

Approaches for Presentation to Grades K-9 Based on Age/Grade Characteristics

Any discussion of children's development should begin with the understanding that all children do not fit neatly into categories. Children develop at different rates and depending on their previous experiences may exhibit responses that can be "typical" of older or younger children. Experience in working with children and sharing in the knowledge of your colleagues will help you to judge the best approach to any group. These guidelines are general suggestions of what you might expect from different age groups and are intended as a starting point for planning your presentations.

Pre-School: Ages 3-5

General Traits

Children are discovering a great deal about their environment. Experiences that explore their senses are important.

Learning is active rather than passive. Children enjoy opportunities to explore things they can touch, move and put together.

Children have little concept of time. By age 5, time is viewed in relation to themselves. Useful time terms are "before," "after," "now," and "then."

Empathetic reactions are strong modes of responses. Children can lose their own identity when they are seeing, feeling, or talking about something.

Children's moods come directly to the surface. Feelings fill the whole mind and body with no self-conscious awareness.

Children can only participate in a group discussion for about 10 minutes. Activities should be paced with as much participation as possible.

Children have a hard time understanding the reasons for "don't touch" or "don't run."

Artistic Preferences

Children are usually attracted to objects with vivid colors, real or implied motion, and recognizable subject matter.

Children may prefer simple pictures with few elements and are eager to identify and point out objects in pictures.

Very young children believe that anyone who has equipment (brushes, paint) can make good art. Later, artist's skill and hard work are appreciated.

Based on personal preferences. “I like it” means the same as “It is good art.” Later, may begin to consider amount of time and effort.

Tips for Presentation

In general, short, focused, and repeated encounters with a few works of art are better than prolonged encounters with many works.

Activities such as play-acting, miming, and mirroring can be successful because they take advantage of the children’s empathetic power but still allow them to keep their own identities.

Taking “imaginary trips” through a work of art can be one good approach: going into a work of art to discover what we can feel and see with our eyes.

Grades 1-2: Ages 6 and 7

General Traits

Children approach art with confidence and unrestrained enthusiasm. Their interests generally center on themselves, family, home, and school groups.

Children begin to understand that both similarities and differences among people can be acceptable.

Two forms of time recognition begin to appear, clock time and calendar time.

Children are beginning to understand simple logical relationships, such as describing events in a time sequence (what came first, next, etc.) or in terms of spatial relationships (what is in front, behind, etc.), and can also compare relative amounts (higher/lower, more/less, faster/slower, etc.).

Children have only a general awareness of historic time. Use of terms like “long ago” and “early times” are appropriate.

Children can visually experience size, shape, distance, and other cues that originally came through other senses. There is less of a need to touch. They are able to see the characteristics of visual elements.

Children can label and describe similarities and differences in things.

Empathetic reactions are still strong, but children can distinguish between fact and fiction.

Children are easily able to project themselves imaginatively into a work of art, respond well to make believe, and enjoy a chance to pretend and fantasize.

Children can effectively participate in group discussions for about one-half hour. Presentations should be well-paced and designed to create anticipation, arouse curiosity, and encourage participation through inquiry, games, and activities.

Eighty percent of children's questions begin with "Why?"

Artistic Preferences

Children's preferences should be accommodated and explored but not to the point of limiting the child's horizons. Their interest and appreciation should be expanded, not merely reinforced. Start with their preferences and relate new ideas and information to these preferences.

Children still prefer vivid colors and motion, along with vigorous and dramatic subjects. Children tend to prefer representational pictures that are relatively simple and relate to themselves and/or make believe.

Children are eager to identify objects in pictures and are interested in stories in pictures. Children often prefer familiar images seen in the home, school, neighborhood, and mass media.

Tips for Presentation

Thematically organizing groups of artworks helps children become familiar with sources of inspiration used by artists and by themselves. Examples of works that make different interpretations of the same themes work well.

Children react well to active techniques that use inquiry and games. Activities that employ multi-sensory awareness can be used; receiving information visually from an object.

Relate children's emotional responses to works of art, to specific elements in works of art, like colors.

Take advantage of children's empathetic powers. Play-acting, miming, and mirroring can all be entered into with ease by most children. For instance, take an imaginary walk into a landscape or interior scene: have children become different animals or people in a work of art.

Descriptive activities can be helpful for children who have not had experience looking at or talking about works of art. Ask the children to identify which works make them feel: happy, lonely, peaceful, excited, or strong and powerful. Be sure to point out that

there is no right or wrong answer to these questions, we all see things differently, and that is good.

Grades 3-4: Ages 8-10

General Traits

Children are still generally enthusiastic toward art and learning art skills. Children's interests center on themselves but gradually grow to include other people and the community.

Children become curious about outside activities, such as adventure, nature and travel. They may develop hobbies and collections.

Children are interested in subject matter or stories in works of art. They may be attracted to topics of cultural awareness, mechanical operations, and fantasy.

Children become more skilled at making visual discriminations, they have an increased sense of visual elements and composition. They can discern simple ideas of form, structure and color, light and dark, balance of composition, and repetition of color for emphasis.

Children's time concepts are still basic and general, but they begin to understand historic time in terms of past, present, and future. They become better able to describe things in terms of sequences of events.

Children 9 or 10 understand more specific time references, such as "300 years ago." Logical spatial relationships (what is in front, what is behind, etc.) are also better understood than previously.

Children tend to be interested in the real world, with very little interest in abstraction. Responses tend to be concrete, literal, or realistic. Children can learn to understand symbols and metaphors but not ones that are too subtle or complex.

Children can effectively participate in group discussion for 30 to 40 minutes. They still are active and need to participate through inquiry and/or improvisational techniques.

Artistic Preferences

Children are still attracted to large, colorful, and realistic works. Children begin to develop an appreciation for artistic skill and admire craftsmanship.

Children are interested in subject matter and stories, especially those that are exotic or bizarre.

Children show increased interest in how color is used.

Children can now look at line and know what it does and how to use it.

Children can grasp light and dark, balance of composition, and repetition of color for emphasis.

Appreciate artistic manual skills, perseverance, patience, and hard work, and show admiration of craftsmanship.

Personal preference still strong but also considers manual skill involved, the amount of realism and detail produced, as criteria for good art.

Tips for Presentation

Utilize stories about works of art that bring out the children's fascination with things and events removed from their own experience. Emphasize symbolism and origins in works of art.

Have children identify similarities and differences between works, perhaps through activities that focus on variations in visual elements.

Then begin to interpret meaning in such works by attempting to describe expressive qualities. Activities that strengthen a child's appreciation of the action and mood of a work of art promote a sensitivity to expressive meanings and to how visual elements can convey such meanings.

For example:

- Strong light and dark contrasts and opposing linear movements add to the tenseness and excitement of works.
- Somber colors and subdued contrasts help to create a sad and moody work.

Choose cross-cultural symbols, such as images of the sun, birds, and trees from various cultures. Discuss how the different images evoke similar or contrasting feelings and emotions.

In sculptural works, examine the most obvious visual qualities and the ideas and feelings they might convey. Explore how the materials used in a work can also express its mood. Generally, invite speculative interpretation of works.

Interest in information about the artist or artists, craftsmen begins at this age. Students become increasingly aware of other people's lives and compare these to their own.

Grades 5-6: Ages 10-11

General Traits

There is a gradual shift among young people from a dependence on adults for approval toward a greater reliance on themselves and their peers for approval.

Young people begin to judge themselves and others by more critical standards.

Generally, this is the age of peer groups or clubs, rituals, secrets, heroes, and heroines.

Interests include sports, hobbies, crafts, puzzles, problems, and tricks.

Children begin to differentiate the past into periods. They can match figures and periods, such as John Smith/Colonial times.

Specific concepts about time are still uncertain, but young people can make broad distinctions between “now” and “very long ago.” Specific times, i.e., 300 years ago or 1,000 years, can help in comprehension.

Young people become more interested in historical events and activities, lives of artists, adventures of other peoples, and dress and customs of different times and nations.

Young people are becoming more skilled in careful scrutiny of their environment and are fascinated in their ability to observe details and nuances that others may overlook.

With pacing to build suspense and arouse curiosity, young people can participate in group discussions for 40 to 50 minutes.

Artistic Preferences

Young people enjoy works where the process is active, filled with suspense and intellectually demanding. They are fascinated with detail and enjoy optical illusions, symbolism, secret codes, and disguised or hidden meanings.

Young people still prefer realism to abstraction. They tend to value art that is based on nature and that reflects skill in representing the world.

Craftsmanship and mastery of technique are strong criteria for judging the value of a work of art.

Abstract or stylized works, however, can be approached more easily with discussion of the artist's concerns.

Young people can be led to understand that art may be valued for its originality and imagination as well as its skill in representing the world.

Young people can learn to see aesthetic qualities separate from concrete subjects and can relate to expressive content; and the expressive power of lines, colors, shapes, textures, and form.

Tips for Presentation

Activities that require observation and comparisons can still be effective.

Presentations that focus on techniques and technology can be of interest to some students.

Presentations based on chronological information are still less effective than tours formed around facts, people, events, activities, and artists and their concerns about their work.

Improvisational techniques should be approached carefully because students may be less willing to share the extent of their emotional involvement with a work or may be self-conscious in front of others.

Have students observe details and speculate on different ideas conveyed by the art of different cultures. This can be done through inquiry techniques.

Grades 7-9: Ages 12-14

General Traits

Early adolescence can be a time of self-doubt and inconsistent behavior. It can be typified by emotional intensity, physical energy, and social awareness that can contrast with apathy, fatigue, and personal loneliness.

Young people are often reluctant to express their empathetic relationship with people, places, or things.

Peer pressure to conform is strong. Being “grown up” often is equated with cool indifference or outright ridicule of anything unconventional or conventional, depending upon peer group view.

Interests often concern mechanical objects, construction problems, experimentation, and science.

Language usage may not be as effective as possible; frequent use of terms as “like” or “you know” are used to dismiss immediate experience from deep attention.

Adult time concepts begin developing during this stage. Students comprehend specific dates (1650) and periods (Colonial). By age 14, they understand references to centuries (first half of the 17th century).

Artistic Preferences

Young people are still interested in real subject matter, but some may be beginning to branch out into the abstract or imagined.

Interest in media becomes important, including: the technical problems artists encounter in different media, how media can produce different effects, the possibilities and limitations of various media, and reasoning out the symbolic meaning in certain uses of media.

Natural beauty, craftsmanship, and representational skills are criteria adolescents have little trouble understanding. They can also begin to understand the value of imagination and originality as criteria for judging art, particularly abstract art.

Realize that different people may respond to a work of art in different ways. Greater tolerance of ambiguity in feelings in oneself and in art.

Tips for Presentation

Young people are not socially or economically naive. Choose images that have the potential for making a vital connection with the world of the adolescent and that will further help the student to see, feel, and think about that connection, such as images that address relevant social, political, and economic issues that confront adolescents.

Presentations can focus on technological problems artists encounter when using their media. When referring to media, center on the sensuous qualities of a material, the processes by which the media is shaped, the symbolism inherent in the choice or use of a medium.

In approaching style, teaching labels, such as “Impressionism, Baroque, Cubism,” is less effective than discussion about the qualities of the works. However, traditional stylistic terms can be introduced along with the perceptual associations that underline the term.

Comparisons can be explored on theme, subject matter, and interpretation.

Students can also distinguish between descriptive statements and value judgments. For instance, students can be asked to gather evidence about a work as a detective would, including visual descriptions and cultural/historical information which can then be used to speculate as to the probable intent of the artist who created the work.

This can be taken one step further to introduce the techniques of critical judgment of a work of art. Students can describe the subject and visual elements for a work of art, then analyze how these qualities relate to each other and the whole composition. Students can then interpret how the subject and visual elements work together to create a certain mood or theme and finally judge on the basis of the above evidence how successful the artist was in achieving that effect.

Source: “Developmental Stages in Children’s Aesthetic Responses,” Parson, etc. al,
Journal of Aesthetic Education, Vol. 12, No. 1, January 1978, pp. 83-104.