

30. Why are the arts important?

INTRODUCTION

Ask children if they know what we mean by the arts. Explain to them this can be a range of activities from drama to drawing to 3D art to music and so on!

ACTIVITY

Ask children to put their hand up or to stand in lines showing their answers to the following yes/no questions:

- Do you like arts subjects?
- Do you think they are important?
- Do you think schools should spend more time and money on the arts?
- Do you think instead of halls for assembly, schools should have theatres where plays could be put on by the children?

ACTIVITY

Next read out the text below about why the arts are important. Ensure children understand the main points by reviewing and summarising a bit at a time.

What are the arts and why are they important?

When people talk about the arts they mean everything from drawing and painting to model making to drama, poetry and music – everything creative and imaginative, basically!

What's happening in schools at the moment?

Lots of schools don't give much time to creative subjects like art. Some parents, and children themselves, worry that the students are missing out. Teachers usually like teaching arty subjects but they often say there just isn't enough time in the day to teach them properly. There's no doubt that the arts are fun for kids but the arts also help kids develop on many basic levels.

Why are they important?

Children who do lots of artistic and creative activities are better at expressing themselves and their feelings. They think carefully about their opinions and their likes and dislikes. They can show how they feel through the arts and also put their point of view in words. They can make good use of their imagination, inventing stories and poems, designing things and places and creating music, sculpture, film and other art-works.

Children who are creative are often better at problem solving than children who do not have the chance to do creative things. They are often better at maths and science and other subjects even though they might spend less time doing them.

One basic benefit of art is that children improve their fine motor skills. That means, using their hands really carefully, controlling tiny movements and co-ordinating eye to hand movements. Clearly, these skills are really important!

Another benefit of the arts is increased confidence. Children who see their art on the wall, who are applauded when they are on stage or reading a poem out loud or simply finish a story they have been writing by themselves, feel proud and feel confident. As they improve and see their own progress their confidence grows even more! Getting up on a stage and singing gives children a chance to step outside their comfort zone. When children regularly stretch themselves and try new things, they believe in themselves and know they can do anything they want to!

Why don't schools do more arts subjects?

Schools always complain that the curriculum is too busy and there is little spare time for what they see as fun subjects. Teachers also say they feel they don't have the skills to teach the arts and there isn't enough money in schools to buy things like paints, paper, musical instruments and so on. Some parents and teachers even say that maths and English are more important and that spending time and money on arty subjects is just a waste! What do you think?

Once children have thought about why the arts are important, ask children to think about the arts in their everyday life. What would be missing if we did not have the arts? (See sheet below with examples – children could write their ideas on A3 versions of the sheet.)

Finally, they could draw or describe a world without arts. Perhaps all the houses are the same with no bright colours anywhere and the gardens are covered in paving stones with no flowers or grass. People might go past each other without speaking because they don't know how to show their feelings or how to interact.

Children could finish by adding a caption to their picture that expresses their views on a world without the arts.

CONCLUSIONS

Set up a 'continuum' across the room, with one end of the imaginary line standing for '100%' and the other for '0%'. Ask the children to put themselves somewhere along the line according to their answer to such questions as:

- How much time should we spend on arty subjects in school?
- How much money from the school budget should be spent on arty subjects?
- Instead of SATs tests, should we perform plays, musical concerts or have art galleries in school that adults visit to see how well a child is doing in school?

After each question, ask a few children to explain their position on the line and to change their position if they want to after hearing a range of views.

What are the arts?

The arts are creative skills like drama, music, dance, sculpture as well as drawing and painting. Without the arts what would the world be like? Write down what would be missing if we did NOT have any arts in the world.

For example: there would be no galleries with paintings in them...

There would be no patterns on wallpaper, carpets, clothes, curtains, duvet covers – everything would be plain!

There would be no singing or dancing or music anywhere...

There would be no song lyrics or poetry...