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## READING THROUGH THE ARTS EQUALS LITERACY WITH A PLUS!

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*The poetic as distinct from the prosaic, esthetic art as distinct from scientific, expression as distinct from statement, does something different from leading to an experience. It constitutes one.*

*John Dewey (1934)*

In today's educational parlance, literacy and the basics are key words. Competence in reading and language have become national priorities. Still, there is more to literacy than minimal competence. Why not offer the youngsters in your classroom the chance to become literate with a *plus*? The plus stands for artistic literacy, for the experience of the arts belongs to all of us: The visual and performing arts can easily be integrated with reading and language activities in your classroom, in ways which help to enrich meaning through heightened personal interest and cultural understanding. Active participation in arts experiences gives each child the chance to discover that there are artworlds to explore, in addition to the everyday world he/she already knows.

### **Bring the arts into your reading room.**

Reading through the arts provides an unparalleled context in which knowledge from the different areas of the curriculum may be connected. Interrelationships are made through first-hand experiences in utilizing the primary sources and materials found in museums, galleries, concert halls, theaters, and libraries devoted to one or more of the arts. There are several traditions or idioms from which to choose, such as classical, popular, folk; with a grand variety of arts forms, among which are music, dance, world crafts, painting, sculpture, or selected forms of popular media, video-art, animation, and film-making.

For the non-artist teacher, it is often wise to commence with an art form with which you feel particularly at ease. This is generally one with which you have had some familiarity, on which you can now build. We are often likely to overlook the art in our homes, schools, and other surroundings which can become the starting points of our own renewal about art.

For example, quilt designs, needlepoint, pottery, and jewelry are among the valued and useful items which beautify our lives. These suggest basic ways by which we can teach and share art with youngsters in the daily curriculum.

Linking reading and language to the arts follows in a natural sequence. An obvious first step is to teach the special vocabulary words and concepts which accompany the art form. In music, such musical terms as "presto," "forte" "allegro," may be taught, or instrumental names, such as "glockenspiel," "violin," "piano," "harpsichord" can be presented. The concept of time in music can be understood through listening to its rhythmic and measured beats which have similarity to the pulse beat by which we are kept alive and "in time." The teacher will develop the concepts and language of the art form by the same techniques used in learning any new vocabulary. Charts or bulletin board display areas can be filled with these excitingly different vocabularies. The process is also facilitated by the way in which the classroom is arranged. Art prints, pictures, photographs, posters, and art objects may be displayed in your own minigallery. Books, concert and theater programs, periodicals, notices of exhibits, plays, dance performances, new recordings, musical scores, and instruments should extend and enrich the classroom library. Every member of the class, including the teacher and the parents will add to this collection throughout the year.

Language-extending activities which focus on the arts as content provide additional entrances into the experience of reading through the arts. Students search for new words, terms, phrases, arts ideas and concept, for information about music, dance, or other art forms, as seen within a particular historical perspective.

Some words will be expanded and built upon. For example, abstract art may be expanded to include abstraction and abstracting as a process in art. Geometric art may be viewed as homage to a square, or to a rectangle, rhomboid, or polygon. Concrete music will be related to concrete art, as will found music and found poetry. Linear and nonlinear ways of writing and thinking should be encouraged in order to elicit aesthetic insights and responses in children. The names of artists, their works, the worlds in which they lived, the difficulties which some encountered as creative persons are vantage points for reading and for researching. The reasons for the popularity (or unpopularity) of an art form at a particular period in time and the relationship between an artist and the society in which he/she has lived give practice in advanced reading skills, such as interpretation, evaluation, generalization. An ever-widening channel of communication for genuinely motivated research through reading in the arts has begun. It will lead toward an indepth study, appreciation, and reflection of individual student's special needs or interests, and may suggest a future career or avocation.

#### Ways to connect reading and the arts.

There are innumerable ways to connect the arts and reading in your classroom or school setting. Here are one dozen ways for your youngsters to try out their wings. You may choose to set up a bulletin board, class journal, or an arts center for this purpose:

1. The name of artists, writers, poets. Find out where and when these persons lived. Find out something important, interesting, or special about their lives.
2. The titles of some of their works. Say these titles over and over until they slip off your tongue easily and thus, become part of your working vocabulary. What do the titles mean to you? Why, do you suppose the artist chose that title for that particular work? Would you have done so? If not, what would you have called it?
3. Some special vocabulary words and phrases. Each art form has its own "language" with terms that have particu-

lar meaning. For example, the dance uses many foreign words, such as, "on pointe," "pirouette," "grand jete," "tour en l'air." Begin to use these words and phrases in your writing and speaking.

4. Language-extending activities. Select one or more words, build on each for speaking, reading, writing, by constructing sentences around them. For example, using the words, sea, seascape, seaworthy, seaweed land, landscape, landlocked, landlord. Find an artist, a writer, poet, musician, or dancer who has sung, written, painted, or danced about the sea or about land.
5. History. Oral history about art in the past or present is all around us. There are stories about arts or crafts which your family can tell you. Collect all these on paper, in pictures, on tape. Write and read about these in many different ways. Look up information in reference books, maps, journals, folios to find out more about what particularly interests you.
6. Creating. Create "found" poetry and "found" art, or combinations of these. Create "concrete" poetry and "concrete" art, or put these all together to make a huge montage or picture.
7. Finding reasons for things. There is an explosion of art forms in today's world. Why? This occurred during other revolutionary eras. When? Art had special characteristics in other decades, in other civilizations. When? Who? Where? What? Why?
8. Reading and collecting. Programs from museums, galleries, concerts, dance performances, operas, craft fairs, theater playbills, catalogs, fliers, and other collectors' items will make your library come to life!
9. Combining sensory experiences with the beauty of language. Search out and become aware of sounds, images, designs, and styles in art and language.

10. Inventing and composing in art forms.

Find ways to use language artfully, artistically, graciously. Find ways to use print creatively, integrally, originally.

11. Using the elements of art.

Put print, color, shape, texture, patterns, and systems of patterns on everything you see. Try this on pink paper, or on round-shaped paper, and even on paper that moves, twirls, shines!

12. Recording.

Be a creative recording artist on cassettes, in journals, recording over other sounds, with music as a background, or with voices in the background.

#### Reading as an art.

Reading becomes an art when the preliminary skills and techniques are mastered so that these may be brought into the realm of appreciation, interpretation, and evaluation of what has been read. It is in the framework of comprehension skills that the reading/arts concept has special value for the above-average and gifted student. For example, in order to expand vocabulary concepts, children engage in an experiential art activity by means of "hands on" participation in the making of art. In the process of creating a figure from a chunk of clay, the child moves through a range of reading/thinking processes, such as searching, observing, expressing ideas and feelings. He/She then comes to the point of closure with a finished art product, such as a clay person, animal, or an imaginary creature. This youngster has moved through a hierarchy of levels of abstraction (Sanders, 1966, p. 3) — changing information into a different symbolic form, discovering relationships, solving a real problem which has meaning for him/her. The appropriate reading and/or art skills, techniques, generalizations have also been applied in the same situation. The learner reaches the level of synthesis when he/she uses creative and original thinking in artistic/aesthetic ways.

#### The flourish of artistic literacy!

Finally, the sounds of our spoken and written language, through creative and expressive forms of writing meld graciously with other art forms. Personal or group

writing, particularly in the idiom of poetry, may be stored in journals, folders, or in individually handbound books and folios by the youngsters themselves. These carry over directly into the act of reading in your classroom and signify that a bold flourish of artistic literacy has been added to the student's repertoire. Each youngster deserves the blessing of the civilization of which he/she is an important member. The record of our civilization may be found most graphically in the expression of the several arts — in song, dance, painting, architecture, sculpture, crafts — which help us to reflect upon the quality of our humanness.

Reading and the arts bring with them a special kind of learning, one which tingles with excitement, discovery, meritment, and loveliness. All children have special gifts and interests. Give them the gift of love by bringing together the arts and reading to deepen the quality of their learning and living in this world and in your classroom.

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**NOTE:**

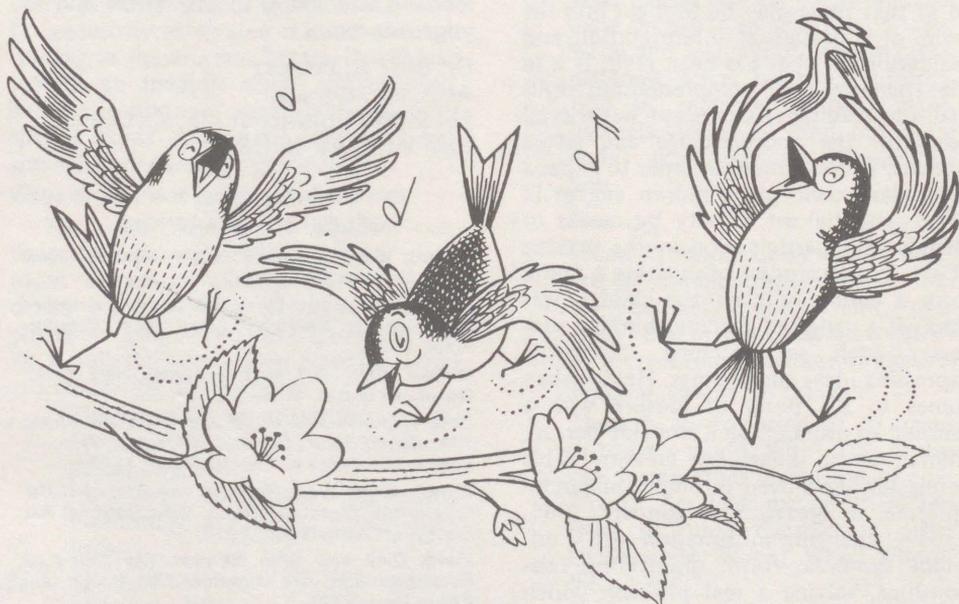
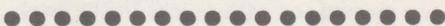
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**NOTICE OF CORRECTION**

The Fall MRA Journal contained an article which should have been titled, "Using Miscue Theory to Analyze Oral Reading Inventory Results." Unfortunately, a "miscue" was made by the printer, and the article carried the title, "Using Machine Theory to Analyze Oral Reading Inventory Results."

While this printer's "miscue" is "graphically similar" and "grammatically acceptable," it is "semantically unacceptable" and definitely involves a "change in meaning." Confusion and loss of comprehension had to result.



**A SPRING TREAT IT WAS!**

A little birdie told us that the entire staff of Covert attended the MRA Conference this year. The entire district — teachers, administrators, and superintendent were there. Congratulations to the entire district for recognizing the significance of sharing with others about reading!