

STRATEGIES FOR MAKING THE VISUAL ART TEACHER TAKE CENTER STAGE: IMPLEMENTING THE ARTS STANDARDS

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Arts education policy has taken the lead in reinforcing the duality of the interconnectedness and discreteness of the visual and performing arts (dance, music, theater) in the K-12 academic curriculum. Teaching the arts in our public schools now means instruction in dance, theater, music, and the visual arts. National and state standards require the incorporation of the written and spoken word in the form of art(s) historical, critical, and aesthetic inquiry. The visual arts teacher can be the catalyst for the following four examples that translate the theory of arts education into practice.

DANCE

Stomp is a dance form that requires rhythm, balance, energy, and coordination. This form of dance can be taught to an individual, a small group or a large ensemble. The distribution of body weight, the forward and backward movement, the varying tempos of the accompanying music require the dancer to move in various patterns. Having students draw student stomp dancers in action and in repose is an excellent opportunity to see the human body with a realism that is unavailable through photographs or plaster casts. Students are often asked to present life drawings of the human form for college portfolios and are therefore empowered by the

interdisciplinary format of dance and visual arts. Using charcoal or pencil on large sketching paper, students will be challenged in learning the proportions and expression of the human form.

MUSIC

The visual image inspired by classical, jazz, and contemporary music has been a longstanding classroom art project. Fine art computer graphics utilize software tools to translate individual interpretations of music with a new technological vocabulary. Established compositional devices such as montage with hand-drawn illustrations—using software programs—overlapping borrowed commercial images are often the basis of original student work.

The design and packaging of musical compact discs is a typical lesson of a computer graphics class. Using computer graphics programs such as Photoshop, Illustrator, and Paintbrush, students can bring together the shared aesthetic qualities of tone, form, shape, and color to both symbolize and express the music.

THEATER

Set designers provide a unique set of skills that straddle both the theater and visual arts classroom. A set designer needs to sequence the scenes that will take place on stage. By separating out the specific scenes and outlining the necessary props and pathways

needed for the actors, the set designer creates the visual backdrop for the actor. After careful reading of the script, the set designer and students will recognize the need to use sections of the stage for some scenes and the whole stage for other scenes. Lighting, a critical element of the visual arts and theater, can alter the size of the stage, focus attention on the dramatic moment and create the ambience of a scene.

VISUAL ARTS/SOCIAL STUDIES AND SCIENCE

Fiber arts projects employing phragmites (cattails), indigenous vegetation of seaside shore communities, represent the vegetation of estuaries and underscore the ecological importance of the recycling of fresh and salt water. In

constructing fiber arts sculptures with cattails, their tall thin stems can be secured by brown paper into wrapped joints. The repeated use, innovative angling and composition of the cattails stems and joints provide the method to form spatially interesting monochromatic sculptures. The linear structure of cattails delineates negative and positive space, while being the armature for individual and group three-dimensional sculpture(s).

VISUAL ARTS/WORLD LANGUAGES

World languages are traditionally taught with an emphasis on reading, writing, and speaking. However, hands-on visual arts activities using world languages combine listening and tactile skills that seem to generate an immediate interest in

understanding the language and doing the art project. For instance, Day of the Dead, a Mexican holiday, can involve the making of votive images and masks as well as small installations for celebrations with all instruction given in Spanish. Art specific vocabulary and the use of directional words and phrases are then incorporated into classroom exchanges. The expertise of art and world language teachers is further realized through curricula alignment and interpersonal sharing.

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