

EMPHASIS ART: A Qualitative Art Program for Elementary and Middle Schools, 8/e

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Part 1

Introduction to Art

Both art and schools mirror society—including society's conflicts. Norman Rockwell depicted the school integration conflict in this painting for a magazine cover in fall, 1960, following the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Here Rockwell shows us first-grader Ruby Bridges entering William Franzz Elementary School in New Orleans under the protection of Federal marshals.



Norman Rockwell, "The Problem We All Live With." Collection of the Norman Rockwell Museum at Stockbridge, Massachusetts. Reproduced by permission of the Norman Rockwell Family Agency, Inc.

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hy should children study art? How can anyone go about making art that is pleasing or beautiful or good? The first two chapters of this book about teaching art to children explore these important questions.

Children might say they should study art just because it is fun: fun to make things, fun to draw things, fun to use art materials, fun to talk about pictures—a welcome relief from other subjects. But there is more than that. In Chapter One, we will explore the value of art in education and for society.

In Chapter Two, we will think about what makes a picture beautiful—or what makes art, art. We probably agree on some answers: care, thoughtfulness, attention to detail, practice, assuredness. But here we will learn a new vocabulary, the language of art, its formal elements and principles, and also introduce the idea of contextualism—that is, what art is about.

Chapter 1

Art in Society and the Schools



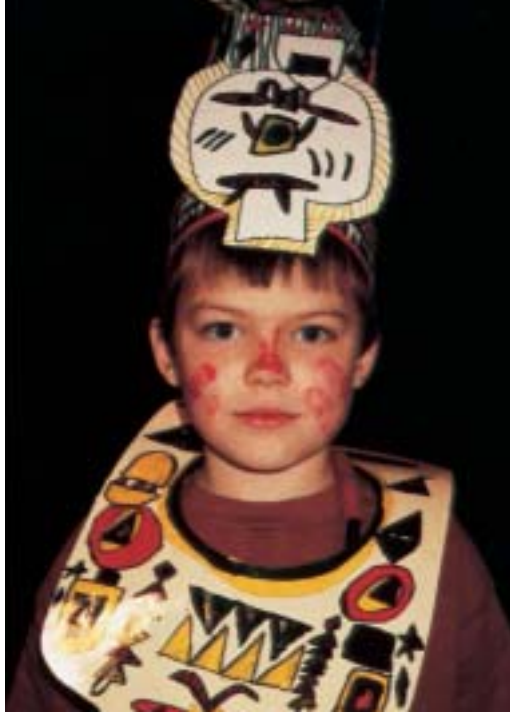
Why is art education important? Now more than ever? As we move into the twenty-first century, art education is struggling for its life in the public schools. Budget cuts and a curricular emphasis on “back to basics” have hurt or even eliminated art programs in many schools. Yet learning about—and producing—art is a critical part of what our children need to be doing as they develop their awareness of the world around them and their own abilities to function effectively in that world. Indeed, understanding visual symbols, cultural differences, and individual expression may be more important now than ever before.

Here are some reasons—there are many more.

- **Cultural understanding.** Art is an international language, universally accessible even to those who know little about how art was used in a culture. It communicates meaning without words—but because it does come from a specific culture, art is relative to the time, place, and circumstances of its creation. For the members of a cultural group, art provides a mirror, reflecting the group’s unique sense of cultural identity. Indeed, art is one way in which cultural identity is transmitted, maintained, and analyzed.

Culture is more than a simple heritage of creations and behaviors. It is the shared values, attitudes, belief systems, and cognitive styles; culture gives meaning to life. Art is both intentionally and unintentionally a carrier of cultural value and meaning, encoded in a sensuous medium.

Although art communicates some of its meaning across eras and cultures, its creation is relative to its culture. It helps to create a sense of cultural community and identity. **Top:** Dropped Bowl with Scattered Slices and Peels, 1989, Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen, Art in Public Places Program, Miami, FL. **Middle:** Native-American kachina. **Bottom:** Mola (reverse appliqué) by San Blas Native Peoples.



Courtesy of Alice Ballard Munn and Diane Rives.

Second-graders acquire an appreciation of Native-American culture by studying the myths and art of the northwest and southwest Native-American cultures. Each second-grade class selected its own power animal. **Top left:** Wolf kachina with exciting patterns. **Bottom left:** Blue bird kachina based on southwest Native-American stories. **Top middle:** Boy with symbolic collar and headpiece. **Top right:** Black-and-white-striped doll based on Hopi clown kachina. **Bottom right:** A girl in white costume enacts the northwest Native-American myth of how the loon lost her voice.

Art education helps students understand the connection between what is depicted in art and how it is depicted, and the culture and time in which that connection of content and form was created. Art helps students see culture as an interpretive social schema that people project upon existence in order to create their own identity.

- **National needs.** Art education helps create the citizens this country needs—citizens who can think for themselves, communicate effectively, and appreciate our nation's diversity. As our culture becomes more and more visual, citizens capable of responding intelligently are increasingly important.

- **Celebrating ordinary experiences.** More Americans go to museums than to sporting events. Over one million Americans call themselves artists. Communities and cultures make art because art makes everything special. When art celebrates ordinary experiences, these experiences take on new significance. By making events and things stand out from the commonplace, art transforms and reorganizes our concept of the world.
- **Personal communication and expression.** At the heart of arts learning is the process of giving form to and making meaning from personal experience. The idea that a person can make an individual



Courtesy of Melody Milbrandt.

Pride is evident as third- and fourth-graders show off their class-painted mural about fun activities in their community: playing ball, jumping rope, flying kites, and skating together. Notice how the space was suggested by overlapping and diminishing sizes of figures and objects in the foreground, middle ground, and background.



Courtesy of David W. Hodge.

A personal expression of family togetherness.

statement through art—one that brings meaning and pleasure to self and others—is powerful. This rationale is all the more poignant in a technologically advanced society where so much of what we use is made by unseen others in remote parts of the world.

- **Creativity.** Art education promotes higher thought processes, such as a willingness to imagine possibilities, a desire to explore ambiguity, and an ability to recognize multiple perspectives.



Courtesy of David W. Hodge.

Art is a welcome way of learning—here, using our eyes to think.



Left: Courtesy of Beverly Barksdale Mallon. Right: Courtesy of Joyce Vroon.



Left: An integration of art, ecological awareness, writing, lettering, and advertising occurred when this fifth-grader won first place in the state of Georgia for her conservation poster. The art teacher emphasized the design principle KISS (“keep it simple, silly”). Students role-played that they were graphic designers at an advertising agency charged with creating an ad for an ecological cause. **Right:** Sports advertising is one of our nation’s largest businesses and fourth-grader Ross Baird’s memory drawing testifies to its power.

- **Vocations.** Art in schools can breed interest in many careers involving visual creativity, from film-making and photography to architecture and landscape design, from computer graphics to fashion.
- **Aesthetic awareness.** Art education heightens our awareness of nature, art, and life. Spider webs, cloud formations, Van Gogh’s sunflowers, and beautiful moments in daily life are experienced more vividly if we have been sensitized to them in art classes.
- **Visual literacy and integrated learning.** Education should develop a young child’s literacy in all symbol systems, all modes of thought, and all means of inquiry. This goal is especially applicable in early childhood, when perception more than logic governs views of reality. Children relate to the arts as media for expression and communication and develop an ability to interpret visual symbols that may later coalesce into sophisticated reasoning and problem solving.



Courtesy of Mary Ruth Moore.

Second-grade children learned about poisonous and nonpoisonous snakes through creating this stitchery mural.

The arts are great partners in academic learning. Integrating art into other disciplines—social studies, math, science, reading, and so on—adds richness, meaning, and excitement. In a curriculum crowded with academic subjects, art is a welcome means of learning about self and word. The language of art uses a different symbol system—one that fuses into a single entity the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects of learning. Art gives students a unique opportunity to communicate in a language that is neither verbal nor mathematical.

A QUALITATIVE APPROACH TO TEACHING ART

What some observers call *art* in a child's drawing very often is not art at all, but simply a visual report that relates to factual writing. Art is more akin to poetry, which, like all fine arts, distills the essence of an experience through highly expressive and discriminative choices. That is how the qualitative method of teaching art differs from other methods. As the quality of verse depends on choosing the expressive word and employing the tools of language exquisitely, so the most evocative children's art employs art principles to create unity and rich design very different from more ordinary work.

Frank Wachowiak, whose approach to teaching art is represented in this book, stressed that children learn to see more, sense more, and recall more—they become more aware of their changing and expanding environment, and they realize that art is not something special done by special

people—when they are enriched and stimulated in art classes by a teacher's varied and challenging motivations. Anyone can put an imprint on a piece of paper. What a child does may indeed be that child's visual statement, but it is not necessarily a quality work of art. Only children who express their ideas, responses, and reactions with honesty, sensitivity, and perceptiveness from within a framework of compositional principles and design actually create art.

Qualitative teaching requires teachers to move beyond initial stimulation and to invest more time and more thought into the teaching process. From preliminary drawing to finished product, the teacher must guide the process. This means encouraging students to evaluate their work in terms of the lesson's objectives, since without critical evaluation, we cannot assume that students will develop either aesthetic awareness or artistic potential. Without a teacher's help, the average art production by a child, often created in a limited time period, is apt to be cursory and sterile. With it, the kind of art that you see reproduced in this book can be standard.

How long does it take for a child to create a work of quality art? Longer, certainly, than a single session. Motivation and preliminary drawing alone often take one 45-minute art period, and a completed project may take three, four, or five such periods. The time needed can be reduced a little by strategies like using smaller paper (9 × 12 inches, rather than 12 × 18 inches, for example), but children need real, substantial time devoted to art every week. When art plays a subordinate role to every other subject, or is relegated to creating stereotypical holiday decorations, it cannot perform a vital role in children's creative growth.



Courtesy of Frank Wachowiak and Mary Sayer Hammond.

A qualitative artwork, such as this “pet in a garden” oil pastel, takes time to create. On 12- × 18-inch violet-colored construction paper, it took three 50-minute class periods. The preliminary drawing was made in school chalk, then gone over with a large-sized, black felt-nib pen. Color then was applied up to, but not covering, the black lines. Instructional objectives for color: to use color imaginatively and to repeat colors for unity. The pet was drawn first; the garden environment added afterward.





Courtesy of David W. Hodge.

A print by a Japanese youngster. Observe the care with which the block is cut and the attractive background texture.



Courtesy of David W. Hodge.

For Frank Wachowiak, helping children make beautiful art was almost a religious quest.



Courtesy of David W. Hodge.

A child in Italy did this beautiful painting of a posed standing girl wearing a wonderful big fringed hat, holding a pitcher, and accompanied by spectacular roosters.

Art has unquestioned merit as a unique avenue to cognitive, social, and individual growth. Qualitative art instruction nurtures better citizens who are more culturally aware and understanding, as well as simply more joyful and confident individuals. Artistic creativity should be recognized and embraced, and every lesson should be designed to augment both basic



Courtesy of ICCA.

When art is taught both purposefully and qualitatively and the instructional objectives to be mastered are made clear, beautiful work results. A St. Petersburg, Russia, first-grader's scene of children skiing in the snow fills the page with many figures.

learning of the “language” of art—the body of skills and knowledge that it comprises—and every child's ability to perceive, read, analyze, and build a vocabulary in every aspect of education.

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WEB RESOURCES

For a fine overview of web art education:

- <http://www.getty.edu/artsednet/resources>
- <http://www.getty.edu/artsednet/advocacy>
- <http://www.princetonol.com/groups/iad/lessons/middle/arted.htm>
- <http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/teach/wlk.cfm>
- <http://www.howard.k12.md.us/connections/arhome.html>

For an overview of advocacy for all the arts:

- <http://aep-arts.org/tfadvocacy/tfadvocacy.html>

For the official National Art Education website for teachers:

- www.howard.k12.md.us/connections/arhome.html

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