

MAKING the GRADE

SPRING 2008



UNDERSTANDING ARTS EDUCATION

The arts have been part of life from the very beginning. They have described, defined and deepened human experience. The arts are everywhere in our lives, adding depth and dimension to the environment we live in, shaping our experience daily. The arts are a powerful economic force as well, from fashion, to the creativity and design that go into every manufactured product, to architecture, to the performance and entertainment arts that have grown into multibillion-dollar industries.

Arts education benefits both student and society. Involving the “whole child” in the arts gradually teaches many types of literacy while developing intuition, sensitivity, reasoning, imagination and dexterity.

Parents can play a major role in helping their children experience the arts and make connections with the arts and 21st-century life and work skills. This edition of *Making the Grade* will help parents learn how to empower their children to become aware of and involved with the arts.

WHAT IS ARTS EDUCATION?

Arts Education is a collective term that means learning and instruction in four distinctive subject areas: dance, music, theatre arts and visual arts. The arts connect person and experience directly, building bridges between verbal and nonverbal, logic and emotion — the better to gain an understanding of the whole. The arts have *intrinsic* value. They are worth learning for their own sake, providing benefits not available through any other means. The arts contribute to education beyond their intrinsic value: each arts discipline appeals to different senses and expresses itself through diverse media, and each adds a special richness to the learning environment.

HOW CAN I SUPPORT ARTS EXPERIENCES FOR MY CHILD?

In the *No Child Left Behind Act*, Congress named the arts as core academic subjects that all schools should teach. There is an increasing national focus that recognizes the importance of developing skills of the imagination to prepare students for success in a 21st-century global society. The study of each of the arts disciplines is a proven strategy for developing children's imagination. In addition to advocating for strong arts programs in your child's school, the following strategies can help your child enjoy the arts outside of school:

At Home

- Teach your child songs and enjoy singing them together.
- Play different kinds of music from the radio or your own collection and encourage your child to enjoy singing and dancing along with it.
- A simple piece of paper and a pencil or crayon offer children the chance to express themselves — even a scribble is a good beginning. The important point is for them to feel encouraged and to develop the habit of writing and drawing.
- Have pictures and books available for your child to enjoy and value. Have them act out and retell stories. Your local library can be a terrific source of materials at no cost to you.
- Seek out high-quality television programs that can stimulate your child's imagination and expand his/her understanding of the many different art forms that exist. Public television (UNC-TV) offers cultural programming for adults and children. If your children see you valuing the arts, they will too.
- Make videos together. Try organizing the shots ahead of time to tell a story as in filmmaking.

In Your Community

- Attend professional presentations to help your child experience excellence: children's theatre for younger children and adult dramas, comedies and musicals for older children; symphonies; jazz ensembles; dance companies featuring ballet, ethnic (Irish step dancing, Spanish flamenco, American square dancing) or modern forms (including jazz and tap).

- Museums sometimes offer musical and dramatic programming in addition to their regular exhibits.
- Singing practice and instruction through choirs can often be found at no cost through local churches and houses of worship. Some communities also sponsor choral groups and other singing opportunities.
- Enroll them in classes that teach drawing, dance, musical instruments, singing or theatre skills. There are some classes that parents and children can take together.
- Many communities have museums where you and your child can look at different types of art. If you don't know of any museums, browse through an art store or gallery just so your child can enjoy seeing a variety of different artistic expression. Museums often offer special events and classes at free or reduced rates. See "For More Information..." on back for Web-based resources.
- Check out books from the library that tell stories about visual artists, dancers, actors and musicians. This will introduce your children to the arts and help them feel like they "know" various artists.

Offer Your Talents

- If you are someone with artistic training, volunteer to teach lessons at a community organization so that children who may not be receiving training in dance, music, theatre arts or the visual arts can benefit from your knowledge and skill.

Many of these strategies are courtesy of the Americans for the Arts *Art. Ask for More.* public awareness campaign. To find out more about how to get more art in your kids' lives, visit www.AmericansForTheArts.org.



“The future belongs to a very different kind of person with a very different kind of mind – creators and empathizers, pattern recognizers and meaning makers. These people – artists, inventors, designers, storytellers, caregivers, consolers, big picture thinkers – will now reap society's richest rewards and share its greatest joys.”

– Daniel Pink (*A Whole New Mind: Moving from the Information Age to the Conceptual Age*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2005)



ACTIVITIES...TO ENCOURAGE AND STIMULATE YOUR CHILD'S ARTS EDUCATION

All Arts:

- Have your child scan local newspapers and other media for photos and articles that deal with the dance, music, theatre arts and visual arts in your area. Discuss opportunities for attending or participating in events that your child might enjoy. Visit www.ncpress.com for links to North Carolina's online newspapers where readers can find additional photos and articles about the arts across North Carolina. If you're traveling to an area in North Carolina, have your child choose an arts-related event to attend, a museum to visit or an exhibit to see.
- When you visit art galleries or performances, discuss connections that the artists make with historic and/or current events. Read newspaper articles and identify ways that the arts express, reflect and respond to current events.
- Newspapers run reviews of art exhibits before their openings and critiques of music, dramatic or dance presentations on opening night. Encourage students to visit art exhibits and attend plays, festivals, dance and music performances; write their own reviews and compare theirs with those in the newspaper. They should explain why they'd recommend the event to specific friends. Help your child summarize and evaluate a live performance such as a play, musical or concert that you attended together.

Dance:

- Ask your child to identify any dancers whom he or she sees in photos. If your child enjoys dance of any kind, encourage him or her to create a visual display about dance and look for books and other information about dance.
- In the newspaper, have your children identify as many types of dance (ballet, folk, tap, Latin dances, modern) as they can in the news. Discuss the culture out of which each style of dance grew. Use the library or Web sites to help your children learn more about both the culture and its specific dance(s).
- Ask children how dance can be used to communicate a message or tell a story. Scan the paper for dance performances (geared toward children) that tell stories they are familiar with. After viewing the performance, ask children to describe how the dancers used their bodies and the theatrical elements (lighting, sets, costumes, etc.) to convey the story without words.

Music:

- Read reviews of musicians and musical concerts in the newspaper. Take your child to a live concert and have her or him discuss or write a review describing personal responses to the musical elements.
- After listening to songs that are based on real-life events, help your child write a song about a current event they learn about through reading and viewing news.

- Explore your local newspaper for opportunities to experience in person the range of musical styles present in your community. Discuss the various styles and the roles they play in peoples' lives (entertainment, celebrations, etc.).
- For fun, have your children think of jingles to sell their favorite foods, games or other items.

Theatre Arts:

- Ask your children to impersonate a favorite sports figure, cartoon character, political figure or another well-known person. They may dress like the person or, in a voice that sounds like the person, read what that person says in a newspaper article.
- As you and your children read and discuss stories, have them hold in front of their faces a drawing that expresses their response to the different stories. After the topics are discussed, have them choose expressions again to see if hearing other views made them feel differently about an event.
- Discuss different emotions using photos and illustrations found in newspapers and other media. Practice demonstrating or guessing various emotions using only facial expression and gestures.
- Use events in the newspaper to introduce the concepts of comedy and tragedy. Have your children look for TV shows, movies and/or live performances that fall into each category.
- Have your children design puppets using wooden or plastic sticks. Cut faces from newspaper or news magazine photos or comics. Encourage them to start their home-grown plays with dialogue from the newspaper.

Visual Arts:

- Create a bulletin board, poster or allow space on your refrigerator for photographs or drawings cut from your newspaper that represent your neighborhood or community. Take a walk through your neighborhood. Encourage your child to take photos that interpret the area where you live, or have your child draw what she or he sees on the walk.
- Help your children identify comics and characters that appeal to them. Let each child read the part of her or his favorite character. As a parent, you too should participate. Point-out that comics often deal with real-life, day-to-day situations and events. Encourage your children to create comic characters or comic strips about themselves and their friends.
- Make available such art supplies as Play-Doh®, modeling clay, pencils, markers, paints and brushes and paper. Whenever your children read or listen to you read newspapers, magazines and books, encourage them to create visual presentations that represent the stories.
- Discuss the visual effectiveness of several newspaper or magazine ads. Discuss how visual elements emphasize the product or its function. Have your children study photos in newspapers and magazines, and then discuss what these photos contribute to the stories and how the newspaper would look without them.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

NC Department of Public Instruction: See what your child should be learning and experiencing with the arts in North Carolina's public schools. [www.ncpublicschools.org/curriculum/artsed]

Arts Education Partnership: Explore the database of arts-related contacts in education and the quarterly newsletter, *The Critical Link*, which features articles and resources on emerging issues related to arts education. [<http://aep-arts.org>]

education.com: At the "Parent-School" site's "Classically Speaking, Kids are in Tune!" section, you can find out-of-the-box ideas for enjoying classical music at home. [www.education.com/reference/article/Ref_Classically_Speaking]

Crayola®: At this dynamic site, find more than 1000 printable pages for your child to color, multiple craft ideas using the company's products, and a revolving collection of online games ("Color Wonder Treasure Hunt" is one of many examples). In their "For Parents" section, find everything from creative projects for parties and celebrations to "Tips for Raising Creative Kids." [www.crayola.com]

National Gallery of Art (NGA) "Kids": Create interactive art online at "The Art Zone," and learn about revolving subjects (art history, for example) in the page's "What's New" section. [www.nga.gov/kids]



North Carolina Arts Council: Find local events; locate festivals, galleries, museums and performances statewide; and view local examples of the four elements of arts education at the North Carolina Arts Council Web site. [www.ncarts.org]

The Imagine Nation: This site's strong point is its "Resources" section which features information to help parents learn more about the importance of creativity and discovery. [www.theimagination.net/]

[PLEASE INSERT YOUR OWN NEWSPAPER'S ARTS/ENTERTAINMENT URL OR USE THIS SPACE TO PROMOTE YOUR NEWSPAPER AS A SOURCE OF LOCAL/REGIONAL ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT-RELATED INFORMATION, RESOURCES AND EVENTS.]

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PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF NORTH CAROLINA

301 N. Wilmington Street
Raleigh, NC 27601-2825
PHONE :: 919.807.3300
www.ncpublicschools.org

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