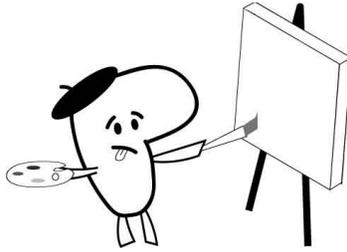


Chapter 7: The Creative Arts



Art is not a beautiful thing, but a thing beautifully expressed. By their very nature, the arts tend to be inner curriculum activities. The arts originate from within and are often an expression of an emotion, an impression, or some other intrapersonal element. Also, one can see in the arts the commonality of the human experience. This chapter describes inner curriculum activities that use the following creative arts: music, drama, visual art, creative writing, and poetry. As a resource, I recommend *The Arts as Meaning Makers* (1999) by Claudia Cornett. Her book provides research-based information that can be used to justify the inclusion of the arts across the curriculum and contains an extensive list of creative arts activities that can be used in all curriculum areas. (Some of the activities described below are based on ideas found in this book.)

THE ARTS IN GENERAL

This section contains a list of general activities that can be used with any art form.

1. Depicting feelings, emotions, experiences, or themes (FEET). Students use an art form (music, movement, visual art, creative writing, poetry, video, mime, or drama), to depict a feeling, emotion, experience, or theme (FEET). FEET might include the following: pain, victory, loss, lonely, happy, returning, reunion, sad, angry, empowered, disabled, bored, interested, frustrated, jealous, ignored, sick, nervous, inspired, embarrassed, surprised, disgusted, apathetic, hurt, vulnerable, creative, inspired, hope, jealousy, love, protected, bully, hero, nurturing, healing, creating, changing, birth, growth, ascension, awe, inspiration, humility, overcoming, something new, victory.

2. FEET from art. Given a particular art form, students describe and share a related emotion or experience.

3. Brainstorm specific FEET incidents. Individually, in pairs, or in small groups, students brainstorm to generate a list of specific incidents related to FEET. Example: “*List or describe a time when ...*” These can be kept in a journal or idea book to be used to create art.

4. Multi-dimensional FEET. Given a particular FEET, students collect or create a variety of art forms related to it.

VISUAL ART

The activities described here can start with a visual medium and move into an examination of students’ lives; or they can move from an examination of students’ lives into a visual medium.

1. Period art. Study the art of a particular time period, place, or culture. What does this tell you about the people? What values do you see? What common themes?

2. Images from popular culture. Collect pictures, ads, or images from magazines and newspapers that illustrate interesting or important ideas related to a FEET.

3. Art as science. Art and science are both ways seeing and representing reality. When conducting scientific inquiry, have students use visual arts to represent the data.

4. Art as worksheet. Instead of homework questions, worksheets, or post-reading comprehension sheets, students create designs or visual images to describe three interesting or important ideas.

5. Noticing tour. Art tells you what is being noticed. What is noticed tells you about the person noticing. Have student do a walkabout, outside. Older students may do a walkabout in an area outside of school

such as a mall, park, or library. In a sketchbook, students record or sketch five interesting or important things. When they come back, students trade journals/sketchbooks. Partners look for interesting themes. What do the contents tell you about this person?

6. Values. Draw or create visual images of three or more items that are of value to you. What do these images tell you about you? Draw an image to depict a characteristic or personal value that you hold, such as honesty or hard work (see Chapter 5).

7. Art poem. Find or create a poem that expresses an emotion, experience, or idea that you have. Create a picture or image that expresses some part of this poem. Combine the two to make an art poem.

8. Power scribble. This is similar to the power write described in Chapter 4. The goal is to use scribbles or doodles to get beyond the conscious mind. Students draw a series of scribbles, shapes, lines, textures, and dots for three minutes. The goal is to keep the pencil moving, drawing the first image or shape that seems to come to mind. Then, students look for interesting images within the scribbles that seem to be important. Larger images or pictures are created based on things found in the power scribble.

Metaphors

The following activities use the elements of visual art as metaphor. These activities should be used with older students, middle school and above.

1. Texture as metaphor. The elements of visual art can be used as metaphor to draw, describe, depict, or discuss elements of students' lives. The following questions or activities could be used: Students identify a time in life that was rough, smooth, mushy, hard, silky, thorny, rounded, bumpy or had sharp angles. Visual art can be used to describe or depict the experience or as background for other forms of art. Also, while examining an experience, students might look for a texture that best compliments it.

2. Shape as metaphor. Use shapes as metaphor to draw, describe, depict, or discuss elements of students' lives. The following questions or activities could be used: Circles -- What have you come back to? What seems to be encircling you? What or who is outside your circle? What or who is inside your circle? Boxes -- What keeps you boxed in? Where in your life do you feel boxed in? Describe what is in the different boxes in your life. Triangles - Describe an incident or event from two different perspectives. Describe a higher point that has two lower points.

3. Line as metaphor. Use line as metaphor to draw, describe, depict, or discuss elements of students' lives. The following questions or activities could be used: Tell us about the line you are traveling. What things are found on your line? What is something that is over the line for you? When have you been over the line? Describe a time when you had to fall into line. What things seem to line up in your life? Create a timeline for your life (see Chapter 8). Create a plot profile (see Chapter 4). Using a line that rises, describe those things seem to be going up. Using a line the goes downward, describe those things seem to be going down. Describe a time when you have been on the edge.

4. Angles as metaphor. Use angles as metaphor to draw, describe, depict, or discuss elements of students' lives. The following questions or activities could be used: Describe a time when something in your life took a sharp turn or changed at a sharp angle. Describe something in your life that has changed at a slight angle. Describe an experience or incident from two or three different angles. Describe a corner you have turned. Once you turn the corner, how will life be different? What corner do you have to turn next? In your life, what is around the corner?

5. Colors as metaphor. Use colors as metaphor to draw, describe, depict, or discuss elements of students' lives. The following questions or activities could be used: Given a color, describe an experience or situation that reflects that color. Given an experience, find colors to paint that experience. Use colors to create a background for a poem or short piece of creative writing. Given a color, first brainstorm a variety of things associated with that color; then look for these things as they appear in your life.

6. Patterns as metaphor. Use patterns as metaphor to draw, describe, depict, or discuss elements of students' lives. The following questions or activities could be used: Go outside on a walking tour. Record the patterns that you see. Where do you see these patterns occurring in your life? What patterns do you see occurring in your life? What sorts of things seem to repeat? Create visual art using patterns to describe repeating life patterns.

7. Light as metaphor. Use light as metaphor to draw, describe, depict, or discuss elements of students' lives. The following questions or activities could be used: Draw or describe a light period and a dark period.

What is something about which you are in the dark? What would you like to know more about? What are some elements of yourself that you try to keep in the dark or keep hidden? What are some things in your life that you would like to bring into the light? Describe your lighter side. What are some things you do in your lighter moments? When were you enlightened about something?

8. Space a metaphor. Use space as metaphor to draw, describe, depict, or discuss elements of students' lives. The following questions or activities could be used: What is something that you have distanced yourself from? What is something that you are very close to? What is something with which you would like to have more distance? What is something with which you would like to be closer? What is something that seems to be hanging above your head? What is something that is behind you? What would you like to have behind you? What is ahead of you? What would you like to have ahead of you? What have you risen above? What would you like to rise above? What is something that seems to overwhelm you? What things seem to undermine your efforts?

MUSIC

1. Analysis of related music. Look for music of a particular time period, place, or culture. What does this say about the people? What messages can be seen in the lyrics?

2. Find song lyrics. Look for songs with lyrics that seem to express an interesting or important idea, event, emotion, or experience from students' lives.

3. Create song lyrics. Create new lyrics for a known song incorporating interesting or important concepts from students' lives

4. Music for radio drama. Create a radio drama related to aspects of students' lives. Look for music to use as an introduction or as background music for interesting or important parts.

5. Musical associations. Play a piece of music and have students describe and share associations or experience related to the music.

6. Sharing music. Invite students to bring in and share their favorite or most meaningful CDs. In small groups, students tell why they find each particular CD interesting or important.

7. Music as background. Find music that creates a mood to compliment the oral reading of poetry or creative writing or for a piece of visual art.

8. Music performance. Create a structure where students can share musical performances in class or in all-school settings. These could be individual performances or small-group ensembles.

CREATIVE WRITING AND POETRY

Many ideas related to creative language arts are found in Chapter 3.

CREATIVE DRAMATICS

Creative dramatics uses students' imagination and willingness to act or pretend in order to reinforce academic, emotional, and interpersonal objectives. It is a form of imaginative play that helps students learn. Creative dramatics uses no written dialogue, making it different from a play. In a play, actors read or memorize lines that somebody else has written. In creative dramatics, actors create and use their own words to convey meaning. Although a teacher provides a beginning structure, students using creative dramatics are encouraged to improvise or change the original form.

Components of Creative Dramatics

There are four necessary components of creative dramatics: it has structure, it is open-ended, it needs a safe environment, and it includes feedback.

1. Structure. While pretending is very natural for children, improvising a short drama can be a difficult and abstract process. Children need structure to guide their actions and dialogue during the initial stages of creative dramatics. The teacher can provide this structure by modeling and demonstrating the basic story, actions, possible dialogue, and characterizations. It is best to keep early dramas short and simple, using only two to four characters. Older students and those with experience in creative dramatics will need less structure.

Example: Pat Dahlberg plans a creative drama activity as part of her sixth grade social studies unit on values. She creates a scene that takes place in a fast-food restaurant where two people are waiting to give their orders. The restaurant worker is ready to take an order but doesn't know who is next in line. Ms. Dahlberg

provides structure by describing the initial situation, then models the drama up to the point where the worker turns and asks, “*Who’s next?*” Drama groups are formed and asked to portray courteous and rude responses by each of the characters in the drama.

2. Open-ended. Creative dramatics is spontaneous and changeable. Although it works best when teachers provide a beginning structure, this structure should be flexible and open-ended. As students become more comfortable with creative dramatics, they will begin to use ideas and experiences from their own lives to create unique variations on the original themes. Using a prepared script would not allow this to happen. It is a good rule, therefore, never to use written dialogue. Provide structure, but let students find their own words to carry the meaning and encourage improvisation and alternate endings.

3. A safe environment. Creativity of any kind involves a certain amount of risk and disclosure. Creativity is enhanced when the teacher creates a fun, safe environment. Closing the classroom door during the initial learning stages of creative dramatics can help to develop a sense of safety and community. A teacher who is willing to take creative risks by modeling and participating in creative dramatics primes the pump for further creative endeavors. Also, feedback that is positive, specific, and acknowledges actors and their efforts will ensure that creative behaviors continue. Finally, a teacher should never force students to participate in creative dramatics; rather, he or she should always ask for volunteers.

4. Feedback. Students like to receive feedback, both formal and informal. Informal feedback is best given by a teacher’s response. This is provided when the teacher reacts to the drama, laughing when appropriate and giving other verbal and nonverbal responses. More formal feedback is given when a drama has ended. Here, the teacher processes the experience with students, recognizing actors for those things done well. As students become more familiar with the feedback process, they become better able to reflect upon these experiences and describe successful and less successful dramatic elements. Actors of all ages eventually develop a critical eye and become adept at giving each other positive feedback. Feedback is most effective when it focuses on the four actor’s elements described below.

Creative Dramatics Activities

1. Creative dramatics as problem solving. Students find an interesting or important problem. Use CPS or MEA to generate solutions and pick the best one (see Chapter 9). Creative dramatics are then used to bring the problem and its solution to life.

2. Radio drama. Here students take an interesting or important event or portion of a story and create written dialogue with narration if necessary. Audiotape is used to create these dramas. Background music and sound effects can be included.

3. Social skills. Creative dramas can be designed to help teach social skills such as waiting in line, applying for a job, asking for permission, polite conversation, or how to act at a party.

4. Social situations. Creative dramas can be used to practice uncomfortable settings or situations such as: parent-teacher-student conferences, asking somebody for date, getting a shot, settling arguments, compromise, respecting somebody with a different opinion, or dealing with a friend not who does not share work or responsibility.

5. Moral dilemmas. Creative dramas can be created around real life issues, moral dilemmas, ethical problems, or problems situations from school or real life (see Chapter 5 and Chapter 9).

6. Puppets. Creative dramas can be created and performed using puppets. With younger students, a popsicle stick with a figure glued to it is a good starting place.

7. Oprah interviews. Create interviews with famous characters from history, books, etc.

References

Cornett, C. (1999). *The arts as meaning makers*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill.