

The arts in the classroom

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Dear Lenore: With all the talk about Common Core, we don't hear much about the arts in the classroom. What are the schools supposed to provide for art education?

The California Visual and Performing Arts Standards were adopted in 2001 and include dance, music, theater and visual arts. Elementary teachers are expected to infuse arts into the curriculum. We also have elementary magnet schools for the arts: Salvador, Napa Junction and Alta Heights. Middle and high schools have programs in dance, instrumental and choral music, theater and the visual arts, but not all students participate. The standards for each area include these elements: artistic perception; creative expression; historical and cultural context; aesthetic valuing; and connections, relationships and applications.

Here are some samples of what the Visual and Performing Arts Standards expect from students in fourth and seventh grades, as well as high school. Fourth-graders should be able to create, develop and memorize set movement patterns and sequences (dance), identify and interpret expressive characteristics in works of art and music, dramatize events in California history, and read and summarize stories about artists, telling how the artists reflect their culture.

Seventh-graders should be able to use ideas and themes to develop simple dance forms; identify and describe the development of music during medieval and early modern times in various cultures; demonstrate projection, vocal variety, diction, gesture and confidence in an oral presentation; and use different forms of perspective to show the illusion of depth on a two-dimensional surface.

By high school students are expected to be able to use dance structures, musical forms, theatrical elements and technology to create original works; analyze the role and function of music in radio, television and advertising; compare a traditional interpretation of a play with a nontraditional interpretation; and use the principles of design to discuss, analyze and write about visual aspects in the environment and in works of art, including their own.

I'd like to sign up for the classes that teach those things! I know they exist, especially in middle and high schools, but there is no way that every student is being exposed to this wide range of arts curriculum with any depth. Especially with the recent emphasis on test scores, the arts are a supplement, rather than an important part of the curriculum for all grades and all students. What can we do to give our young people a better experience in the arts, especially since studies show clearly that involvement in the arts promotes learning and discipline in other areas? The Napa Valley Arts Council has obtained a grant from the California Alliance for Arts Education to identify the needs up and down the valley and to build community support for the arts in school. Learn more at ArtsCouncilNapaValley.org; look under the "news" tab for the latest update. In the meantime, you can have art supplies on hand at home and encourage "art time," provide music or dance lessons if you are able, and take your children to museums, concerts, dance and theatrical performances. Children who get involved will find a world of expression, hard work and joy.

Lenore Hirsch is a retired school principal living in Napa. Send questions to lenorehirsch@att.net. Please include your child's age or grade.