
abc art,
books, &
creativity
arts learning in the classroom

Art, Books, and Creativity is an elementary-level arts integration curriculum that helps students make connections between visual art and writing.



Art, Books, and Creativity: Arts Learning in the Classroom

Art, Books, and Creativity (ABC) is an arts integration curriculum developed by the National Museum of Women in the Arts through generous funding from the U.S. Department of Education. ABC is a model for integrating the visual arts into the core curriculum while maintaining a specific focus on the contributions of women artists to our shared cultural history.

THE ARTS AND STUDENT LEARNING

The arts are a vital part of every child's education and are critical to student achievement. Current [arts education research](#) shows that arts learning experiences contribute to the development of important skills that are basic for success in school, life, and work. The arts help students build skills in:

- Reading and language arts
- Mathematics
- Critical and flexible thinking
- Social interaction
- Self-motivation

Most importantly, the visual arts engage the whole person, drawing on cognitive skills, emotions, the senses, and prior knowledge. The synthesis of these aspects makes arts learning experiences meaningful and keeps students engaged in the learning process and in school.

ABOUT THE ABC CURRICULUM

Art, Books, and Creativity promotes meaningful arts learning experiences while highlighting the natural connections between the visual arts and language arts. The goals of ABC are to develop students' knowledge of visual arts concepts and vocabulary, promote the acquisition of skills in creating and responding to the visual arts, and enhance skills in written expression and critical thinking.

Students participating in ABC will:

- Learn art vocabulary and concepts;
- Observe, discuss, and interpret works of art;
- Apply new knowledge of art terms and concepts in discussions of works of art;
- Create works of art, including portraits, landscapes, narrative and abstract art, and artist's books;
- Write in a variety of styles and for various purposes, including reflective, expressive, descriptive, and quick writing;
- Make connections between the tools and processes used by artists and writers; and
- Produce a work of art that builds on and synthesizes what they have learned.

Introduction to the ABC Curriculum

ABC gives teachers a proven method for integrating visual arts and language arts in the classroom. Results of a rigorous three-year study funded by the U.S. Department of Education show that ABC is an effective model for integrating the visual arts and language arts, and that ABC has a significant positive effect on student learning in visual arts and writing. Moreover, results from the study show that ABC is particularly effective in high-poverty schools. For more details about the study, please read the [ABC research report](#) (2007).

ABC is designed for classroom teachers who may or may not have had training in the visual arts. Support materials and resources for its implementation are available on the [ABC website](#). The curriculum was created especially for use in fourth-grade classrooms. ABC meets the [National Standards for Arts Education](#) and the [National Standards for Language Arts](#). The concepts, goals, and activities in the ABC curriculum can be adapted by teachers for use at other grade levels.

ABOUT WOMEN ARTISTS

The National Museum of Women in the Arts brings recognition to the achievements of women artists of all periods and nationalities by exhibiting, preserving, acquiring, and researching art by women and by teaching the public about their accomplishments.

Art, Books, and Creativity was developed by the National Museum of Women in the Arts in an effort to broaden and diversify the national elementary school arts curriculum by including more information on women artists. All of the art works included in the ABC curriculum were created by women artists.

ABOUT ARTISTS' BOOKS

Despite the popularity of artists' books, the term is not easily defined. Artists' books can take any form and be created from almost any material. They can incorporate old and new technologies and can express a limitless range of ideas. In effect, artists' books are as unique as the people who make them. Broadly defined, artists' books are original works of art that combine elements of the book in any of its forms—traditional codex, accordion, scroll, papyrus, pop-up, etc.—with the elements of art. The form, materials, and content of an artist's book are interrelated and together convey its meaning.

While artists' books have clear connections to the visual arts, they have direct applications in other curricular areas. Bookmaking activities contribute to learning in literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, and life skills and can be used for gathering information about student learning in these cross-curricular areas. Literacy practices include reading and creating written texts, building vocabulary, structuring ideas, and communicating meaning. Mathematics practices include applying spatial concepts and measurement skills—for example, artists' books can be used to help teach geometry. In the sciences, artists' books can be used for observational drawing and mapping. Life skills include problem-solving, self-management, and cooperation with others.

Teachers who have used the ABC curriculum have extended their use of artists' books in a variety of ways to support student learning in other disciplines. One fourth-grade teacher had his students make check-books in a mathematics unit. Another teacher developed a mentoring relationship between students when her fourth-grade class made alphabet accordion-books for kindergarten students struggling with phonics. Special Education teachers and teachers of English language learners have found that artists' books open up a new way of communicating by giving students who struggle to express themselves verbally and in writing an opportunity to create something and then respond to it with language.

Introduction to the ABC Curriculum

TIPS ON USING THE ABC CURRICULUM

The ABC curriculum organizes the creative process into observation, creation, and reflection, activities that engage students in the learning process and support skill building across disciplines. Under these topics you will find suggestions to help you implement different elements of the ABC curriculum in your classroom. Visit www.artbookscreativity.org for more resources.

Observation

Artists, scientists, and writers rely on their senses to see and understand the world around them. Giving students the opportunity to carefully observe, consider, describe, draw, and discuss something facilitates their curiosity, questions, and discoveries. Additionally, the observation and discussion of works of art helps students build vocabulary skills that empower them to articulate their ideas and, in turn, to sharpen their observation skills. These activities can be enriched through the following suggestions and resources:

- [Exploring Art](#) is a NMWA publication that can serve as a companion to the ABC curriculum. The booklet includes reproductions of artworks from NMWA's collection, some of which also appear in the ABC curriculum, and serves as an introduction to visual arts concepts and to art museums. The booklet allows students to observe high-quality reproductions at their desks in addition to seeing them projected in the classroom.
- [Artful Thinking](#) is a program developed by Harvard Project Zero and the Traverse City, Michigan, Public Schools that employs “thinking routines.” Thinking routines are simple sets of questions that extend and deepen students’ thinking. Specific routines, such as “Claim, Support, Question” and “I See, I Think, I Wonder” support students as they observe, reason, compare, and describe objects and phenomena. Thinking routines can be used when observing and discussing works of art in class and in a museum setting and can be adapted for other curricular areas as well.
- [The Private Eye](#) is a program that encourages looking closely at the world, thinking by analogy, and theorizing. The program is based on a simple set of tools—a jeweler’s loupe and simple questions—to help students see more clearly, refine their thinking, and make cross-curricular connections. Elements of this program can be integrated into ABC to extend observation activities.
- Other observation tools include hand-held magnifying glasses and composition frames. Students make frames by cutting a square, circle, rectangle, or other shape from the middle of a piece of cardboard or heavy paper. Looking through the cutout space provides students a focal point for observations and frees them from distractions. Students can experiment by holding the frame at varying distances from their eyes.
- Unusual writing materials that enliven the way students respond to visual and verbal prompts can foster student observation and interpretation.

Working in Teams

When students work together to observe and interpret works of art, they build on each other’s observations and ideas and can reach a higher level of understanding. The higher level is accentuated when students work together with the guidance of a teacher. Additionally, students learn to respect one another’s ideas and value a diversity of opinions when working together and learning collaboratively.

Introduction to the ABC Curriculum

ABC provides opportunities in all phases of the curriculum for students to work in pairs and in groups. Students benefit when they collaborate on the development of ideas, making and building art works, writing, revising, editing, and evaluating their work. Working in teams will help generate a comfortable and supportive environment in the classroom.

Sharing Images with Students

Reproductions of artworks from NMWA's collection are available on the ABC website for use in Lessons 2 through 7. Each of these lessons includes an artwork and a series of open-ended questions to guide students' observation of the artwork. Additional artworks are suggested with each lesson for comparison purposes. The open-ended questions can be adapted for use with the additional artwork.

It is important for students to be able to clearly see the reproductions of artworks in the ABC curriculum for them to fully engage and participate in the lessons. Images downloaded from the website can be shared with students in two ways: by overhead projector or by a TV or computer monitor.

- To show images with an overhead projector, you must first print the images with a color printer onto 8" x 11" transparency paper. Transparency paper can be purchased from an office supply store.
- To show images on a TV monitor, you must first download them onto a CD or DVD. To show them on a computer monitor, the images can be downloaded to a folder on your desktop or to a CD or DVD.

A Note about Art Vocabulary

Art vocabulary terms are defined in the curriculum and are available on the ABC website in Spanish and in English. The purpose of the vocabulary is to provide a consistent description of visual arts concepts and to define the meaning of the art terms. If you use parallel terms at your school for concepts related to the visual arts, we suggest that you continue to use them rather than adopt the ones used here; it is a greater priority for students to be comfortable using art vocabulary and to use the terms consistently.

Reflection

Reflection is an important critical thinking process and an essential part of learning. It helps students develop strategies to apply new knowledge to various situations in school and in their daily lives. Reflection helps students transform experience into authentic learning, to set goals for continued development, and to understand their own growth over time.

Students are encouraged to reflect on their learning at many points during the ABC curriculum, such as in their journals and in class discussions. The following suggestions will facilitate and support student reflection in these and other areas.

- Provide a supportive environment where students can re-evaluate conclusions.
- Present opportunities for students to step back from a learning situation and think about how they are solving problems.
- Give students plenty of time to respond to your questions, and practice being quiet.
- Encourage students to talk it out. Using language can help students develop and refine their ideas.

Introduction to the ABC Curriculum

The Language of Talking about Art with Students

The following suggestions for talking with students about their work are appropriate for both visual arts and writing.

- Encourage students by asking open-ended questions such as: What are you trying to say with this piece? What do you want the viewer/reader to realize? What do you think of this piece? What part do you need help with? What part do you like?
- Give your students your full attention when they show or read their work to you.
- Use art vocabulary to reinforce the concepts and skills students are applying to their work.
- Beginning your sentences with “I” instead of “you,” for example “I see _____” or “I notice _____,” is a nonjudgmental way to discuss the student’s work.
- Instruct classroom visitors, volunteers, teaching assistants, parents, and other students to follow these guidelines as a way to bolster your classroom’s positive environment.

Creation: Visual Arts

Making art presents students with problems that can be solved in an endless number of ways and allows them to regularly apply knowledge and make new discoveries.

Art Materials

The following materials are needed to complete the art projects in the ABC curriculum (the amounts are figured for a class of twenty students). Students can use basic art materials in unlimited ways; optional materials are listed below and will further their media explorations but are not necessary. You can promote experimentation by providing conventional and unconventional materials and by encouraging students to look for alternative materials outside of class.

Paper

4½" x 5" construction or cover stock paper	40 sheets
8½" x 11" colored copy paper	80 sheets
8½" x 11" colored cover stock paper	20 sheets
8½" x 14" white copy paper (legal size)	200 sheets
9" x 15" construction or drawing paper	80 sheets
12" x 18" drawing paper	10 sheets
12" x 18" construction paper or posterboard	40 sheets
16" x 20" all-media drawing paper	20 sheets
Scrap or recycled paper for prototypes	
Paper scraps for collage	

Basic Supplies

Scissors
Glue and glue sticks
Rulers
Crayons
Colored pencils
Markers
Watercolor paint and brushes

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Miscellaneous Supplies

Sticks for journals	20
Rubber bands	20
Masking tape, 2" wide	2–4 rolls
Paper bags	20
Plastic wrap	1–2 boxes
Salt	2–4 shakers

Optional Materials

Sticky notes (for quick writes)	1 pack per student
Hole punch (for book bindings)	4–5 for sharing
Mat knife	1–2 for the teacher's use
Popsicle sticks (for making folds)	1 per student
Tacky glue	2–3 bottles
Mod Podge (for collage)	1 bottle
Masking tape	2–3 rolls
Oil pastels	2–4 packs for sharing
Sharpie pens	2–3 packs for sharing
Gel pens	2–3 packs for sharing
Metallic crayons	1 pack for sharing
Felt, ribbon, and buttons	
Found objects	

Materials Management and Storage

The following suggestions will help keep ABC curriculum materials organized and maintain a positive environment for students to explore the visual arts.

- Consider where ongoing projects will be kept. Student folders and journals can be filed in boxes; three-dimensional works and students' individual project materials can be kept in large, stackable box tops or on shelves; and two-dimensional work can be hung on a wall or on lines.
- Keep art materials and the students' projects easily accessible.
- Arrange desks in groups so students can share materials and work collaboratively.
- Leave enough time in each lesson for clean up. Demonstrate how to care for and clean tools, and assign clean-up responsibilities to students.
- Have soap, water, and paper towels available. Buckets and plastic tubs filled with water can be used to soak hands and tools.

Sources for Art Materials

Your school may have a supplier you can contact for materials. You can also visit the following art suppliers online to purchase materials or to request a catalog:

- Nasco (www.enasco.com)
- Dick Blick (www.dickblick.com)
- Utrecht (www.utrechtart.com)

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Local businesses may be able to donate surplus products and materials.

- Printing businesses or newspaper companies may have leftover paper they can donate.
- Frame shops may have leftover scraps of mat board that can be used by your students as book covers or other elements in their books.
- Paint stores may have surplus wallpaper samples that can be used in student books.
- Copy shops may cut a stack or ream of paper to size for a few dollars per cut, saving you preparation time.

Creation: Writing

Connections between Visual Arts and Language Arts

The elements of art are the visual vocabulary of the artist. They are the tools an artist uses no matter what medium he or she is using. Likewise, writers have tools they use to create written texts—to express ideas and emotions and to describe people and places. The ABC curriculum uses the 6+1 Traits of Writing framework as a starting point from which to explore the parallels between the two disciplines.

[The 6+1 Traits of Writing](#) is a framework developed by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) that uses common language to identify and define what good writing looks like. The 6+1 Traits model includes ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions, and presentation. These components are the foundation for NWREL's writing assessment model and the basis for the criteria used by many teachers across the country to define the qualities of good writing at different levels of achievement.

Below is a chart comparing the elements of art and principles of design to the writing traits defined by NWREL. The comparison highlights the parallel processes that enrich communication in each discipline and shows how the integration of visual art can support writing standards in the classroom. It is important to note the process of writing and of art making do not always fit into neat categories and that there is significant overlap between categories.

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Traits of Writing	Elements of Art and Design
<p>IDEAS Ideas are the heart of the message, and the content and the theme of the text.</p>	<p>Artists use the elements of art to express ideas, emotions, and observations in visual form.</p> <p>UNITY is the quality of wholeness and completeness that comes from the effective use of the elements of art. The relationship among all parts of the artwork forms the meaning of the artwork.</p> <p>EMPHASIS creates a focal point in a work of art.</p>
<p>ORGANIZATION Organization is the structure of the text, the thread of meaning, and pattern of ideas.</p>	<p>Artists make choices about how to organize the elements of art within a work of art.</p> <p>BALANCE refers to the way the elements of art are arranged in a work of art to create a sense of stability and visual weight.</p> <p>RHYTHM is the regular repetition of elements of art to create the look and feel of movement.</p> <p>PATTERN is created through any repeated element of art.</p> <p>SPACE refers to the area between, around, above, below, or within parts of an artwork. It can be described as flat, shallow, or deep; as open or closed; and as positive or negative.</p>
<p>VOICE Voice describes the emotion, conviction, and individuality of the writer.</p>	<p>Artists express their character, individuality, and unique perspectives in their work.</p> <p>EMPHASIS creates a focal point in a work of art.</p> <p>VARIETY is obtained by combining and changing elements of art in multiple ways to create visual interest and vitality in an artwork.</p> <p>TEXTURE refers to the feel of a thing or its surface quality. Texture can be implied or actual.</p>
<p>WORD CHOICE Word choice is the use of rich, colorful language.</p>	<p>Artists select from various elements of art and media to create visual interest in an artwork.</p> <p>VARIETY is obtained by combining and changing elements of art in multiple ways to create visual interest and vitality in an artwork.</p> <p>TEXTURE refers to the feel of a thing or its surface quality. Texture can be implied or actual.</p> <p>PATTERN is created through any repeated element of art.</p> <p>COLOR consists of three properties: hue, intensity, and value.</p>
<p>SENTENCE FLUENCY Sentence fluency is the rhythm and flow of language and the sound of word patterns.</p>	<p>Artists select and arrange elements of art to engage the viewer and move his or her eyes through the work of art.</p> <p>RHYTHM is the regular repetition of elements of art to create the look and feel of movement.</p> <p>MOVEMENT is the arrangement of parts to create the sense of motion and lead the viewer's eye through the artwork.</p> <p>PATTERN is created through any repeated element of art.</p>
<p>CONVENTIONS Conventions refer to the mechanics of spelling and grammar.</p>	<p>Artists master technical skills to communicate effectively with the elements of art and principals of design.</p> <p>PROPORTION refers to the relationship of one thing to another in terms of size, shape, number, or degree.</p> <p>BALANCE refers to the way the elements of art are arranged in a work of art to create a sense of stability and visual weight.</p> <p>UNITY is the quality of wholeness and completeness that comes from the effective use of the elements of art. The relationship among all parts of the artwork forms the meaning of the artwork.</p> <p>EMPHASIS creates a focal point in a work of art.</p>

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The Role of Writing in ABC

Lessons in ABC are also about exploring ideas for writing. Ideas are generated from artworks, new vocabulary, artist biographies, and quick-write activities. ABC writing activities focus on the process of writing rather than the product and are meant to encourage students to write. As they write about things they know and speculate about other things without focusing on writing conventions, they will become more comfortable with writing and begin to write more.

It is not necessary for students to have a completed text to begin working on the final artist's book; a collection of short writings, descriptions, memories, phrases, etc., will provide enough material for them to start working. Writing is a parallel element in the development of the artist's book.

Student Journals

Journaling is a literacy strategy that allows students to express and record their thoughts, comments, ideas, and questions and to reflect on what they are learning. In the ABC curriculum the journal is designed to document students' work and experiences and can be used by students for self-evaluation. Students will use the journals as a place to respond to prompts and as a place for the ideas, designs, problems, revisions, and solutions that arise in the process of creating artists' books.

- Tell students that although writing is emphasized in most journaling prompts, entries may also take the form of drawings, illustrations, clippings, quotes, lists, and other forms of response.
- Blank, unlined paper provides a place for students to develop ideas through writing and sketching, and will allow students to choose how they prefer to work, beginning with words or with drawings, or combining the two. Combining words and images in their journals will help students make connections between visual and written communication.
- Have students date each entry as a way to document their progress.
- Consider collecting and reading student journals at set intervals. Doing so can create opportunities for dialogue with students and can shed light on students' understanding of the project.
- Emphasize that journals will be assessed, but not graded, and that students will keep their journals at the end of the project.
- Create different writing environments to see what works best for your students. Try dimming the lights or using natural light, playing different kinds of music, or going outdoors. See if silence helps your students focus or if a loud, boisterous environment feels more comfortable for them.

Quick Writes

A quick write is a literacy strategy that captures ideas, thoughts, or feelings, often in response to a written or visual prompt, and can be completed in about three to five minutes. Quick-write activities help students integrate new information with prior knowledge, set the stage for the lesson, and allow students to write freely without being concerned about spelling and grammar conventions.

- Each ABC lesson includes a quick-write activity that students do when they first enter the classroom or as a bridge between activities.
- The purpose of quick-write activities is to provide a collection of ideas that can be developed and used later in the curriculum. Students will be asked to select from this collection of ideas to develop one for their artist's book.
- Quick writes can be recorded on sticky notes and attached to journal pages or in a pocket or envelope attached to the journal.

Introduction to the ABC Curriculum

Paper Variety

Use a variety of paper styles for the writing activities. Unusual formats of paper will engage students and help them think differently about their writing. Try paper styles such as sticky notes, lined and unlined paper, graph paper, paper on rolls (register paper, toilet paper, paper towels, wax paper), paper bags, paper wrappers, wrapping paper, wall paper, colored tissue paper, very large and very small sheets of paper, etc.

Assessment

The ABC curriculum incorporates a variety of ongoing assessment opportunities. Student journals, quick writes, student artwork, classroom discussions, and displays of student work provide multiple layers for gauging what students understand, what they have learned, and in what areas they may need assistance. The following ideas can extend your assessment of student learning and provide evidence of achievement.

To assess what students understand and where they may need support:

- Keep track of students' use of art vocabulary in class discussions, quick writes, and journals. Create a simple rubric, with a column for student names and additional columns for vocabulary words, and check off words as students use them.
- Collect and review journals, quick writes, and written work done on sticky notes and other materials to evaluate student progress.
- Encourage students to use sentence stems to describe their observations. For example, sentence stems such as "I notice _____" and "I wonder _____" help teachers focus on the student's ability to respond to works of art and give students a method for structuring their thoughts and responses.

To gauge higher order thinking skills, notice when students:

- Use concepts and skills to create or solve problems, which shows their ability to apply knowledge.
- Predict, contrast, and summarize, which shows their level of comprehension.
- Make connections to other subject areas, which shows their ability to synthesize information.
- Revise and refine their conclusions, which shows their flexible thinking skills.
- Interpret works of art, which shows their ability to evaluate and make judgments.

To capture the student's levels of self-esteem, motivation, and enthusiasm towards ABC:

- Create simple pre- and post-curriculum journal prompts to measure student attitudes before and after the project.
- Develop a multiple-choice questionnaire, checklist, or survey to find out how students feel about the arts and about their enthusiasm for making art. Base questions on your teaching and learning goals.
- Videotape conversations with students at the beginning, middle, and end of the project to illustrate student engagement at different points in the curriculum.
- Encourage students to review their journals and artwork occasionally in order to see their own growth over time. Capture their responses in journals, in group discussions, or individual meetings with students.

Introduction to the ABC Curriculum

ENHANCING THE ABC CURRICULUM

The opportunity to meet and work with professional artists and writers and to interact with original works of art in a museum or gallery can greatly enrich your students' experience of the ABC curriculum.

Visiting an Art Museum

A museum visit can be at the heart of any arts learning experience, and we encourage you to contact the education department of a local museum to schedule a tour while you are using the ABC curriculum. During the visit, students can apply the concepts they have learned in their classroom to a discussion in front of an original work of art. Applying new knowledge in a real-world setting empowers students and demonstrates the value of their learning.

Allowing students to respond to original works of art is also important. They will discover how a painting, for example, works as a primary source offering insight into historical periods or our own contemporary culture. Elements of a work of art such as scale or texture, which are not apparent in reproductions, will become meaningful for the students. Firsthand encounters with original works of art makes the museum lessons exciting and memorable for students. Moreover, the experience of seeing multiple works of art within the context of a museum contributes to the impact of the museum visit and allows students to seek comparisons between art works or to compare and contrast their meanings and content.

Look for examples of artwork created by women artists as you visit arts institutions and seek the work of women artists in your community.

Artists in the Schools

Consider inviting visiting artists and writers to your classroom. Professional artists and writers can present special lessons in art techniques, writing, book illustration, papermaking, and bookmaking, sharing insights and providing inspiration to teachers and students. Visiting artists also demonstrate that the arts are a viable career option and can speak to students about their individual career paths.

Partnerships with Arts Organizations and Local Businesses

Local arts organizations, museums, libraries, and state and local arts councils can be a rich source of information and assistance. They can identify visiting artists, offer grant opportunities, and even develop long-term partnerships to help sustain arts learning programs in your school. Local businesses and industries also may be able to contribute equipment, supplies, facilities, and guidance.