

Benefits of Art & Art History for Early Childhood Learning

Art and art history allow early learners to establish an early foundation for art appreciation, visual analysis, imagination, and creativity that will extend well beyond their early years!

Physical Development



Fine Motor Skills: Art offers limitless opportunities to develop fine motor skills. Tearing paper, using scissors, gluing materials onto surfaces and holding a paintbrush all require varying levels of hand-eye coordination and dexterity. Art-making also provides children with the coordination and control needed for other developmental tasks like tying shoes or printing their name.

Multisensory Engagement: When making art, a child is in control of their own learning. Active engagement, hands-on discovery, and material exploration utilizes nearly all of the senses as the child creates. Children forge new neural connections in their brains as they swirl paint on a canvas, squish clay between their fingers, or blend oil pastels.



Cognitive Development

Visual Processing: Looking at art helps children develop observation and interpretation skills. They learn important concepts like symbolism and abstraction while also strengthening pattern recognition and visual-spatial skills to understand relationships between parts of a whole.

Creative Thinking & Imagination: Looking at and creating art nurtures a child's early critical thinking and helps them learn to creatively solve problems. Children learn to be flexible thinkers who are able to adapt to new situations and find new ways of doing things.

Social-Emotional Learning



Self-Esteem: Art helps increase a child's self-esteem and confidence by allowing them to master certain skills. Creativity and autonomy flourish when they also embrace the concept that there is no "right way" to make art and that "art" is so much more than just coloring inside the lines of a picture!

Cultural Education and Perspective-Taking: Early childhood is a critical developmental period for children to learn about the world around them, and art is one of the shared languages of the world. It teaches the importance of different perspectives through other cultures' histories, stories, values and traditions. Creating and talking about art facilitates the exchange of ideas and opinions, and helps children learn about the beauty of diversity while also strengthening their own sense of self.

Imagination, Self-Expression & Emotional Development: Art is an ideal opportunity for free play, the most important type of learning for young children! As they explore different subjects and experiment with materials, they express themselves and process their emotions in a safe space. Art functions as a crucial emotional outlet when children are nonverbal, frightened or overwhelmed.



Try This!

- **Invent your own art-making tools** by using objects other than paint brushes. For example, what happens if you paint with leaves, an old whisk or a cotton swab?
- Explore the world by **making rubbings**. Take paper and crayons on a walk: when you see an interesting texture, place the paper on top and rub the crayon over it with broad strokes to visually capture the texture.
- Collect objects around your home or out in nature. Practice **observational drawing** with a simple sketch. What shapes make up the objects? What textures do they have? What changes when you switch your perspective and look at the objects from a different angle?
- **Visit a public mural, museum or a local statue** in your community. Ask your child what they see. What ideas do they have for what the artist is trying to say?
- Try **emotive art-making** by playing different music as your child creates. How do different tempos, rhythms and beats affect their creations?
- **Make ephemeral art** outside by making a design with natural found objects such as flower petals, pebbles, leaves and acorns. Take a picture and leave your creation for other people to enjoy!
- Use magazines and paper to make a **collage** or small objects in a junk drawer to create **assemblage art**.

Resources:

Ann Pelo, *The Language of Art: Inquiry-Based Studio Practices in Early Childhood Settings*.

Art experiments in the *Art Lab for Kids* series, including:

- [Art Lab for Kids: 52 Creative Adventures in Drawing, Painting, Printmaking, Paper, and Mixed Media for Budding Artists of All Ages](#)
- [Drawing Lab for Mixed-Media Artists: 52 Creative Exercises to Make Drawing Fun](#)
- [Paint Lab for Kids: 52 Creative Adventures in Painting and Mixed Media for Budding Artists of All Ages](#)
- [Art Lab for Little Kids: 52 Playful Projects for Preschoolers](#)
- [3D Art Lab for Kids: 32 Hands-on Adventures in Sculpture and Mixed Media](#)

Brenda Hieronymus & Sally Moomaw, *More Than Painting: Exploring the Wonders of Art in Preschool and Kindergarten*.

National Association for the Education of Young Children, [How Process-Focused Art Experiences Support Preschoolers](#).

PBS Parents, [The Importance of Art in Child Development](#).

Smithsonian Early Education Center, [Looking at Art with Toddlers](#).