

Guiding Principles for the Arts Grades K–12

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INTRODUCTION

Developed by one of the authors of the Common Core State Standards, the seven Guiding Principles for the Arts outlined in this document should guide development of curriculum modules and accompanying materials. Please note the connections drawn in these principles to literacy and other areas of study.

1. *Studying works of arts as training in close observation across the arts disciplines and preparing students to create and perform in the arts*

Meaningful appreciation and study of works of art begins with close observation. The Core Standards in Literacy similarly describe reading as the product of sustained observation and attention to detail. Particularly when encountering complex art, or reading the level of complex text students will need to be ready for college and careers, students will need to learn to re-examine and observe closely.

The arts reward sustained inquiry and provide a perfect opportunity for students to practice the discipline of close observation whether looking at a painting or lithograph, watching a drama or a dance, or attending to a piece of music. New York State is therefore requesting a sequence of materials that cultivates students' observation abilities in the context of the sustained examination of magnificent works of art that are worthy of prolonged focus. Classroom work would be spent on in depth study; several days or longer might be spent on a specific work. What is requested are a set of arts modules that bring to bear observing, listening to and appreciating expansive works of art across disciplines and grades.

In both the arts and reading, such attention to the specifics can be hard, particularly when the work is complex. Often, when one first looks at a painting, hears a piece of music, or watches a dance, one does not know “what to say” or “where to begin.” The process of analyzing the work is a slow, gradual one that requires practice. Appreciation requires tolerating any initial confusion or uncertainty and staying with it until more is seen. Proposals should offer thoughtful, specific, and imaginative guidance to the student who stands before the painting and asks, what do I do now?

Of course, the judgment of what are magnificent works of art worthy of close study is not a simple one. Publisher's Criteria for the Common Core State Standards in Literacy offer the following guidance for selecting texts that may prove useful in this context:

“Given the emphasis of the Common Core Standards on close reading, the texts selected should be worthy of close attention and careful re-reading. To become career and college ready, students must grapple with a range of works that span many genres, cultures, and eras and model the kinds of thinking and writing students should aspire to in their own work.”

The developers of instructional materials should show through their materials and assignments that the art selected for particular focus can sustain high quality conversation and engagement.

This in-depth study of works of art across the Arts disciplines will enable students to actively participate in the creation and performance of the Arts (dance, music, theatre, and visual arts). Each work of art studied closely becomes a potential model for students' own work.

2. Engaging in a deep study of works of art across arts disciplines and preparing students to develop arts literacy and develop their own art.

One way to deeply study works of art in different disciplines is to examine multiple renditions of the same work. Perhaps the most obvious example is drama. Students can study closely a specific act or scene, and then observe how it has been played by different directors and actors. Proposed arts materials should pay special, in depth attention to these closely related concepts of examining the source and its various interpretations. The Core Standards in Literacy require that students can compare the evidence they see in the script, and observe how different productions draw and interpret the script.

Of course, a score in music offers similar opportunities for students who can read and follow the music. Different renditions of a score provide a window into how different performing artists interpret the content and in doing so transform it. New York State is therefore interested in materials that cultivate students' capacities to study the source image, script, or score, and compare more than one rendition.

When there is an explicit source for several pieces of art, such as a passage in the Bible, students can explore what different artists chose to include and emphasize. One of the most significant choices can be where to focus. Once again, it is powerful to trace an artist's interpretation to evidence from the source.

Shared topics and themes in the arts also offer opportunities to make comparisons across different mediums. For example, the 9-10th grade Standards in Literacy require students to: "analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment (e.g., Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts" and Breughel's Landscape with the Fall of Icarus)."

In depth study of the arts should also strengthen students' abilities to make their own art, beginning by studying arts as rigorously as artists do. A good reader reads as a writer. A core component of reading well is analyzing the choices authors make, and drawing on evidence within the text to explore the impact of those choices. Likewise, a good writer is alert to the impact of his or her own choices. Materials for student work in the arts should therefore help the student look and listen as a maker, and make as a thoughtful looker and listener.

3. *Studying the social, political, cultural and economic contexts of works of arts while maintaining an in depth focus on each work, allowing students deeper understanding of the works of art that includes their connections with other areas of knowledge and in the evolution of the art disciplines.*

Students will gain a deeper understanding of the works of art by studying the social, political, cultural, and economic contexts in which these were developed. This is critical in helping students make connections of the arts disciplines with other areas of knowledge. However, making connections to other works of art, or historical or political forces should not replace an in depth examination of the each work of art.

Sometimes, the generalizations of traditional criticism of the arts cause us to avoid looking at the specifics. It is not enough to say, for instance, that Rembrandt works with dark, shadow, and light, perhaps using a term like chiaroscuro to describe his technique. Students must learn to see how Rembrandt *uses* that technique, and what he makes it mean in a specific painting like *The Night Watchmen*. Likewise, the political and social context of Rembrandt's painting is important, but not sufficient to account for the unique power of this masterpiece.

The successful proposal will avoid sole reliance on stock art appreciation and will cultivate a fresh approach to the work itself with the goal of developing an appreciation of its specific qualities. Students should accumulate a body of knowledge about technique and style, but each work must be studied anew. The same is true of good reading: it requires being open to what is in the text. As CS Lewis says, when comparing viewing a painting to reading: "The first demand any work of art makes upon us is surrender. Look. Listen. Receive."

The questions and tasks designed for students should therefore encourage require careful observation of the work itself and then forge further connections. Aligned materials should require students to demonstrate that they have followed the details and artist's specific work as a prelude to making connections to political or social forces or comparisons to other works of art. When discussing influences on a work of art, materials should require students to return to evidence in the specific work to check the quality and accuracy of their evaluations and interpretations. Students can and should make connections between works of art, but this activity must not supersede the close examination of each specific work.

4. *Integrating the appropriate USNY cultural institutions to promote a rich study of the arts*

New York State is remarkably fortunate in the quality, range, and depth of its cultural institutions. The curriculum modules developed should bring to bear the appropriate USNY cultural institutions pertaining to the arts disciplines. The arts modules should encourage teachers and students to go beyond the classroom walls to explore the richness of the arts disciplines and to take full advantage of the rich resources available in museums, concert venues, galleries, performance spaces, theaters, etc.

Increasingly, much of the excellent work of NYS cultural institutions, including performances, is available online. A successful bid should provide an approach to integrating such resources into the study of art within and outside of school. It is particularly important that students gain a sense of the liveliness of the arts as work that is performed, or exhibited in specific ways, at the moment students are studying art.

5. *Providing an explicit learning progression in the arts disciplines along the pre-k – grade 12 continuum that is developmentally appropriate*

Student interaction with the arts requires that learning experiences be developed with students' developmental stages in mind. Too much of pre K-12 arts curriculum has been disconnected; the proposed materials should cultivate a core set of skills and capacities that build over time. Materials should at once be developmentally appropriate and increasingly demanding, both within years and across years.

In analyzing art, a critical capacity that grows over time is the capacity to draw evidence from a work of art to support understanding of the work. As students advance, they should cultivate the ability to cite evidence from specific works of art, such as specific features in a painting, the details of a score or a script. As students develop, they should be able to gather and share more evidence to support their understanding; they should notice more in each work, and be able to draw on it.

Likewise the Common Core Standards in students require students to become more adept at drawing evidence from a text and explaining that evidence orally and in writing. Aligned arts curriculum materials should include explicit models of high quality evidence-based answers to questions about—samples of proficient student responses—about specific works of art from each grade. Questions should require students to demonstrate that they follow the details of what they have seen but also are able to make non-trivial inferences based on their observations.

Another way students can gradually build their mastery of the arts is through the practice of imitation and applying what they have learned in their own work: taking a great work of art as a model, and trying to make something that looks or sounds like it. Imitation is an ancient technique. Students have always learned about painting, for example, by drawing or painting the paintings they study. They may not make new masterpieces, but with guidance they can reckon with the same challenges and choices that the artist faced.

Materials over time should be increasingly demanding regarding the care and quality of student imitations, including the extent to which those imitations notice and incorporate key details of the original. Over time, a student of the arts should become a more accomplished imitator. At the same time, students should grow in their capacity to not just imitate but to apply principles they have gained through the study of an artist. Students should demonstrate their ability to apply an artist's style, technique, or ideas to novel situations and topics.

6. *Studying the arts associated careers, including the choices artists make as they design solutions and how aesthetics influence choices consumers make*

The choices artists make shape their specific works as well as their careers. As students practice making their own art, high quality instructional tools should encourage them to explore alternatives and examine the impact of their choices. The arts almost always offer multiple solutions to a given problem or challenge. Student training in the arts should make students alert to different possibilities and strengthen their ability to produce and compare alternatives.

Studying the artist's sketches or drafts of a great work of art can also provide a very concrete way to examine artistic choice. Often artists will provide several sketches or fuller works in preparation for a painting or piece of music. Similarly the choices of a dramatist or poet can be studied by examining their progressive drafts. This activity of revision offers great insight into the working life of the artist.

Just as powerful is to see how some of the most fertile artists transform over time, and find new approaches. Sometimes artists, over the course of their career, will develop new techniques and approaches that transform their earlier treatment of similar material. Artistic choice and artistic careers should be studied over time.

The curriculum modules must ensure that the study of the arts includes the study of associated arts careers and an understanding of how aesthetics influence choices consumers make. For example, Daniel Pink in his book "A Whole New Mind" suggests that design principles and aesthetics influence choices consumers make. This is a critical element in the study of arts associated careers as well as how aesthetics influence choices consumers make in a global economy. Future careers in the arts require that students be prepared to participate in a global work place and understand the intricacies of the global market place. This requires that students develop a new set of skills including the ability to work with diverse teams that can be international in nature to address creative solutions that can be facilitated by the deep study of the arts.

7. *Developing a lifelong curiosity about the arts, and understanding that art transcends time*

Pursuing the study of art in ways that respects the intricacy and power of individual works of art will contribute not only to students' lifelong engagement with the arts but also to the development of deeper skills demanded by a standards-based education. The curriculum modules should promote lifelong curiosity about the arts by making the study of the arts disciplines engaging over time and ensuring that the notion of the arts transcending time is internalized by students as they engage in the study of the arts over the course of the pre-k through grade 12 continuum.

Successful materials will cultivate students' ability to discuss what is distinctive, beautiful, and valuable in the works they study. Student discussion of art should include attention to what is memorable, what is remarkable, what is at stake. Students should cite specific examples within a work to support their account of the impact of the art. The Core Standards in Literacy likewise require students to analyze "language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful."