of experimenting with a broad range of different types of sketch books and drawing papers. Check out various art supply and stationary stores, and some department stores and purchase the best quality that you can afford. Make sure the actual paper is acid-free, or your drawings will deteriorate quickly.

### DRAWING BOOKS (SOMETIMES CALLED SKETCHBOOKS)

Even though soft-covered sketchbooks are usually less expensive, drawings may easily become crumpled and damaged. A hard cover sketchbook is much more durable, and protects your treasured masterpieces from being ruined. If you happen to like drawing outside, away from a table, you'll really come to appreciate the hard covers as a solid surface on which to draw. Choose a size that is easy to transport when you travel. Stay away from sketchbooks under 9 by 12 inches or your drawing options for composition and subjects will be too limited.

ILLUSTRATION 03-02

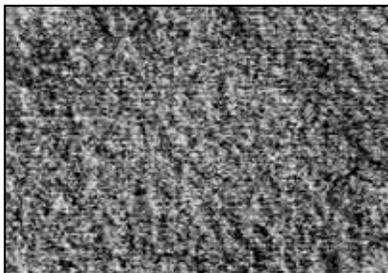


## DRAWING PAPERS

Drawing papers come in oodles of colors, textures, and sizes. Go to a good art supply store, purchase several different types, and then try sketching on each until you discover your favorites.

Tooth refers to the surface texture of paper and can range from silky smooth to very course. The more tooth a paper has, the rougher it feels to the touch. Some artists like smooth paper, and others prefer rougher, more heavily textured paper. Consider the qualities of the following three types of paper:

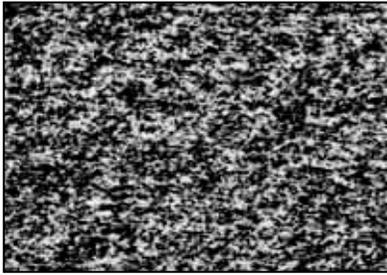
ILLUSTRATION 03-03



This close-up of shading was rendered with a 6B pencil on smooth, fine-tooth paper. Fine tooth paper often feels velvety smooth to the touch and is perfect for rendering fine textures with hatching, crosshatching and/or squirling.

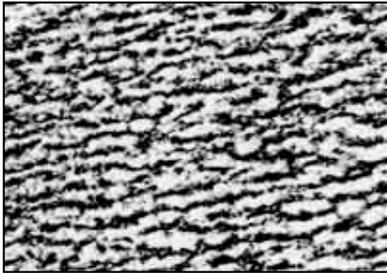
A word to the wise: stay away from papers with a really glossy surface! If the paper's surface is too smooth, the graphite simply won't stick very well, and it's darn near impossible to render medium and dark values.

ILLUSTRATION 03-04



Shading with a 6B pencil on medium-tooth sketchbook paper created this wonderful delicate texture. Medium tooth papers are ideal for most portrait drawings and work beautifully for rendering a full range of values from light to dark. The surface allows you to easily create diverse textures. Many artists prefer a medium tooth drawing surface in that it's somewhere in between smooth and rough.

ILLUSTRATION 03-05



The peaks and crevices of rough watercolor paper helped create this textured shading. Coarse, highly textured paper holds graphite very well. Some really great textures appear when the peaks of the paper grab the graphite and some of the crevices show through as white.

## PENCILS AND OTHER DRAWING MEDIA

Artists have been drawing with graphite for centuries and even today it remains the most popular drawing medium. It has withstood the test of time for permanence, and lends itself beautifully to all styles of drawing.

Some other types of drawing media are very similar and others are quite unique. For example, a drawing done with charcoal looks completely different than one done in graphite or pen. Media such as colored pencils, conté crayons, and pastels present you with the challenge of combining values with colors.

ILLUSTRATION 03-06



## GRAPHITE (SOMETIMES CALLED *LEAD PENCIL*)

Pencils are your most important drawing tools, so buy the highest quality you can afford. Inexpensive graphite may work well for writing, but are often poor quality and can sometimes scratch your drawing paper instead of going on smoothly. A big ugly scratch mark right smack dab in the middle of smooth shading can be incredibly annoying and frustrating.

Graphite comes in various grades and beginners only need a few different pencils. Generally speaking, H pencils work beautifully for light and middle values, and B pencils are best for middle and dark values. When you use a combination of both H and B pencils you can easily create a full range of values in your drawings. Choose a selection of both H and B pencils, such as 2H, HB, 2B, 4B, and 6B. 2H is the lightest (hardest), and the 6B is the darkest (softest).

ILLUSTRATION 03-07

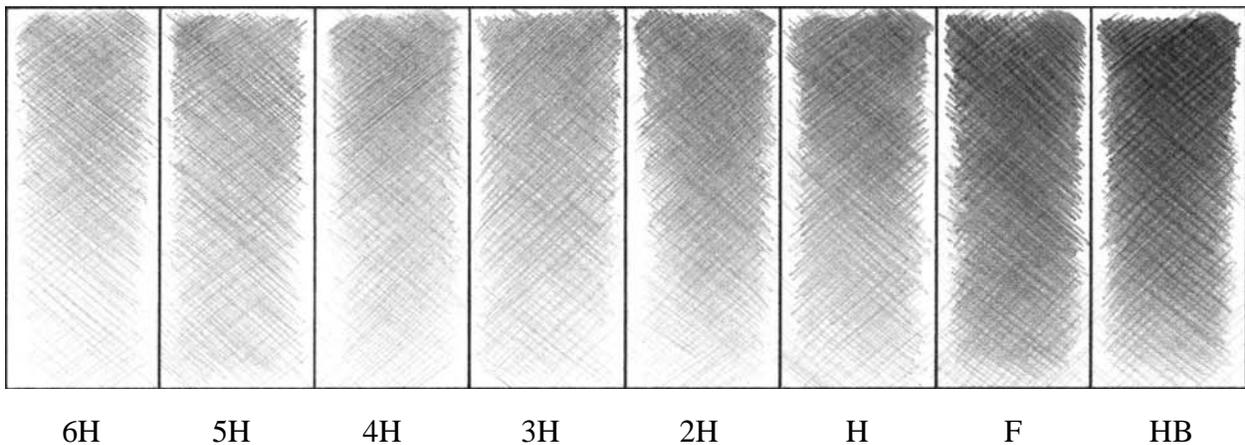
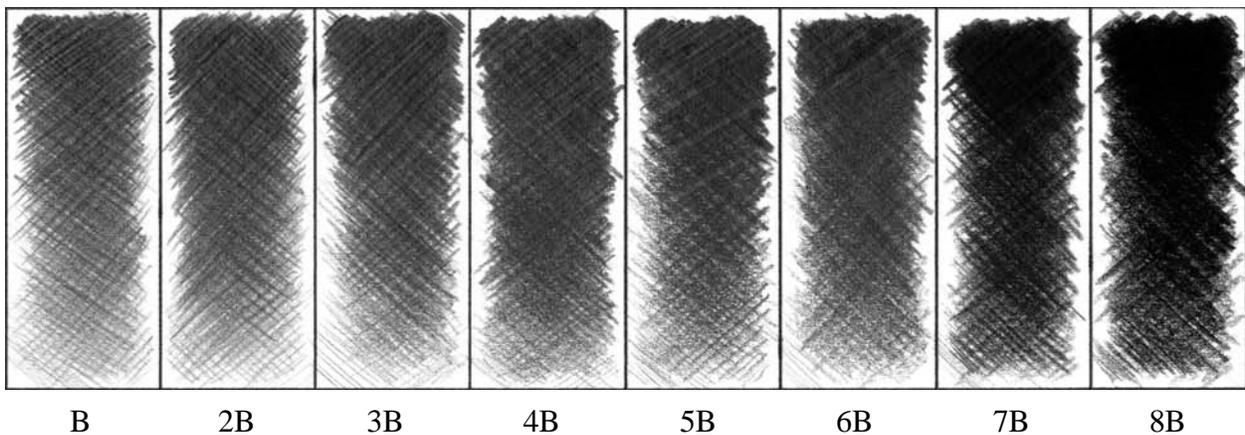


ILLUSTRATION 03-08



Mechanical pencils are a fantastic alternative to pencils that need to be constantly sharpened. They can hold various grades of graphite from very hard to soft and come in different sizes, such as 0.3, 0.5, 0.7 and 0.9. A 0.3 mm pencil allows you to render very detailed drawings, a 0.5 mm pencil is great for regular drawings and 0.7 or 0.9 mm mechanical pencils are ideal for sketching loosely or drawing on a large surface (or both).

## SOME OTHER MEDIA TO CONSIDER

As your skills improve, you may want to add some of the following to your selection of drawing materials:

- ✦ **Chalk pastels** come in tons of wonderful colors, and can be layered and blended to build up a paint-like quality in a drawing.
- ✦ **Charcoal** offers beautiful rich intense blacks that work brilliantly for sketching. However, keeping your sketches clean as you work can be challenging in that charcoal is messy and easy to smudge. On the up side, charcoal blends beautifully because of its soft texture, is available in both pencils and sticks, and come in various grades from hard to soft.
- ✦ **Conté** is similar to charcoal, is also available in either pencils or sticks, and comes in black, white, and gray, as well as a gorgeous range of rich earth tones, such as browns and sepias.
- ✦ **Colored pencils** (also called crayon pencils or crayons) have become very popular and highly respected over the past two decades. Painting with colored pencils involves dry mixing by layering colors on top of one another. Colored pencils rarely smudge, but they don't blend very well and are difficult to erase. You can purchase colored pencils individually or in sets, and they come in tons of different colors. Stay away from cheap colored pencils. They're much too waxy to blend and they fade very quickly.
- ✦ **Pens and markers** have become very popular as drawing tools in recent decades, and are relatively inexpensive. They work beautifully for various cartooning styles, such as Manga.

## PORTFOLIO CASE

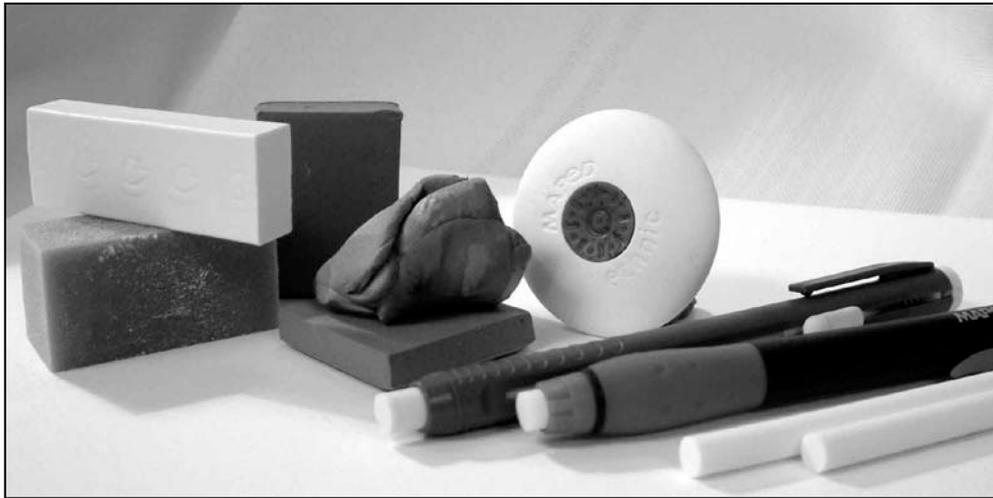
You absolutely must have a hard-sided case in which to keep your completed drawings safe from being wrinkled or damaged. You can purchase many different sizes and types of portfolio cases ranging from simple inexpensive cardboard to high quality expensive leather. You can even make your very own unique portfolio case (Refer to Lesson A-05: Making a Portfolio Case).

## TOOLS FOR ERASING

Vinyl erasers are gentle to the surface of your paper, and are incredibly effective for both artistic uses (such as pulling light sections from a layer of graphite or charcoal) and reparative needs (such as erasing complete sections of a drawing). If you need to erase very tiny details, you can cut off a small slice of a vinyl eraser with a utility knife. For erasing small sections of a drawing try a pencil type of vinyl eraser (for which you can buy inexpensive refills). If you aren't familiar with art erasers, have a salesperson help you.

Kneaded erasers are a real joy to work with in that they don't leave annoying eraser crumbs on your paper, and can easily be molded to a point or wedge for erasing or lightening sections of drawings. You can either pat or gently rub the surface of your paper to make a section of shading lighter. Your kneaded eraser can be easily cleaned by simply stretching and reshaping (also known as "kneading") it several times until it comes clean. However, eventually kneaded erasers get too dirty to work well, so pick up some extras.

ILLUSTRATION 03-09



## TOOLS FOR SHARPENING

If you use any type of pencil media, you need a pencil sharpener. Stay away from fancy, battery-operated, or expensive sharpeners. Instead, choose a simple, inexpensive, sturdy, hand-held metal pencil sharpener, preferably with two openings for regular and oversized pencils. They seem to last forever, especially when you buy replacement blades for them at art supply shops. Also pick up a few sandpaper blocks, with tear-off sheets designed to sharpen just the pencil points; hence, the wooden sections of your pencils won't wear down as quickly.

ILLUSTRATION 03-10



## TOOLS FOR BLENDING

Blending is the process of rubbing shading lines with a blending tool (such as tissue or paper towel), to evenly distribute the drawing medium over the surface of the paper, to achieve a silky smooth graduation of values. Choose blending tools that are clean, and experiment with colored items (such as fabrics) before you use them, to make sure they don't leave dyes on your drawing surface.

Consider a few of the following blending tools:

- ✦ **Blending stumps (or tortillons)** are tightly wound sticks of paper with points on both ends. Check out the various sizes and types available in art supply stores.
- ✦ **Chamois** is a soft fabric found in many grocery and department stores, and is ideal for creating a silky smooth texture.
- ✦ **Cotton balls** work well for blending large sections of your drawings.
- ✦ **Facial tissues** are great for blending soft pencil strokes.
- ✦ **Felt** creates different textures for various subjects, and is usually found in department or craft supply stores. Select white so colored dyes don't spoil your drawings.
- ✦ **Make-up wedges** are ideal when your goal is very smooth blending. You can find them in cosmetic sections of department or drug stores.
- ✦ **Paper towels** are durable and work well for various blending applications.
- ✦ **Q-tips** work beautifully for blending tiny detailed sections of drawings.

ILLUSTRATION 03-11



## SKETCHING WITH PAPER ON A DRAWING BOARD

A portable drawing surface, such as a drawing board is perfect when you draw with sheets of paper and don't want your drawings to end up all crinkled, wrinkled, or torn. Many art supply stores sell different types in various sizes, and they are relatively inexpensive.

As a matter of fact, if you (or someone you know) are handy with tools, you can very easily make your own drawing board. Simply cut a piece of smoothly finished, thin plywood to a size slightly larger than your favorite drawing paper. Use a fine sandpaper to sand it until its surface and edges are very smooth.

When you draw outside, a drawing board is a great alternative to a hard covered sketchbook.

Of course, you need to find a way to tape or clamp the sheets of paper to the drawing board, so they don't fall on the ground or blow away with a gust of wind. I personally prefer Boston Bulldog clips (available in various sizes at most art supply stores).

Be aware that some types of tape can damage or tear your paper, so visit an art supply store and choose a special tape that is specifically designed for this purpose.

## ADDING TO THE BASICS

When you wander through the labyrinths of art supply stores, resist the temptation to pick up a bunch of stuff you really don't need and may never use.

However, in addition to the basics already discussed in this article, you may want to check out the following drawing supplies that I use on a regular basis:

- ✚ **Knife:** A utility knife with replaceable snap-off blades can cut your drawing paper much straighter and neater than if you use scissors.
- ✚ **Easel:** An easel is a great alternative to propping up your drawing board on your lap, or against a tree. Check out various types and sizes in art supply stores.
- ✚ **Spray fixative:** A spray fixative, designed specifically for graphite and other drawing media, can protect your completed drawings from being accidentally smudged. However, keep the following in mind before you use a spray fixative:
  - Make sure you read the directions carefully.
  - Spray only in a well-ventilated area (such as outdoors).
  - Two or three thin coats are better than one thick coat (less is more!).
  - Don't use a spray fixative on your unfinished drawings, because you may no longer be able to erase a problem area.
  - You may find it very frustrating to draw over top of a sprayed surface; the spray changes the texture of the paper, so the graphite doesn't adhere properly.
- ✚ **Pencil case:** A large zippered pencil case can keep all your small drawing supplies, such as pencils and erasers, together in one place.

ILLUSTRATION 03-12

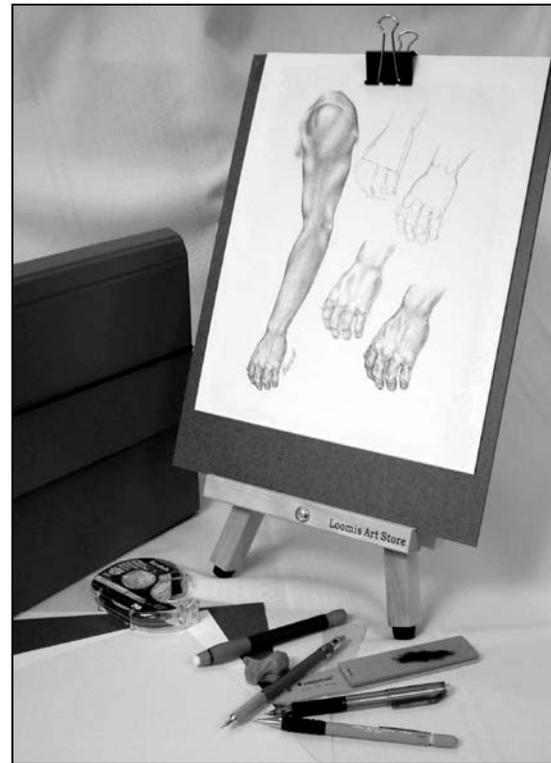


ILLUSTRATION 03-13

- ✚ **Ruler:** A ruler comes in handy for drawing grids, outlining drawing spaces, and as a guide for cutting straight pieces of drawing paper with a utility knife. A metal ruler with a beveled edge may be a little more expensive than some others, but will last longer, is easier to clean, and is less likely to smudge your drawing as you work.



- ✚ Three-ring binders are absolutely fantastic for organizing art files, small drawings, and reference materials. I simply punch holes in text sheets and file them away in binders. Small drawings and photos are inserted into plastic sheet protectors, which are specifically designed for three-ring binders. Supplies for this type of file system are available in most department, stationery, and business supply stores.

ILLUSTRATION 03-14



Have some fun wandering through various art stores, and check out the different drawing materials and new and innovative products currently available. However, keep in mind that you don't need to spend a lot of money on supplies to learn how to draw well.

## BRENDA HODDINOTT - BIOGRAPHY

As a self-educated teacher, visual artist, portraitist, forensic artist, and illustrator, Brenda Hoddinott utilizes diverse art media including graphite, technical pen, colored pencil, chalk pastel, charcoal, conté crayon, and oil paints.

My philosophy on teaching art is to focus primarily on the enjoyment aspects while gently introducing the technical and academic. Hence, in creating a passion for the subject matter, the quest for knowledge also becomes enjoyable.

>Brenda Hoddinott<

Born in St. John's, Newfoundland, Brenda grew up in the small town of Corner Brook. She developed strong technical competencies with a personal commitment to self directed learning, and the aid of assorted "Learn to Draw" books. During Brenda's twenty-five year career as a self-educated civilian forensic artist, numerous criminal investigation departments have employed Brenda's skills, including Royal Canadian Mounted Police and municipal police departments. In 1992, Brenda was honored with a commendation from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and in 1994, she was awarded a Certificate of Membership from "Forensic Artists International".

Her home-based art career included graphic design, and teaching recreational drawing and painting classes. As supervisor of her community's recreational art department, Brenda hired and trained teachers, and designed curriculum for several children's art programs. In 1998, Brenda chose to end her eighteen-year career as an art educator in order to devote more time to writing, drawing, painting, and developing her websites.

Drawspace <http://www.drawspace.com> incorporates her unique style and innovative approach to curriculum development. This site offers downloadable and printable drawing classes for students of all abilities from the age of eight through adult. Students of all ages, levels and abilities have praised the simple step-by-step instructional approach. This site is respected as a resource for fine art educators, home schooling programs, and educational facilities throughout the world.

## LEARN-TO-DRAW BOOKS BY BRENDA HODDINOTT

- ✚ **Drawing for Dummies (2003):** Wiley Publishing, Inc., New, York, NY, this 336 page book is available on various websites and in major bookstores internationally.
- ✚ **The Complete Idiot's Guide to Drawing People (2004):** Winner of the Alpha-Penguin Book of the Year Award 2004, Alpha - Pearson Education – Macmillan, Indianapolis, IN, this 360 page book is available on various websites and in major bookstores internationally.