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The First Lesson

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ArtsBridge

The First Lesson

GOALS (indicating appropriate California Content Standard [CS code])

1. To introduce first or second graders to “art.” CS 1.3
2. To demonstrate, through pupils’ active participation, how art exists inside and outside of “the box.” (Long range: to prime children for delodomatic thinking.) CS 4.3
3. To stimulate their curiosity about this hard-to-pin-down word and to suggest some of the ways in which it can be understood and still retain its mystery. CS 4.3
4. To administer the pre-test of basic art vocabulary. CS 4.4

The guiding aim of this session is not to impart skills, but to acquaint children with a way to think about art that includes respect for both “in the box” (traditional standards and skills) and “out of the box” (inventive, experimental) thinking. The ideas seeded here should be reinforced over the next four years of study of visual art, dance, music, and drama. Each child should keep the art box, or renew it with fresh boxes, throughout their four-year study.

SEQUENCE OF INSTRUCTION (for 55 minute session).

1. 5 minutes: scholar introduces self
2. 10 minutes: the Letter Game.
3. 20 minutes: the Art Box.
4. 15 minutes: pre-test vocabulary
5. 5 minutes: closure—preparing for next time,

VOCABULARY.

Pupils will be given a pre-test of a vocabulary list appropriate for second grade Studio Art. Definitions are deferred to later sessions.

MATERIALS.

For the Letter Game:

1. One sheet of poster board, blue in this example, but any rich color will do.
2. The letters “A,” “R,” “T,” in quantity equal to about a third of the class for each letter, 2 to 3 inches high, stenciled and pre-cut.

For the Art Box:

1. One empty shoe box per pupil.
2. Paints in varied colors, brushes.

3. Gift wrapping paper remnants, paste or glue.
4. Samples of optical illusions.
5. Sample images of a “beautiful,” “realistic” tree or landscape and of a similar tree/landscape with abstract or highly distorted colors and lines.

PROCEDURES.

Introduction: The Letter Game helps to learn the children’s names and to introduce them to the concept of creating inside and outside of “the box.” Begin by distributing one of the letters, “A,” “R,” or “T,” to each child in the class. Note the words than can be spelled with these letters: “ART,” “RAT,” “TAR,” any others? It’s interesting that of the three words we can spell, one is a despised rodent, another is a useful but unpleasant sticky substance, and one is an important field of human endeavor.

Naming. Ask the children to raise hands if their first name begins with a letter they are holding. Call on them one at a time to say their names aloud. Next, ask others to raise hands if their last name begins with the letter they are holding. Ask them to say their first and last names aloud. Then ask children to raise hands if their middle name (or any other name, including nicknames) begins with their letter. These children are asked to state their entire names aloud.

Trading letters. Have children exchange their letters with others who have not raised their hands because their names begin with a different letter than they are holding. Then call on children who have one of the three letters *anywhere* in their names. Finally call on those who do not have any of the three letters in their names—until all children are given a chance to state their names.

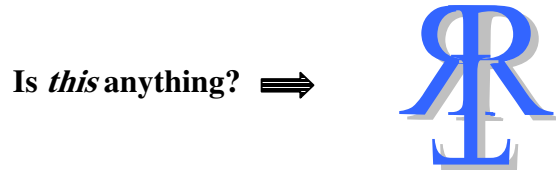
Creating words and shapes. After noting that simple words can be formed with the letters and having the kids connect the letters with names, direct them to form into small groups and use their group’s letters to form longer words. Help them by explaining the meaning of unusual words—such as the verb for making lace (“TAT”), a type of pie (“TART”), the name of a Turkish tribe (“TATAR”), a form of dental plaque (“TARTAR”), the sound of a trumpet (“TARA-TARA”), the sound of a drum (“RAT-A-TAT-TAT”), the Spanish verb for plowing (“ARAR”), the Spanish word for rat (“RATA”), etc. Do not insist that pupils learn all these words; form only three or four words this way, just enough to hold interest and to show that these few letters can be re-formed in many different ways.

Explain: “Letters are tools, and they can be used in different ways to create many different words that are easily recognized by those who can read them. When we use tools in art to make things that others recognize right away, we say ‘we are working inside the box.’ Working in the box means making art

that others understand right away what we are doing. Artists find it important to be able to work within the box so they may be understood by others.

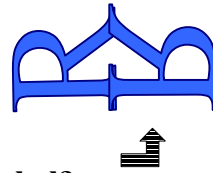
[Basic Misunderstanding: Here we have reached an important part of this lesson. Pupils are likely to be programmed already into thinking of letters only as tools for building written words. Thus, they are thinking entirely “in the box.” There is nothing wrong with this, but now it is essential that they see that letters exist also as shapes and when they are not required to use them to form words, they are free to discover other applications for them.]

Explain: “Artists do not always do what is expected of them. For example, when we use letters, people expect us to form words. We can do that, *and* we can do more. What shapes can we form with these letters?”

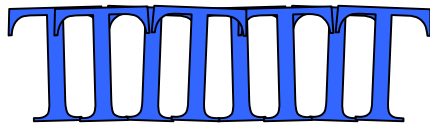


What do *you* see?

Or this? →

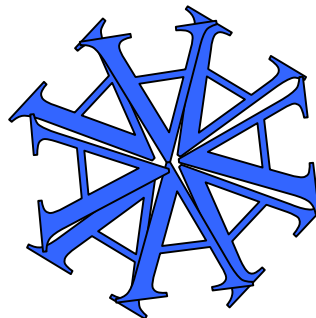


The Taj Mahal?



← A fence?

Maybe a snow flake?



Or a Ferris wheel?!

Think bigger! Spread the letters out on a big table and form other shapes! (Can the letters be used to create three-dimensional objects” as well as “two-dimensional” ones?)

Because the kids are now using letters—word-building tools—to create things other than words, they are actually “working outside the box.” **Explain** to them: “With a little thought, people can understand what you are doing, even though it is not what they expected!”

THE ART BOX. “People talk nowadays about ‘the box.’ The box is a *metaphor*. This means that it is an idea or image that means *more* than a real box. When we talk about the box, we mean something that stands for something regular, with equal sides, a top and bottom, and a lid. A box is a container, and it stands for ideas that are ‘contained.’ What does this mean? These are ideas of ‘the way things are usually done.’ To create anything—in art or in other ways of making things—we must first understand how things are usually done because that is how we know that we are able to do what is expected of us, and it is also how we know when we are doing something special, something that is ‘outside the box,’ something new and exciting!” [The entire “Art Box” section addresses Content Standards 4.3 and 4.4 under the “Aesthetic Valuing” strand, in that it begins an exploration of the language of art that will lead pupils to “make informed judgments.”]

“*Everybody* has art, but not everyone knows what it is. Does this sound like a mystery? Well, it is one. Art is mysterious because it has more than one meaning. How many know what art is?” (Give kids a chance to respond. Reinforce answers, and continue on.)

Here are some meanings that are used to explain art.

1. Art = *Something made by a person that looks or sounds beautiful.*

What can you name that looks or sounds beautiful?

Have ready some examples of art. Children’s answers should refer to something that is made by a person. The word “art” is contained in the word “artifice,” *an illusion requiring thought and skill*, and in the word “artifact,” *a thing that is made*. A tree or a sunset, for example, may be very beautiful but it is not art. But the depiction of these by a person may be art.

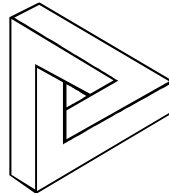
If kids say that something natural is art, explain that “some people consider Nature or God to be the greatest artist.” Note that this is neither a secular nor religious argument, for it allows children to make a private unspoken choice.

“You are a person, and we want to see art made by you. If nature gives you things that look or sound beautiful, we say these are things

that ‘inspire’ you—make you want to make something that is beautiful too.”

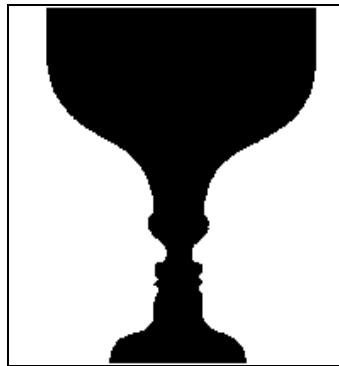
2. Art = *skill*. The ability to make something well. Here, art is an ability. We all have the ability to make something well. When you start out, you make things as well as you can. The more you make things, the better you become at making them. As you get better and better, we say you have more “art.” But even when you start—to draw, or to dance, or to make music, or to act, you can make something that shows your “art.” **When you make something within the box, you have a chance to show your skill.**
3. Art = *something that makes you think again about things you thought you already knew.*

Show optical illusions to children.



Is this a triangle? Or a weird block? Does it have more than one side? Where does the top go?

How about the picture below? Is it a goblet?



Or two faces?

What do *you* see here?

Maybe this is not beautiful, but it can be called “art” because *it makes you see things in more than one way.* (Show a “beautiful” picture of a tree with green leaves and a brown trunk, and a picture with orange leaves and a blue trunk.) Which of these do you like

more? (It doesn't matter which they choose.) The first picture is beautiful and looks more like a real tree. But it is not a real tree, is it? It is a *picture* of a tree that shows what someone (a painter or photographer?) thought is pretty about trees. The second may or may not be beautiful, but it shows that a person can make things that are not in nature but are interesting because they let you see what someone has "imagined." To see things that are different from what you thought you knew. [This discussion addresses Content Standard 1.3, requiring pupils to identify elements of art, including color, in objects in nature, the environment, and works of art. It may also be used to touch on CS 5.2 and 5.4 if followed up in later sessions.]

When you make something that is surprising, you are working outside the box!

What is "something beautiful?" Well, people have different ideas about this. One of the tree pictures may be more beautiful to you than the other, but both are art because both are made by people. The "real" one helps you to see and understand what a tree is—it has a trunk and branches and leaves. The other, which does not look exactly "real," makes you think about how different it is from a real tree and shows you how a tree might be in somebody's dream, or in their imagination—or just how they want to have fun when playing with the idea of a tree.

4. Art = *fun*. Art is something that is fun to *see or hear*. Why do we care how somebody else imagines a tree or sings a song? (Show several examples of tree drawings, paintings, photographs—more and more abstract.) Because in each of our lives, we see things only through our own eyes, hear things only through our own ears, know and imagine things only through our own minds. Art is fun because it shows us how *other people* see and hear and know and imagine things. It shows how *other people* think and feel. Because of art, we can actually see things the way *other people* see them, or imagine them. Now, think about this—because to *other people*, **you** are the *other person*. Do you understand that? So this means you can have fun showing others what **you** see and imagine.
5. Art = *fun* (2) Art is something you make that is fun *to do*. Do you like to run on the playground? Art can be running, moving, jumping, spinning, skipping. We call this dance. Do you like to play music or sing? Art can be music you make, or it can be music you listen to while you run and spin. Do you like to play act? To play like cartoon characters or like movie people? Art can be acting. Do you like to color, or to see things that have beautiful colors and shapes? Art can be drawing and painting.

As you begin the great game of Art, you will not know yet whether you would rather make art inside the box or out, or to do it both ways. You will find out over time what kind of artist you are by keeping your own box.

Artists keep what is known as a “portfolio.” A portfolio is usually a large folder where an artist keeps samples of his or her creations. Sometimes the art you make is too large to fit even in a very large portfolio, so some artists keep small photographs of their work in their portfolio. You don’t keep everything in the portfolio, just those things that you are very proud of.

There are basically *two* kinds of artists—

visual artists and performing artists.

A visual artist makes drawings, paintings, photographs, or solid objects like vases or statues. This is the kind of art we will be doing this year. A performing artist uses his or her voice and body to perform art. Performing artists are singers or musicians who play instruments; dancers, or actors. Sometimes they combine several arts, so one may be an actor who sings and dances.

Performing artists keep records of their performances. Dancers learn special codes to write down their dances. Musicians who write music do so by using musical notation. Singers make tapes of their singing. Actors and dancers make videotapes of their performances. Although performing artists don’t use the word “portfolio,” the records they keep are worth putting in a portfolio so that they too can show people what they have created.

In our classes, we will use a box as a portfolio. This is to remind you that your art will be “inside the box” or “outside the box.” For the rest of this class, and during our next class, you can decorate your box so that it looks the way you would like it to look. You can paint your box in your favorite colors, or you can paste wrapping paper or pictures on it any way you want. You can put your name on your box if you like. Decorate the lid separately so that you will be able to open and close your box.

When you make things, you can place them (or photos of them) in your box, changing what’s in the box as you go along, so you always get to keep your favorite things. At first you will probably want to keep everything inside your box. But as the box fills up, you can decide which of your things go “inside the box” and which things belong “outside the box.” Keep all your “outside the box” creations in a special private place, so you won’t forget where they are!

CONCLUDE THE LESSON WITH THE VOCABULARY PRE-TEST. [The vocabulary test is the first step toward meeting Content Standards 4.3 and 4.4, requiring pupils to use appropriate art vocabulary to talk about their intentions in creating art and to describe the use of the elements of art in artworks.]

CLOSURE. After the pre-test, prime your pupils' curiosity about the next lesson by showing them a glimpse of what they will be doing—perhaps a sample of your own art. **Important:** At this point, connect your next lesson to the “art box” idea. Either point out that they will be learning how to do some wonderful “old” art technique, working “in the box,” or that they will have a chance at a creative free-form task, working “out of the box.” If you plan to have them continue right away to work on their boxes, you may save until this point (kept well-hidden until now!) some sample ideas of what might be done with a shoe box.

JOURNAL.

This is the section for the ArtsBridge scholar to record his or her thoughts after the lesson has been taught. Personal reflections on how well the lesson went, how the scholar feels he or she did, and commentary on the progress of the pupils are invited. Here the scholar may include thoughts for other scholars to read, and write ideas for future lessons.

Created by
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