



About Labyrinths





What is a Labyrinth?

Labyrinths are found in many cultures and are used as a tool for centering. They all share the basic features of an entrance, a single path and a center or goal.

Some people think a labyrinth is a maze. Labyrinths are not mazes. A maze is a puzzle and has many paths. A labyrinth has only one path. Mazes can trick you. A labyrinth never will. There is only one way to walk a maze. There is no wrong way to walk a labyrinth.

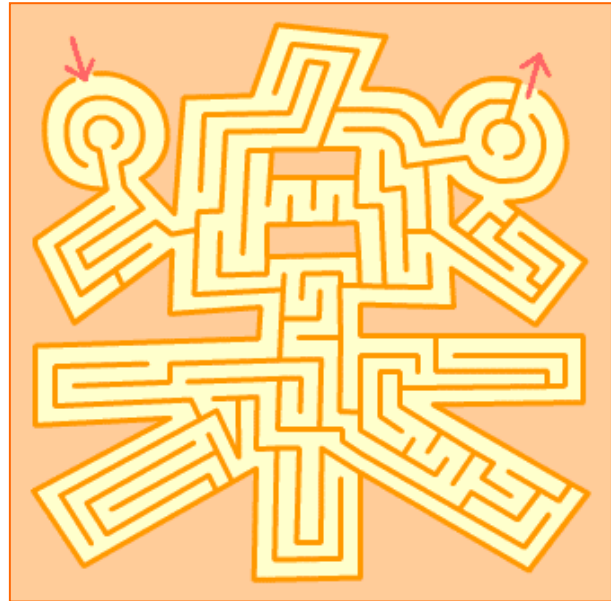
Many people think that walking a labyrinth can bring you peace. I have a friend named Mafion. Mafion is eight. We walked a labyrinth together in Connecticut. It was in a botanical garden. Mafion told me, "Walking labyrinths are fun."



Mazes and Labyrinths

This is a picture of a maze. The goal is to find a path from the starting point to the finishing point. There are walls that block some of the paths. The builder of the maze has tried to hide the exit from you.

Mazes can be confusing. I have a friend named Soshi who is nine. She said, "Mazes are frustrating and sometimes fun."



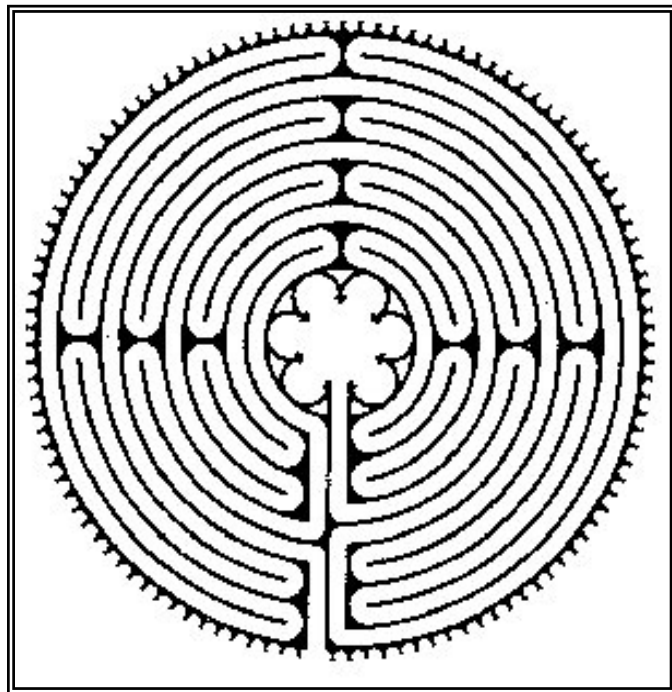
This is drawing of a labyrinth. Look at how different it is from the maze. All labyrinths have only one entrance, a single roundabout path and a center. You can think of the center as a goal. The path carries you to the center and out again. You know where you are going and how you will return. You can just relax and enjoy the walk.

Are Labyrinths new?



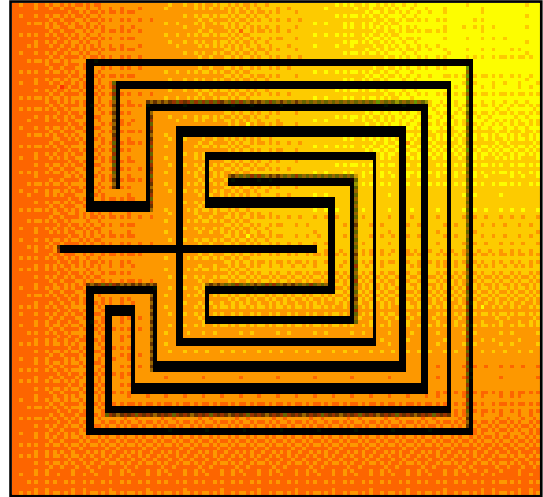
Labyrinths have been found in many cultures. There are people that say humans have been building labyrinths since 1500 BC. The oldest labyrinth ever found is in Egypt on the continent of Africa. It was built by a Pharaoh named Amenemhat III.

Around 1200 AD a very famous labyrinth known as the Chartres Labyrinth was built in France. It is part of the stone floor of Chartres Cathedral. It looks like this drawing. Many people travel to France each year from all over the world just to walk it.



Does the United States have any ancient Labyrinths?

Ancient Labyrinths have been found in both North and South America. The labyrinths in South America were built by a people known as the Pimas. Those found in North America were built by the Hopi and the Navajo Indian Nations. You can still visit some of them in the Southwestern United States. My children and I walked a labyrinth in New Mexico once. My daughter said it made her feel calm and happy inside.



The Hopi Indians named their labyrinths Tapu'at. This means Mother-child. Some people say the name was meant to tell people of the new life they could find when they walked the Mother-child labyrinth. This labyrinth can be square or round. They can be found both on the ground and woven in to different kinds of cloth. The Mother-child labyrinth pictures on this page are from a labyrinth quilt.



Where can I build a Labyrinth?

A labyrinth can be built anywhere. They can be any size. Some labyrinths are smaller than a penny and others are much bigger than this room.

Not all labyrinths are permanent. They may be made of canvass or some other kind of material. These are known as portable labyrinths. They can be carried to anywhere a person might go. It is a very nice way to share with your friends and other people.



You could build a labyrinth in your garden. Or, like the labyrinth in the blue picture, you might make one of clay. Then you could put it in a pouch and carry it in your pocket. These are known as finger labyrinths because you walk it with you finger. If you build a labyrinth, what kind will you make? Whichever it is I know you will have fun.



How do I walk a Labyrinth?



You can walk a labyrinth with your fingers or with your feet. You can even walk a labyrinth on your computer.



What do I need to make a Labyrinth?

You can make a labyrinth out of almost anything. Some are made of stones and some are just made in the grass. Finger labyrinths can be made of wood, paper or clay. You might even make one of beads or draw one on your computer. I've even seen them made of snow.





Have you every built a Labyrinth in the snow?

I wonder why some of the craters on the moon look so much like labyrinths. Do you think some of the meteors that hit the moon were trying to tell us we should think more about peace? Of course, we will never know, but in my heart I think it is true. What do you think?



Some labyrinths are square and some are round. When you make your labyrinth how will it be? Will you be able to hold it in your hand? Or, will you build it on the ground? Will you walk it with a friend? Or, will you walk it with your finger when you just need time to solve a problem and sit down?



You can enjoy a labyrinth alone or it can be a place to sit with special friends. It's just like life. Sometimes we need to be alone. Other times we want to be with friends. The choice is yours. One day you might walk a finger labyrinth all alone. Another day you might walk with friends. There is no right or wrong way. It's up to you and how you feel.



How and when you walk the Labyrinth is always up to you.

There is no wrong way.



Usually people pause a moment before they start their labyrinth walk. A boy in New Mexico put a large stone at the entrance of his labyrinth. He calls it a “pausing stone”. Some Native Americans scatter corn meal before they start their walk. They do this to give thanks and honor the earth.

There are people who ring a bell softly or sound a drum just before they start their walk. My friend Mafion has a hand flute that he blows. When you stop a moment before you begin to walk it helps make your walk special. Mafion told me it makes his mind quiet.



When you get to the center of the labyrinth, whether with your fingers or your feet, you might just want to stop and think. Tzippy, a friend of mine who is 12, told me she does this. You can make your own choice what you want to do. It’s up to you. Stay in the center as long as you want.



On your walk out of the labyrinth you might think about what you feel inside and say it out loud. On the other hand, you might want to just enjoy being quiet. This is up to you. The important thing is for you to choose what is best for you.

There are some children from Santa Fe, New Mexico who built their own labyrinth at their school. Their names are Daniella, Jimena, Molly, Nefthali, Nicholas, Maya, Sara, Sean, Casey and Cole. They were 7 and 8 when they built their labyrinth. These are some of the things they said about walking a labyrinth.

- It makes you happy when you walk around it.
- It helps you feel better when you are mad.
- When my hamster died I walked the labyrinth. I felt better.
- I walked with friends and we stood in a circle before holding hands. I looked around feeling like the labyrinth was my home.
- It was very peaceful and quiet.
- I felt happy when I was walking the labyrinth. It said to me that everything is going to be fine. It was very smart.
- The labyrinth is a spiral path that makes you feel better if you are feeling bad.
- I felt sad before I walked the labyrinth. Now I feel happy.
- Sometimes I get in the middle and just sit with my friends and hold hands.
- I liked walking the labyrinth with my Mom because I could tell it made her feel good.





Would you like a labyrinth?

The finger labyrinth shown on the next page is yours. You can "walk" it on paper with your finger. Or, if you are reading this on your computer screen, you can walk it with your mouse.

Try tracing the path of the labyrinth when you just need some time out. It can be fun. It can also be relaxing as you journey back and forth to the center and then out again. Walk it more than once. Try it two times or three. More, if you want. If Jimena or Sean or Nefthali or Sarah were waiting to see you at the end of your walk, how would you tell them you feel?

Maybe you will build your own labyrinth with your parents or friends. Or, maybe you will mold one all by yourself out of clay. There are pattern guides in the back of this book to help you do that. However you make your labyrinth please make sure you have fun. And, when you are done, remember that there is no wrong way to walk the labyrinth.





This Labyrinth belongs to