



CONTEMPORARY ART START

Why Include Art in Your Curriculum?

The National Standards for Arts Education are remarkable for their vivid imagery, passionate language, and dire predictions for societies who ignore the arts. Take a look for yourself.

“The arts have been a part of us from the very beginning. Since nomadic peoples first sang and danced for their ancestry, since hunters first painted their quarry on the walls of caves, since parents first acted out the stories of heroes for their children, the arts have described, defined, and deepened human experience. All peoples, everywhere, have an abiding need for meaning—to connect time and space, experience and event, body and spirit, intellect and emotion. People create art to make these connections, to express the otherwise inexpressible. A society and people without the arts are unimaginable, as breathing would be without air. Such a society and people could not long survive.”

The benefits of having the arts in your curriculum are so numerous that it boggles the mind to see how thoroughly they’ve been eradicated from many school systems. Consider these ten excellent reasons, developed by Victoria Stevens, Ph.D., for embedding the visual arts into your day.

1The arts:

1. Provide a universal language that transcends race, culture, and time
2. Allow students a way to give form to feelings, enabling those feelings to be communicated, which in turn leads to self-discovery and a sense of agency
3. Promote the formation of nonverbal or verbal constructs that facilitate the handling of complex problems that do not have clear answers
4. Activate multiple intelligences to help students learn in different ways
5. Encourage persistence, resilience, focus, self-discipline, and the ability to tolerate frustration in the solving of a particular artistic problem
6. Encourage the ability to work with ambiguity, view mistakes as opportunities to learn, and understand that there are multiple opinions and views on the same object, person, or experience
7. Foster verbal and spatial creativity, enabling flexibility in thinking and the recognition of a whole and therefore also the parts of a problem within a given context
8. Foster the ability to select important data out of masses of information, to synthesize it, and use it in a quickly changing environment
9. Expand capacity for imaginative “play” with ideas and possibilities
10. Bring a sense of adventure, spontaneity, and joy to learning in your class

1 Victoria Stevens, “Schooling the unconscious imagination: Psychoanalytical and neurobiological theories of child development, aesthetics and education” (lecture, James Grotstein Annual Conference, Los Angeles, CA, May 2002).