



Expeditionary Learning Learning Expedition Documentation Project

Portrait of an Artist

An Study Investigating the Relationship Between the Arts and Emotion

Pre-Kindergarten

Conservatory Lab Charter School

Boston, MA

Expedition authors

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Summary

The *Portrait of an Artist* learning expedition approached an essential aspect of nearly every pre-K and kindergarten curriculum – introducing students to the people and norms of their school community – through the focused lens of art and music. Guest artists from within the school and from greater Boston visited the class, and students explored art throughout the city. They beautified their school and turned their classroom into an art gallery. This pre-K investigation of art, music, and emotion was a fitting learning expedition for the newest members of Conservatory Lab Charter School, a school community whose mission is for students to achieve academic, creative, and social success through a music-infused curriculum.

Portrait of an Artist celebrated and nurtured the creative process, encouraging these young learners to respond to and express themselves through the arts while also meeting key pre-K academic standards, particularly in English and art. Children had hands-on experiences working with a wide variety of art materials as well as the experience of looking closely at the work of established artists. Books about color, the joy of creating art, and artists (real and fictional) provided inspiration for children’s art explorations at learning centers and in the community. Throughout the expedition, students also gained skills in the tools of learning that they will need throughout their educational lives – careful listening, relating themes in fiction and non-fiction to personal experience, using classroom materials, and building vocabulary. The expedition also addressed math, social studies, science, and health standards.

The expedition was divided into two case studies – color and artists. In the first case study, students created several representations of the spectra of color, from large group monochromatic paintings to color wheels, that helped them show their understanding of the relationships of colors to each other and how these colors can be blended to make new hues. At the same time, children learned about important artists in the realm of the visual arts – they were introduced to a new masterwork every day. They even created a copy of a masterwork – Pablo Picasso’s *Three Musicians*. The second case study built on the experiences, concepts, and projects of the first case study and focused more specifically on the mode of self-portraiture. Children studied master artists and noticed how they used color, technique, and facial expressions, among other choices, to tell a story about who they are as creative people.

The culminating products of the learning expedition – acrylic self-portraits and accompanying artist’s statements, full-body tempera paintings, the copy of Picasso’s *Three Musicians*, and found-art sculptures – were displayed prominently in the front hallway of the school and were “unveiled” at an art gallery opening. Visitors to the school marveled at the level of technique used by each artist, proving the point that with rigorous instruction and high expectations for quality, children can exceed all expectations.





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Guiding Questions

- What is an artist?
 - What does an artist do?
 - What materials do artists use to make art?
- What is a self-portrait?
 - How can I create a self-portrait that shows what is special about me?
- How does music affect my mood?
- How does music connect to color?

Case studies

Case study one: Color (March 15 – April 16)

The six-week color case study focused on color, medium, tools, and technique. Hands-on activities invited children to explore the world of color through multi-sensory experiences that included looking at different types of art, listening and moving to music associated with different colors, and creating art with colored paper, tempera paint, finger paint, oil pastels, watercolors, acrylic paint, found objects, photographs, and more. They created a color wheel and conducted experiments mixing colors. During this case study, the classroom was transformed into an art gallery. The dramatic play area became the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and children were greeted with a new masterwork every day. They were surrounded by works of a diverse group of artists, who each used color and medium in unique ways. They created a copy of a masterwork, Pablo Picasso's *Three Musicians*, which demonstrated their grasp of color mixing and paint technique, as well as their intentional use of art tools.



Case study two: Artists (April 26 – June 11)

The eight-week artists case study built on what children learned during the previous case study and examined the stories that artists tell with their art, specifically focusing on the mode of self-portraiture and the iconic works of Frida Kahlo, Fernando Dunn II, Sofonisba Anguissola, Andy Warhol, Judith Leyster, and Auguste Renoir (among others). Through storytelling and sharing books about these masters of the fine art world, the children became aware of the lives of the painters. By creating their own self-portraits, students learned how



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color, detail, and facial expressions are all clues that an artist shares with their audience to reveal who they are and tell the story that they want to share with the world. This study also engaged children in looking at art within the context of the community and the stories that murals tell to the viewer.

Major projects

Project one: The color wheel

Students studied the entire color wheel, beginning with primary and building to secondary colors, shades, and tones. Children searched for variations of colors on their clothes, in the classroom, and in featured art prints. Using food coloring and paint, they created many shades and hues of colors. They made predictions about the effect that varying proportions of drops of color would have and they named new colors that they created. They listened to read-aloud picture books about colors and identified, talked, and wrote about the sounds, tastes, smells, and feelings associated with each color. Students linked genres of music to the different colors they imagined when they heard them – pink to classical, red to jazz, yellow to country, and of course, blue to the blues.

The kick-off for this project was a series of monochromatic, multi-media group-works that students created using a single color at a time. Students then added a word list to each panel of color that contained items which could be that color. These panels were displayed around the room for the children to add to, revisit, and pull words from in their own work at the writing table. The children created their own color books with drawings and words that fit in each color group, connecting their early literacy skills to their artwork. They painted the spectrum of color between yellow and blue and noticed how differing ratios of these pigments produced varying shades of green when mixed together on the paper. Students then created a class color wheel using tempera paint on paper. They marveled at the wonders of the color brown, how it is made when colors across the wheel are blended together. Each experience built students' background knowledge and helped them understand common concepts of color.





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Project two: Found art sculpture

Throughout this investigation, children talked about the practice that artists use to create their work – following their imaginations, using materials in lots of different ways, taking care of their tools and supplies, planning, revising and editing their compositions, and making artistic choices. Several guest experts visited the class during this project, including a staff member who is a found art sculptor, a parent who is a photographer, and a teacher who is a fine artist. Each expert shared their own knowledge of color, medium, process, and composition. The children asked meaningful questions and referred back to their presentations during their own work.



Following a neighborhood walk that allowed children to discover the colors in their city – the vibrant blues of the sky, the many shades of grey in the buildings, the pop of the mustard yellow house two blocks from the school, and the pink of the sign in front of the cupcake shop – they gathered materials to create a found art sculpture. Sculptures were made of wood, broken toys, blocks, puzzle pieces, and many other items. The finished work incorporated color-mixing technique, assemblage, as well as connections to the colors of the city. The sculptures were brought together in a large group installation.

Project three: Picasso

Henri Matisse, Faith Ringgold, Romare Bearden, Andy Warhol, Wassily Kandinsky, and Pablo Picasso were some of the featured artists whose work with color inspired children. The children connected emotionally with Picasso's masterpiece, *Three Musicians*, and decided to create a copy of this work, as this is what real artists do to hone their skills. The theme of the painting fits with the mission of the school – learning through music – and the colors and shapes of this cubist master appealed greatly to the pre-schoolers. The children learned about caring for tools (brush technique and cleaning and maintenance) as well as how to select the appropriate tool and brush technique to render different types of lines and textures. The finished product of this study was signed by all of the pre-K children and hangs prominently in the vestibule of the school, bringing beauty to an otherwise utilitarian entryway and reminding visitors of the culture and character of Conservatory Lab Charter School.





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Project four: Self-portraits

The second case study began with an experience in noticing and rendering detail. A self-portrait project in two parts – life-size full-body self-portraits and more traditional self-portraits of only faces – helped students learn techniques for rendering details of their clothing, hair, and faces. The full-body self-portraits were used in a math experience with the first grade class in which students measured different sections of their bodies using non-standard objects, such as Unifix cubes and toy cars. The more they experienced looking at their paper bodies the more they noticed about themselves and the proportions and ratios of their bodies.



The class then moved into an intense study of portraiture and the process of creating a painting on canvas. The children learned about the sketching process and viewed the sketchbook of a working artist. They learned about the proportions of the human face and the spacing of the facial features. With mirrors in hand they used charcoal sticks to sketch their faces on their canvases. The students immersed themselves in the book, *The Colors of Us*, and each child mixed their own skin tone using different shades of brown, beige, and tan acrylic paint. Over the course of several weeks, small groups of children worked with an expert fine artist to notice details, choose proper tools, mix paint, problem-solve colors, and create a finished self-portrait that spoke to who they were and what they wanted their audience to see in their work.





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Project five: The art gallery

In preparation for their own gallery opening, the class conducted fieldwork at Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) to better understand how an art museum works. They looked at the expectations for visitors, how pieces of artwork are displayed – including a close examination of artist's statements – and what mediums of art are represented. The children came back to the classroom and wrote artist's statements, like the ones they saw at the ICA, which voiced their personal connection to their artwork. They also began preparations for turning their classroom into an art gallery to display the work they had done throughout the expedition.

The finished self-portraits were displayed in the pre-K art gallery along with their artist's statements, full-body tempera paintings, group canvas painting, and found-art sculptures. Families and members of the school community were invited to the gallery opening to celebrate the children's quality work. Students chose background music to play at the opening, adding another dimension to the experience, and performed a joyful rendition of "Yellow Submarine."





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Standards, learning targets, and assessment

Standards

English language arts

- Observe and use appropriate ways of interacting in a group (taking turns in talking, listening to peers, waiting until someone is finished, asking questions and waiting for an answer, and gaining the floor in appropriate ways).
- Participate actively in discussions, listen to ideas of others, and ask relevant questions.
- Communicate personal experiences or interests.
- Listen to and use formal and informal language.
- Listen to a wide variety of age-appropriate literature read aloud.
- Develop familiarity with the forms of alphabet letters, awareness of print, and letterforms.
- Engage actively in read-aloud activities by asking questions, offering ideas, predicting or retelling important parts of a story or informational book.
- Relate themes or information in books to personal experiences.
- Listen to, recognize, and use a broad vocabulary of sensory words.
- Use their own words or illustrations to describe their experience, tell imaginative stories, or communicate information about a topic of interest.

Mathematics

- Explore and describe a wide variety of concrete objects by their attributes.
- Sort, categorize, or classify objects by more than one attribute.
- Recognize, describe, reproduce, extend, create, and compare repeating patterns of concrete materials.
- Investigate and identify materials of various shapes, using appropriate language.
- Use nonstandard units to measure length, weight, and amount of content of familiar objects.

Science and technology/engineering

- Ask and seek out answers to questions about objects and events with the assistance of interested adults.
- Make predictions about changes in materials or objects based on past experiences.
- Identify and use simple tools appropriately to extend observations.
- Record observations and share ideas through simple forms of representation such as drawing.
- Use senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste to explore the environment using sensory vocabulary.
- Demonstrate and explain the safe and proper use of tools and materials.

History and social science

- Discuss and use vocabulary related to time in relevant activities.
- Identify and describe cause and effect as they relate to personal experiences and age-appropriate stories.
- Engage in activities that build understanding of words for locations and direction.
- Talk about the qualities valued in a person's character such as honesty, courage, courtesy, willingness to work hard, kindness, fairness, trustworthiness, self-discipline, loyalty, and personal responsibility.
- Observe and discuss the various kinds of work people do outside and inside their home.



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The Arts

- Explore activities and vocabulary related to movement, balance, strength, and flexibility.
- Respond to a variety of musical rhythms through body movement.
- Participate in simple sequences of movements and dance to various kinds of music.
- Act out ways that movement and dance can show feelings or convey meaning.
- Sing a variety of songs independently and with others.
- Sing expressively.
- Sing songs with repetitive phrases and rhythmic patterns.
- Explore a variety of age-appropriate materials and media to create two- and three-dimensional artwork.
- Observe the safe and appropriate use and care of art materials.
- Explore and experiment with wet and dry media in a variety of colors, including black and white.
- Explore how color can convey mood and emotion.
- Experiment with the use of texture in artwork.
- Choose artwork for display in the classroom, school or community or for a personal book, class book, or portfolio and explain why it was chosen.

Comprehensive Health

- Listen to and use appropriate language to describe the names and functions of parts of the human body.
- Build body awareness, strength, and coordination through locomotion activities.
- Build awareness of directionality and position in space.
- Use both sides of the body to strengthen bilateral coordination.
- Alternate the left and right sides of the body and cross the mid-line of the body.
- Build upper body strength and stability to gain controlled movement of shoulders.
- Strengthen hand grasp and flexibility.
- Use thumb/forefinger in pincer grasp.
- Use a variety of tools and materials to build grasp-and-release skills.
- Build finger dexterity.
- Use eye-hand coordination, visual perception and tracking, and visual motor skills in play activities.
- Recognize and describe or represent emotions such as happiness, surprise, anger, fear, and sadness.

Learning targets

Long-term learning target

I can recognize, identify, and name colors.

Supporting learning targets

- I can describe and make different shades of the same color.
- I can predict what new colors I will make by mixing different amounts of paint together.
- I can compare different background colors and choose which one I want to use in my art.
- I can recognize red as a color that means, "Stop!" or "Emergency."

Long-term learning target

I can visualize and describe the colors I see when I listen to music.

Supporting learning targets



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- I can make observations using my five senses.
- I can draw and paint to music with different colored markers and/or paints.

Long-term learning target

I can express who I am with art, words, and music.

Supporting learning target

- I can write an artist's statement to add to others' understanding and enjoyment of my art.

Long-term learning target

I can explain what an artist is and does.

Supporting learning target

- I can learn about the work and lives of certain artists.

Long-term learning target

I can explain what portraits and self-portraits are.

Supporting learning target

- I can identify self-portraits and some artists who created self-portraits.

Long-term learning target

I can create a self-portrait that expresses what is special about me.

Supporting learning target

- I can name the features and details of my face.
- I can name the part of my body with appropriate words.
- I can identify different shades of skin color and create my own skin tone paint.

Long-term learning target

I can choose and use different colors, art tools, and materials to create different kinds of art.

Supporting learning targets

- I can hold my art tool with an appropriate grip.
- I can manipulate my art tool in a controlled way.
- I can use scissors and other cutting tools safely.
- I can select the proper tool to help me complete sculpting tasks.
- I can use accurate vocabulary words to identify the art materials and tools I use.
- I can talk about an artist's choice of materials, color, details, and composition.

Long-term learning target

I can plan and create art with a group.

Supporting learning target



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- I can share art supplies and respect classroom resources.

Long-term learning target

I can recognize and describe patterns in objects and art, such as stripes, dots, and zigzags.

Supporting learning targets

- I can sort, match, and compare objects with similar colors.
- I can create patterns with alternating colors, stripes, zigzags, and dots.
- I can record and analyze information about colors on charts and graphs.

Long-term learning target

I can critique my own artwork and give helpful feedback to others about their artwork.

Supporting learning targets

- I can respond to questions about my artwork and the choices I made.
- I can reflect on the artwork of others and provide helpful feedback.
- I can reflect on and critique my own artwork.
- I can revise my artwork based on feedback I receive from others.

Long-term learning target

I can enjoy art and music and share my joy with others appropriately.

Supporting learning target

- I can dance with my classmates rhythmically and safely.



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Connections to the community and larger world

Fieldwork

- A neighborhood color walk
- Central Square mural walking tour
- The Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), Boston

Experts

- Music teacher
- Classroom teacher and artist
- School co-director and art history professor
- School co-director and sculptor
- Museum Docent, Institute of Contemporary Art

Service learning

- School entryway beautification

Expedition culmination

Pre-school art gallery opening

