

## Giving Your Students an Appreciation of the Arts

When you set out to become a teacher, it isn't always enough just to teach a rote set of knowledge. You want to give your students an appreciation for the each knowledge area so they not only know things and how to do things, they also understand the history behind the knowledge they have and have an ability to appreciate the nuances of what they have learned. There may be no area of learning that this concept applies to more than art.

By art, we mean the arts which may include music, vocal interpretation, creative writing and the visual arts. Now in many schools, art programs have gone by the wayside due to budget cuts. This is even more of a reason that if you want to learn to teach the arts to your students, you should come to the task with enthusiasm and some creative thinking so you can take advantage of this time when you can offer lessons in artistic development and appreciation.

Perhaps the biggest challenge of offering art classes as part of the curriculum at the school where you teach is to get kids who may not think they have artistic talent to take the course. In most cases art classes are not required but you still want to be able to touch as much as the student body as possible with an appreciation of the arts and give everyone a chance to take a stab at making a bit of art themselves.

Much of the work that will go into letting kids know its ok to take art even if they do not feel they have artistic talent comes from the attitude of the teacher. Too often art teachers send the message that they expect every student to show noticeable artistic talent and that their grade may depend on their ability to produce art that can be judged as "good" by the teacher.

This creates huge stress in the students because nobody can just "become artistic." And sending that message defeats the purpose of offering a program in the arts to the students at your school in first place. But if you can encourage a spirit of play and exploration so that even students with no artistic talent at all are willing to take the class just to "give it a try", learning how art is made by making some of their own will be an enriching experience that may instill a love of art in the student that could last a lifetime.

In the movie *The Music Man*, the professor got two tone deaf children to sing "I love music mommy" as part of his effort to bring band music to a small town in Iowa. The pride those children and their parents showed more than offset that the song they offered to their portents was pretty unrecognizable as real music. But that scene is instructive in what you want to achieve in your students by

giving them a chance to learn to create art with no regard for their talent one way or another. And don't be surprised if a student takes home a perfectly hideous artwork with pride and that piece of art becoming a precious heirloom for that family not because it is good art but because it is an expression of artistic feeling from a child who wanted to try something new and did it.

Along with giving our students the basic instructions in how to create works of art, don't miss out on the opportunity to give them a basic education in art history and art appreciation. This may be the greatest gift your art classes can give a child. If they come from your class with an awareness of why Michelangelo is one of the greatest artists of all time, that is a part of our cultural knowledge that will demonstrate that this child has been given a broad and well rounded education.

Teaching art and art approbation can be one of the most fulfilling forms of teaching that you can offer to the next generation. Not only will the children have a lot of fun discovering the artists inside them, you will have a great time showing that side to them as well. And all of that fun will make them better people which, after all, is the goal of being an educator in the first place.

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