

# Drawing a Young Girl with Charcoal



**Yong Chen**

An EnjoyingArt Publication

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Text set in EB Garamond 12pts.



## Drawing a Young Girl with Charcoal

This is part of the EnjoyingArt Member Learning Challenge of November 2022.

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## Drawing Materials

In this drawing lesson, I used the following materials:

Paper:

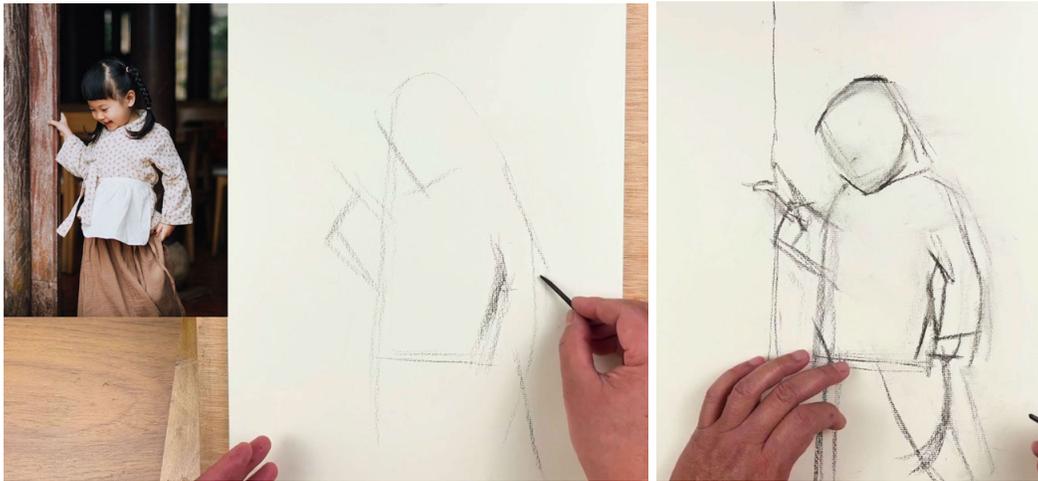
Strathmore Charcoal Paper, 12 in. x 18 in. 64 lb.  
500 Series, archival quality, 100% cotton, laid finish, natural white.

Drawing Tools:

- Vine charcoal, medium or soft
- Compressed charcoal stick, medium
- General brand charcoal pencils, hard, medium, soft, and extra soft
- Paper blending stumps
- Kneaded eraser



## Step 1 - Composition



To start this drawing, I use a piece of vine charcoal and lightly lay out some preliminary lines to help me visualize my placement of the main object which is the girl. At this beginning stage, we are not looking at specifics, such as the face. Our focus needs to be on seeing the overall shape of the figure including the head, the arms, the body and the skirt. We need to focus on the whole; not the details. Drawing simple lines on the charcoal paper helps us to see the space occupied by the figure and the area around the main object. This is the first step in the drawing process.

After drawing the first few marks determining the initial idea of my composition, I will sit back and view the entire paper. I want to get a sense of the balance of the whole drawing by looking at the space around the main object and asking these questions:

1. Is there too much or too little space at the top, on the left, on the right, or at the bottom?
2. Does the main object look too small or too big?

After a ten-minute assessment, you should have a good idea on how to move forward. This is a very important ten minutes. Beginning artists have a tendency of rushing through this step, and at the end of the painting process, they feel disappointed with their artwork because they didn't spend the time to review the questions related to the composition's balance. In this demonstration, I made a couple of small changes.

## Step 2 - Comparative Measurement



I don't start measuring until I get a good composition because comparative measuring is based on having determined the location of the top and bottom of the main object.

In the previous step, we established a good foundation for the drawing. Next, you are going to find out how to define the size of large areas within the main object. In this particular drawing, I first worked on vertical proportions.

After I set a short line to define the bottom of the apron, I then eyeballed the largest spaces in the figure. I assumed that the head height was equal to the vertical space from her chin to the top of the apron and from the top of the apron to the bottom. I used a small bamboo stick to check if my presumption was correct.

By measuring, I also realized that the vertical height of the apron was actually equal to the distance from the top of the apron to the bottom of her nose, and from the bottom of the nose to the top of her head.

Then I found out that the midpoint of the head was the bottom of the hair.

### Step 3 - Angular Measurement



In a complex drawing like this, using only comparative measurements is not enough. It is necessary to combine comparative with angular measurements.

I use the comparative measuring process to identify large relationships within the figure. For example, I compare the head to the width of the front of the body to the shoulder corner on the right. But now, I want to compare the directions of movement of the head, body and skirt. Each of these parts have different turns and angles. So, I use a bamboo stick on the reference image, and a second bamboo stick on my drawing to compare angles. Using masking or artist's tape to secure each end of the bamboo sticks is a good idea. Then, you can spend as much time as you need to match the angle in the reference to the angle in your drawing.

## Step 4 - Angular Measurement to Relate Key Points



Angular measurement is also a good technique to double check different points in the drawing. For example, use an angle to relate the left-side of the face to the fold on the inside of the arm, use a vertical angle to relate the left-side of the face to the left edge of the apron and skirt, and so on.

So often, we think that we have found the position of a part of the body just by eye-balling it, but by using measuring techniques you may discover that your perception was inaccurate. For example, in this reference, you may assume that the left edge of the apron is more to the left than the left side of the head. By measuring, you will find that they are aligned on the same vertical line.

Be sure to spend a considerable amount of time checking the major points and key proportions by using both comparative and angular measurements.

## Step 5 - Defining the Small Proportions



I always first define the large proportions before turning to the small shapes. I have already used comparative and angular measurements to find and check the large shapes. In this step, I will start working on the smaller shapes within those large shapes.

Looking at the face, since we already knew the location of the bottom of the hair (half of the height of the head) and the bottom of the nose, it will be much easier to find the locations of the eyebrows, eyes, and mouth. Also, remember that the face is a sphere. So, when you look for the placement of the features of the face, you need to consider that their alignment is along curved lines rather than straight lines. Always use what you have already found – and double-checked – to relate and define the things that are still unknown.

It's so easy for us to make assumptions without measuring, but if we later find out a detail is in the wrong position, it is very difficult to correct. One critical error can cause more mistakes down the road.

Be patient. Take time to measure. Then measure again.

## Step 6 - Finishing the Draft



After the measurement process, you can now continue using the vine charcoal to finish drawing all the lines.

In this step, we gradually form the complete picture of our drawing. We are not just copying the information from the photo reference, we may make changes or add or remove parts. You only want to include the things that most matter that you care about in your final work.

## Step 7 - Softening Vine Charcoal Marks



Often, I use my hand, or a piece of paper towel to soften the vine charcoal marks. Some of you may find this confusing. We've spent all this time drawing out the figure with vine charcoal, and now, we're going to practically erase all our work! The process, this far, has been a time to play. It is a time of exploration and experimentation. But our work hasn't been a waste of time. All the things we've learned will be carried into the rest of the drawing process.

I choose to soften/erase the vine charcoal marks because of two reasons:

1. Vine charcoal is not stable. It can be too easily smudged
2. I need to tone the drawing paper

At this point, we have another chance to make the final drawing better.

## Step 8 - Contour Drawing with Charcoal Pencils



Charcoal pencils are a form of compressed charcoal. Compressed charcoal has gum as the binder which makes it much more stable in attaching the charcoal to the surface of the charcoal paper.

Charcoal pencils commonly come in a set of Hard (HB), Medium (2B), Soft (4B), and Extra Soft (6B). I usually start with the medium charcoal pencil because I want to see my marks clearly, but to still be able to erase them if they need to be.

Sharpen your charcoal pencil with a sharp utility knife. When you have a fine point on your pencil, pick a starting point on your drawing to begin. Though the faint vine charcoal lines provide good indications and suggestions for placing your lines using the charcoal pencil, you should still use your judgment. Continue to observe and compare as you draw each line again. This time, you can make everything you've done before better.

## Step 9 - Setting the Values



To create balance and contrast, I then use a compressed charcoal stick (medium or soft should be good) to set the dark tones to the background, to add the mid-tones, and to determine the base value of the wood door.

You don't need to apply too dark at this time. When you start blending the compressed charcoal on the paper, it will appear much darker.

In the following steps, you will create the dark, half-tones, and gradually build up a value composition you like.

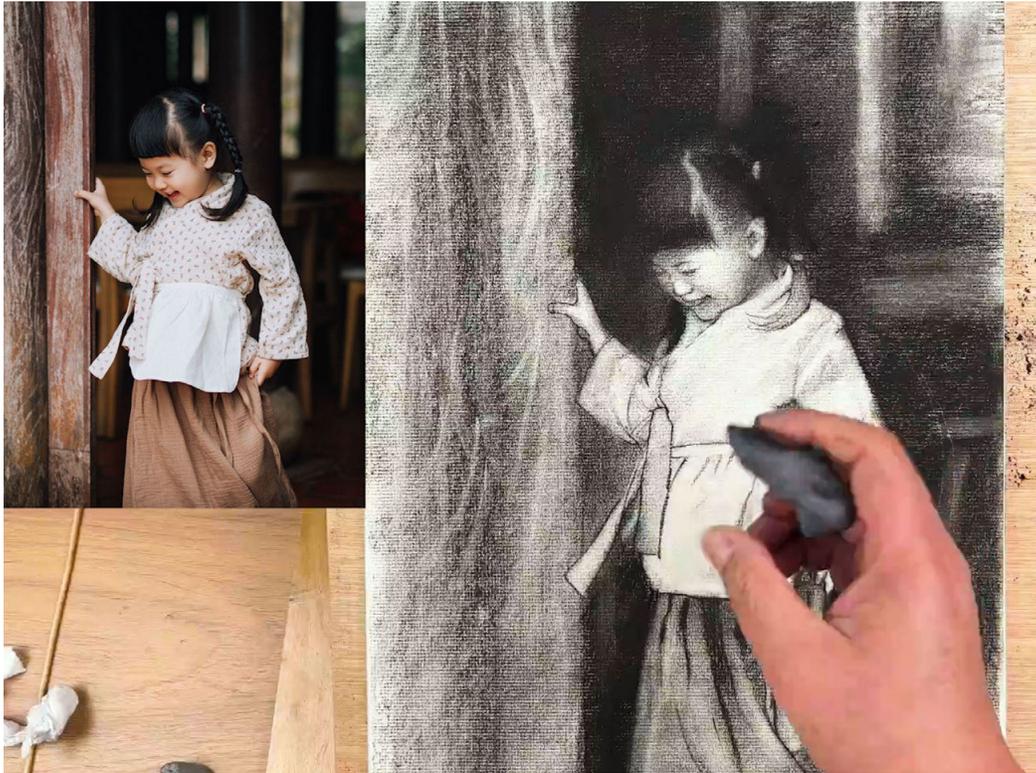
## Step 10 - Blending



There are many ways to blend charcoal. You can use a paper towel, a tissue paper, a piece of cloth, a paper blending stump, etc. Depending on the texture you prefer, you can use a different solution. Sometimes, depending on the mood and personality of the subject, I will use a particular blending tool over the others.

Most often, I use my fingers or the palm of my hand. Using my hand seems to deliver better control over how hard or light pressure is used to touch and to move the charcoal for a certain effect that I need.

## Step 11 - Lightening and Shaping Areas Using an Eraser

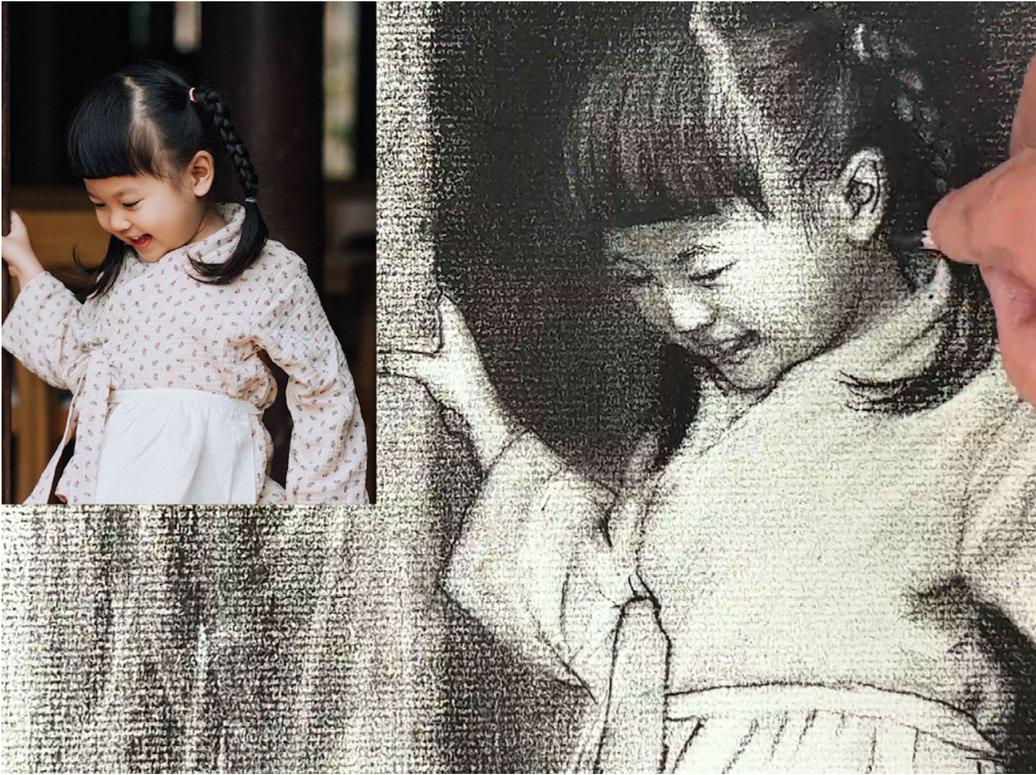


A kneaded eraser is an important tool in the charcoal drawing process.

After the blending step, most edges have been softened and blurred. In this step, I use a kneaded eraser to lighten some areas and to return sharp edges if they are used to strengthen a sharp contrast. Keep in mind, some edges may be better left soft, however. I call this process adjusting the value composition and edges.

I also use the kneaded eraser to develop some suggestions of form or texture in the background area. Here, I used it to create the wood grain in the door.

## Step 12 - Working into the Details



After the adjustment on the values and edges for the large shapes and areas, now it's time to work into defining the small details.

I use a paper blending stump to smooth some textures; for example, the face skin tones. I use a hard charcoal pencil to add other small details, such as, the eyebrows, the nose, the mouth, the ear, and the hair. And, of course, I use the kneaded eraser to create any small light shapes.

## Step 13 - The Final Balancing

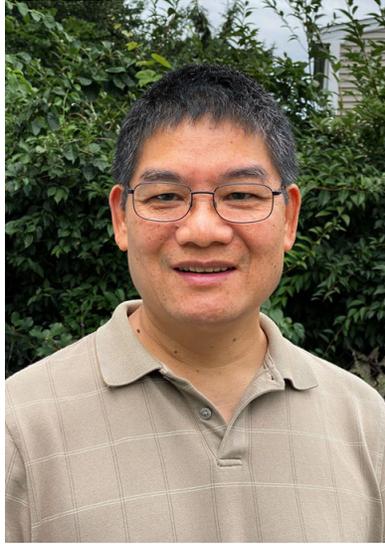


You can always continue working on the drawing, adding the design in the fabric, adding details to the fingers and hands, etc. You can spend hours more from here if you would like.

If you are a member who supports Yong Chen on Patreon ([www.patreon.com/yongchen](http://www.patreon.com/yongchen)), you can view the full video of this lesson as part of your membership as one of your many benefits.

If you are not yet a member, you can purchase, stream and watch the drawing video on Gumroad ([yongchen.gumroad.com](http://yongchen.gumroad.com)).





Yong Chen is a signature member of the National Watercolor Society. He is a professor of art in Boston, Massachusetts. He is also an accomplished author, illustrator and painter having held exhibits in multiple countries. His works are found in private collections both in the US and abroad. He is the founder of EnjoyingArt, an on-line artist community, where he is teaching, coaching, and supporting members who come from across the US and from more than 21 countries around the world.

Yong earned his Master of Fine Arts in Illustration from the University of Hartford and has 30 years of teaching experience. He promotes relaxed art-making, using a systematic, yet creative process of drawing and painting in many mediums. He is not only an expert with watercolor, but with oil, Chinese calligraphy, acrylic, gouache, digital art and other mediums covering all subject matter.

## Yong's Story

Yong's journey as an artist began when his father brought him to the house of an older gentleman in the village. The house was filled with beautiful drawings, oil paintings, and sculptures. Yong soon became his student, drawing and painting every day.

After finishing his degree in art in the US, he began to teach at the college level. Being able to identify directions of growth for his students was a huge challenge, but offered great satisfaction. It required understanding where each one of them was as an artist and showing them what steps they needed to take to become what they desired.

The technological age has meant that Yong has the ability to teach people anywhere in the world. His students can see their progress every week, every month. They can share their artwork in a global art community, and they can help other people to have the same opportunity.

Asked about his own dreams, Yong said, “ I think I was always meant to help other people and to share my love of art with them. I want the whole world to experience a love of drawing and painting.”

To learn more about Yong, visit [www.yongchen.com](http://www.yongchen.com)



# The EnjoyingArt Community

EnjoyingArt is an artist community with a primary focus on teaching art to people around the world over the Internet and in local classes.

The members are part of an international art community which supports their pursuit of artistic expression. Through the use of instructional videos, member-led clubs, community support and encouragement, members improve their artistic ability and work toward their individual art-related goals.

## Available Memberships

### Associate Member

- Access to the Basic Learning Library on drawing and painting fundamentals.
- Traceables and photo references for upcoming demos when available.
- Being able to share your artwork on a private Discord channel

### Member

- Access to the Full Learning Center
- Join Member clubs on Discord and art events on Zoom
- Use Discord for interactive conversation

### Companion

- Includes all Member level benefits, plus
- Monthly group critiques
- Special lessons
- Access to recorded videos on the listed activities for Companions

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