

Your Essential Guide to Tasseography, the Practice of Reading Tea Leaves

Welcome, cosmic warriors. I'm astrologer Aliza Kelly Faragher, and this is [Allure Astrology](#), a column dedicated to all things magick. Today, we're exploring the mystical art of reading tea leaves.

For a seemingly innocuous beverage, tea has a dynamic history. The tea trade's past is [steeped in colonialism](#), [in violence](#), and [even in revolution](#). This aromatic beverage's checkered history aside, there's no denying that it's delicious; today, it's enjoyed in nearly every culture around the world. And tea isn't just for sipping. Tea leaves are also used as a [divination tool](#) to explore the past, present, and future.

Tasseography (also known as tasseomancy) is the art of identifying symbols and interpreting messages found in the shapes and configurations of tea leaves. Though the practice is simple, the results are often profound, and curious minds have been enchanted by tasseography for centuries. Tasseography is not nearly as popular as [tarot reading](#) or [crystal magick](#) is today, however, and so it's also less understood.

But never fear, cosmic warrior, it's easy to get started with tasseography, which is a powerful, creative, and accessible way of exercising your intuition. In fact, since it's much less structured than [reading tarot cards](#) and less expensive than building a [fancy crystal collection](#), it's a great option for anyone who's interested in cultivating a unique divination practice with what they already have at home. Read on for what every beginner should know about tasseography, including inspiration for spicing up your next witchy tea party.

Like all [divination practices](#), tea leaf reading is based on the concept of **directing energy**. When we focus our **magickal intention** on the tea, the leaves become energetic conduits that are capable of mirroring our experiences — including those which have yet to occur. When prompted with a question, the leaves reveal hidden blockages, offer advice, and even forecast the future. These mystical messages are embedded within the wet leaves' shape, density, color, and placement. An old text on tasseography, [Reading Tea Leaves](#) — written by "A Highland Seer" in 1881 — offers a comprehensive list of standard tea leaf symbols and their meanings, along with sample configurations and interpretations. Many tea readers still consider this seminal text a fundamental resource.

[So how do I set the stage for a tea reading?](#)

It may sound obvious, but in order to read tea leaves, you must first brew a cup of tea. Assemble your teacup (preferably white or a light color to allow you to see the leaves' configurations more clearly), hot water, and loose tea leaves. The contents of a tea bag will not work: These leaves are too finely cut to create identifiable forms. It's recommended that beginners use simple [loose black tea leaves](#), but enjoy the process of selecting an aromatic blend that tantalizes your senses.

Once you've located your favorite tea leaves, place them directly into the cup (no need for strainers or infusers) and pour the hot water. Since the leaves will remain in the cup, you don't

need to worry about steeping. While the water cools, take a few moments to reflect on your intentions and begin transferring your energy into the absorbent tea leaves.

The person seeking answers in the divination practice — whether it be you or someone else — is referred to as the **querent**. Specificity is *very* important here, so be sure to formulate a clear and concise question (or, if you're doing the reading for someone else, that they do). Remember, a general ask will yield a general answer. When the temperature is right, the querent (that's you if you're answering your own question) should begin sipping the tea as they continue to contemplate their question. When there is about a tablespoon of liquid remaining in the cup, they can begin the swirling-and-turning ritual: Holding the cup in the left hand, swirl it three times from left to right.

Next, also with the left hand, slowly and carefully invert the cup over a saucer. Leave the cup upside down for approximately one minute, then rotate it three times. Turn the cup back upright, positioning the handle due south. Tea leaves should be stuck to the cup in a variety of shapes and clusters, embedded with insight and answers. Now, it's time to tell their story.

How can I get started identifying tea leaf symbols?

At first, the interpretation process can seem a bit daunting, but don't fret. Throughout the centuries, tasseographers have observed consistent patterns and configurations. Over 150 classic symbols are detailed in [Reading Tea Leaves](#), so feel free to use this classic resource to help guide your interpretations. Contemporary tasseographers have [helpful tutorials](#), as well.

Generally, you'll encounter five types of symbols: **animals**, **mythical beings**, **objects**, **letters**, and **numbers**. Sometimes, these forms will be extremely obvious. The wings of a bird, for instance, can suggest newfound freedom or a successful journey. On the other hand, a cross may signify a blockage or unforeseen trouble ahead. It's important to remember that not *every* formation needs to be interpreted; only focus on the symbols that pertain to the querent's inquiry.

What does each part of the cup signify?

The handle of the teacup serves an important function: It is the energy conduit that connects the physical and abstract realms. It also symbolizes the querent and should be positioned due south to signify the querent's current environment. (In astrology, the [fourth house](#), which governs the home and family, is also located in this position, at the base of the astrological chart.) Tea leaves near the handle suggest events relating to the querent's immediate surroundings, whereas leaves directly across the handle (due north) symbolize external issues and outside influences.

Here, tea leaves are concentrated near the handle.

The cup is divided into three sections for prophesying: The rim symbolizes the present, the sides represent the near future, and the bottom of the cup signifies the far future. Depending on the question, these zones can be used to gauge **timing** (how soon a situation is likely to occur), **connection** (the physical or symbolic distance between two individuals), or **intensity** (leaves on the rim, for instance, could suggest a life-changing event).

Now, let's try a few sample readings.

Let's say the querent is wondering when they'll meet their next partner and the swirling and turning process yields the above tea leaf configuration. That means the reading will be focused on timing, so it will be extremely important to consider the cup's three sections. Are most leaves on the rim? The sides? The bottom? I can identify a wavy line at the bottom left of this cup, suggesting a connection to the ocean. Although the querent may not find love in the immediate future, their next serious mate may be someone from overseas. Since water also [symbolizes emotions and psychic power](#), perhaps encourage the querent to explore their inner world before looking outward for love; healthy personal discovery could help invite new romance.

Next up, let's say the querent wants to gauge whether or not she should speak to a colleague about a difficult situation: Tension has been building at work, and she wants to know whether to address it or let it fade away on its own. Looking at the above cup, we see the presence of a bold and pronounced line of dots.

First, note which zones of the chart they're connecting. The querent's comfort zone is linked to these external circumstances, so clearly, this concern is starting to impact all areas of the querent's life. Also, as a symbol, this dramatic line also resembles a chain. Whether she likes it or not, the querent is bound to her colleague, and there's no escaping that bond through avoidance. Considering these dynamics, it's best to confront the issue directly. Discussing the issue will help the querent feel less trapped by the situation.

Remember, cosmic warriors, neither tea leaf nor teacup has any intrinsic power; the fortunes are, ultimately, a reflection of your own intuition. It takes practice to cultivate divination skills, but the more you exercise your gifts, the better you will become at formulating answers. All of the wisdom you ever need already exists within yourself, so the tea leaves simply help structure your mystical insight, giving it shape within the physical world. Give yourself permission to trust your instincts, and you'll unlock your ability to explore the future and celebrate the magick inherent in you.