

Teaching ART APPRECIATION ACROSS THE GRADE LEVELS

By Alyce Pudewell

Stephanie and her mother are walking through a bookstore when suddenly the child points to the picture on a book cover. "Look, Mommy," she exclaims, "It's a Renoir!" Though only eight years old, she can recognize many paintings by artist and style.

Stephanie does not have special artistic aptitude. Her classroom environment has provided her with this training. Stephanie and her multigrade classmates have received visual stimulus and discussion, as well as taking part in games to reinforce their learning.

The average multigrade teacher is probably thinking at this point, I have so little time to teach the basics. Should I really steal time from reading and math to teach art appreciation?

For a moment, instead of thinking of education as individual subjects to be taught, consider the skills you want your students to acquire. One of the most important is learning to think. Vital skills include categorizing, evaluating, synthesizing, analyzing, and differentiating. One excellent way to develop these thinking skills is through a study of music, painting, sculpture, and architecture. Such training also feeds the soul with beauty.

Interaction with all forms of art should begin at an early age. A young child's mind is like a sponge with enormous absorption capacity.

From the second to the sixth year, a child's

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vocabulary expands dramatically and knowledge grows astoundingly...By the seventh year of life, another major milestone appears. The child becomes capable of "logical thinking"...Children of this age appear responsible to adults because by this time they have also gained the ability to see where they fit into the huge and amorphous world around them.¹

At this age the mind's ability to reason and think is emerging. Being able to relate concepts helps the child to deal in the abstract. Training in art and music appreciation can enhance the child's thinking skills and provide joyful and satisfying experiences.

How to Begin

Large pictures of paintings, sculpture, and architecture should be displayed in the classroom. At the same time recordings of good music can be played before

or after school, during quiet or study time, or at lunch.

Print the artist's name in large letters on a strip of cardboard. Post it under the work of art, or display it on the chalk tray while the music is being played. If the artists' names are repeated regularly, the children will become as familiar with them as with the names of colors or the days of the week.

At odd moments during the day, ask questions about the current works of art in the room. Giving short but frequent attention to these items is an efficient and enjoyable way for children to learn about art. Post pictures for at least a month to allow students to become familiar with them. Play the same music frequently until the students recognize it.

Young children can develop thinking skills as they learn to categorize and discriminate. Older students being introduced to the arts will go through the beginning steps more rapidly. These steps are arranged below in order of difficulty.²

The First Step

First, obtain several sets of card-size reproductions of various paintings (See "Making a Classroom Collection" on p. 27). Using only a few pairs, have children match identical pictures. After they master this, add a few more pairs of different subjects.

At the next level, make the pairs more

two abstracts by Mondrian, and two bouquets by Redon. Gradually increase the difficulty of the task by grouping cards of more similar styles and subjects.

The Third Step

At this point, the classroom collection should include sets of four prints by the same artist. Students move from matching pairs to matching different paintings by the same artist.

Take a group of 12 cards, with four paintings by each of three artists. Ask students to sort the cards into three stacks, with each stack containing only pictures by the same artist.

At this point the name of the artist becomes important. Provide a card with the artist's name for the children to match with each set of four prints. Sets of cards can also be used by the students to play "Authors."

As children progress, they can choose other projects that suit their own interests.

The earlier steps described above can be completed by five-year-olds. However, the interest level of the activities makes these games useful for students through the upper grades.

From the age of eight or so, children begin to use abstract reasoning. By this time they should have a large body of knowledge about the arts. As you display large prints in the classroom, teach the children to identify the artwork by time, period, and style, such as impressionism or romanticism. Students can begin to sort their print cards by the period when artists lived. They can also match paintings that are similar in mood, style, and technique.

Students' thinking skills continue to develop as they analyze the elements of form and design. Ask them to use large and small prints to match designs and illustrate concepts currently being taught in the classroom. A large collection of print cards can illustrate increasingly abstract and difficult concepts.

Story and Picture Music

At the same time, introduce story and picture music. This is the easiest kind of music for children to learn. The story or picture gives them a "hook" on which to hang their memory of the sounds. Using the same principle as with the art cards, expose students to brief but frequent experiences with the selections. The students will easily learn each selection's name and composer after hearing and discussing the music a few times.

Throughout all of these activities, the teacher is the critical factor in the student's learning. Encouraging young viewers or listeners to respond verbally

similar in coloring, subject, or style. As the children become comfortable with these concepts, increase the level of difficulty. Group pairs of cards according to subject—six pairs of birds, or six pairs of mother and child portraits. This makes the task of discriminating and differentiating more challenging.

The greater the variety of subjects in the classroom collection, the more sophisticated this task can become. In the advanced stages the pairs can come from the same artist, or from artists of the same school or style. For example, you might group six pairs of birds by Audubon, seascapes by Turner, gardens by Monet, or bouquets by Redon.

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The Second Step

After children have learned to match identical pairs of cards, they begin to work with single cards. Ask them to pick out paintings by the same artist. Choose three quite different pairs of cards to make the similarities stand out. A sample would be two ballet dancers by Degas,

can provide an exciting challenge for the teacher. Questions about the arts should be seen as *thought provokers*, not cues for right or wrong answers. Young children love to respond when the questions seem playful. Older students join in enthusiastically when the activity has a game-like atmosphere.

Use of four stages of questioning can lead children to an understanding of art masterpieces. Ask them first to *describe*, then to *analyze*, next to *interpret*, and finally to *judge*.

Description

Ask the children to describe what they see, using words that would help others to envision the picture if they had never seen it. Or ask students to close their eyes and try to describe the picture from memory.

Analysis

Next, ask children to describe shapes,

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line, colors, textures, and other qualities in relation to the background and foreground of a picture. Explore together the repetitions of these qualities in order to find patterns and designs.

Interpretation

Using the information gathered in the first two stages, encourage students to express their feelings. Ask open-ended questions such as these: How does this painting make you feel? What happened just before or just after this picture was painted? What are the people like in this

picture? Is this picture happy or sad? Why do you think so?

Judgment

Finally, encourage students to decide if the painting has value to them. If so, why? Any sincere response should be accepted, since learning to reason means developing independent judgment and thinking skills.

Discussions like these can spring from the study of any subject area. All basic curricular areas can be taught through the arts. Through these discussions children can learn to listen. They will also come to appreciate and learn from the opinions and contributions of others.

Learning by Doing

During the early primary and elementary years, children learn best by doing. Producing their own version of a work of art will enhance their bonding to the work being studied. Impressionism and

abstract styles are especially easy for children to relate to and to create.

Don't ask your students to copy a picture. Rather, have them use paintings as inspiration and guidance in creating their own masterpieces.

Don't rush students to complete a project during a 30-minute art class. Begin with the art period, and then allow them to finish during free time or when other work has been completed. It is better for students to have time to do one project well, than for them to rush through a different activity each class period.

Bulletin Boards

As soon as you obtain a few classroom-size prints, feature one a month on a special bulletin-board display. Using reference books such as the encyclopedia, students can take turns finding information about the current artist. First, have them determine when the artist lived. They can then follow up with research on the artist's time and place in history.

It is more important for students to enjoy art and to learn to compare different designs and colors than for them to memorize names and dates. As long as you refer to artworks by their correct name in your discussions, students will naturally absorb this type of information.

An excellent guide for leading discussions about the elements of art and design has recently been published. It is the *Curriculum Guide for Art K-12*, published by the North American Division Office of Education. Also recently adopted by the NAD for use in art education is "ARTWORKS" by Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

Other Values in the Arts

This article has emphasized the cognitive study of the arts. However, art education also enhances emotional expression and growth. Art affects the feelings

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before it addresses the mind.

Froebel and Montessori, early childhood educators, recognized that children are capable of intense aesthetic appreciation. The early years are the optimal time to introduce aesthetic experience, and thus begin a lifetime of art appreciation.

Discussions about the arts help children to learn as they verbalize their feelings and attitudes. Through these discussions, children also discover the pleasure of exploring new thoughts and feelings with their friends.³

Educators do not do children a favor by offering them the cute or the mundane. During their early years, children absorb every detail of what they see and hear. Why not put the best into their curriculum? Help them cultivate good taste and aesthetic values early. This will provide enrichment and critical thinking skills that will benefit them throughout their lives. □

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REFERENCES

¹ Richard M. Restak, *The Mind* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1988), pp. 62, 63.

² Aline Wolfe, "Art Postcards—Another Aspect of Your Aesthetics Program?" *Young Children* (January 1990), p. 39.

³ Elizabeth Cole and Claire Schaefer, "Can Young Children Be Art Critics?" *Young Children* (January 1990), p. 33.

MAKING A CLASSROOM COLLECTION

Museum catalogs are a good source for small reproductions of paintings. Write to the museums listed at the left and ask to be put on their mailing list. Catalogs from these museums have small pictures of prints just the right size for mounting on 3" x 5" or 4" x 6" cards. Laminating the cards will make them last longer.

University Prints (P. O. Box 485, Winchester, MA 01890) offers 7,500 different desk-size prints at very reasonable prices. By ordering four sets of various pictures you will be able to create the games described.

Museums also sell postcard books of their best-known paintings. The sturdy cards in these books, when laminated, will survive a great deal of use.

DISPLAY SIZE PRINTS

Inexpensive larger prints (14" x 24") may be obtained from art calendars. These are sold at half price by the end of January in

bookstores, art supply stores, and museum shops. These prints will need to be mounted on heavy board for safe use and storage. Be sure to include the name of the artist and painting on the poster before displaying on a bulletin board or in a learning center.

LARGE DISPLAY SIZE PRINTS

The best way for children to enjoy pictures is through larger (2' x 3') reproductions. Be sure to mount these prints on heavy board and laminate them. Shorewood, 27 Glen Road, Sandy Hook, CT 06482, will send a catalog of 20" x 30" prints, as will Starry Night Distributors, 19 North Street, Rutland, VT 05701. An additional source of large plasticized prints is the Art Print Enrichment Programs I and II from Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 6277 Sea Harbor Drive, Orlando, FL 32821-9989. Each set includes 30 prints.

ART TIME LINES

Synoptic Tables I - IV
by Jansen and Cauman
Abrams Publishers
100 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10011

or from Prentice-Hall Publishers
Englewood Cliffs, NJ 07632

Art Calendar of Painters, Sculptors,
Architects
Fine Art Distributors
80 Kettle Creek Road
Weston, CT 06883

TEACHING RESOURCES

Aline Wolf wrote the games described in the article. Her books are a valuable help in teaching art appreciation in the primary grades. The teacher's guides, *Mommy, It's a Renoir* and *Child-Size Masterpieces*, can be ordered from Parent-Child Press, P.O. Box 767, Altoon, PA 16603.

One of the best helps in teaching children to make their own masterpieces comes from Crizmac Master Pak (Communicad, P.O. Box 541, Wilton, CT 06897). Its filmstrips and videos describe artists' lives. Each includes suggestions for students to make similar works of art.

For advanced students the CLEAR video set (Crystal Products, Box 2159, Glenview, IL 60025) gives step-by-step instruction in art production.

SUGGESTIONS FOR STORY AND PICTURE MUSIC

Peter and the Wolf by Prokofiev
The Nutcracker Suite by Tchaikovsky
Carnival of the Animals by Saint Saens
Pictures at an Exhibition by Mussorgsky
The 1812 Overture by Tchaikovsky
Schaherazade's 1,000 and 1 Nights by Rimsky-Korsakov
Claire de Lune and *Afternoon of a Faun* by Debussy
Sabre Dance by Katchaturian
Bolero by Ravel
Peer Gynt Suite by Grieg
Moonlight Sonata by Beethoven
To A Wild Rose by McDowell
Music for Royal Fireworks by Handel

MUSEUMS

Boston Museum of Fine Arts
465 Huntington Avenue
Boston, MA 02115

Chicago Institute of Art
Michigan Avenue at Adams Street
Chicago, IL 60603

Metropolitan Museum of Art
255 Gracie Station
New York, NY 10028

National Gallery of Art
6th & Constitution Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20565

Norton Simon Museum
411 W. Colorado Blvd.
Pasadena, CA 91125