

# Hunsberger Elementary School Spectra Art

## How to Talk to Children About Art

### 5-7 Year Olds

#### **They are attracted to:**

- \*Warm bright colors, most small children's favorite color is red.
- \*Strongly contrasting shapes and colors, without shades (as in Lego pieces).
- \*The appearance of relief (the projection of figures or forms from a flat background, as in sculpture, or the apparent projection of such shapes in a painting or drawing) because it "looks real"
- \*Art that reproduces textures (fabric, hair, fur, etc.), engaging the sense of touch as well as sight
- \*Pictures of people – a lady, a baby – and of familiar places – a house, countryside, a garden, a village, a beach (subjects often found in Impressionist paintings).
- \*Pictures of movement and familiar poses: someone running, sleeping, diving, falling, dancing, etc.
- \*Clear expressions of emotions – love, laughter, crying or surprise in paintings of any period
- \*Simple compositions with one central person and very few other elements
- \*Little Details - these are often what they notice first.

#### **Links with everyday life:**

Children of this age like pictures in which they can recognize events, objects and gestures that they encounter in everyday life. For example, a child may see in a painting the position her mother adopts when she leans forward to brush her teeth, or the way her father looks when he's working in his study.

#### **Links with their bodies**

Very small children don't look just with their eyes. Their whole bodies join in. They very quickly mime what they see and can describe pictures with gestures, embodying the image. That is when they will find the words to describe the ideas or feelings they have. Very expressive pictures or sculptures are best to encourage this kind of approach.

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### 8-10 Year Olds

#### What They Like:

- \*Paintings full of color and/or contrast: these are as pleasing to this age group as they are to younger children.
- \*Pictures with a story behind them – a story of either the subject or the artist.
- \*Clearly drawn character types: good guys, bad guys, heroes, underdogs, etc. These types appear again and again in the films, cartoons and video games they already know.
- \*Situations of conflict where good wins over evil.
- \*Pictures that make you laugh or make fun of others.
- \*Scary pictures ‘Strange – or monstrous-looking people’.
- \*Images depicting daily life in different eras, because “it’s not like that any more”.

They may like to stay in front of a painting long enough to feel part of it. Landscapes can be particularly good at drawing youngsters in. They can imagine making their way through the valleys, getting lost in a storm, doing battle with strange monsters and boarding sailing ships. They are a great way to capture their imagination.

#### Use their visual reference points.

Children’s visual world is peopled with characters from films, video games and cartoons, who tend to be heroic. Take advantage of these characters to talk about the principles they illustrate. If you are talking about good and evil, for instance, you could use Star Wars or Spiderman as an example. Such ideas lie behind many aspects of painting or sculpture, particularly in mythological or biblical subjects.

#### How did they do that?

By this age children are much more interested in materials and techniques. They particularly like paintings, sculptures or installations in which they can see the brushstrokes, scissor cuts, fingerprints, and so on. They will already be used to recognizing such things from their own school art projects. This is the time to get them used to looking at a work independent of its subject and get them interested in artists’ techniques.

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### How to Talk to Children About Art

#### 11-13 Year Olds

##### **What interests them:**

- \*The artist's personality and the main points of his or her life.
- \*Why a picture was painted is put together – for example, the illusion of depth created by the use of perspective.
- \*The technique used by the artist or sculptor to visually express a feeling or an idea. For example, what gives the impression of movement, even though the figures are immobile? What evokes the idea of authority or produces harmony in a portrait? How has reality been stylized in order to make it more intense?
- \*The time it takes to produce a work.
- \*Symbols, which, once deciphered, give access to a whole network of hidden means. Why is there a dove in this painting? What does the lighted candle mean?
- \*Comparing works by the same artist. Self-portraits are particularly good for this: especially Rembrandt, van Gogh and Gauguin. Whatever the subject matter it's also a way of learning to recognize the characteristics of various periods in an artist's career.
- \*Comparing works by different artists that deal with the same or similar subject matter (spotting the similarities and the differences).
- \*The relationship between a work and an artist and/or history. Even if it's just to draw parallels, you can start to make links with books or history lessons from school to add context.
- \*How much a work costs.

##### **They are losing some of their spontaneity**

They already know all sorts of things and tend to leap to conclusions about what they see (it's badly done, etc). If you tell them they are wrong you will soon lose any dialogue. It is better to be open: ask their opinion, share information, ask questions yourself and compare. This is a gentle way to get them to see what they may have missed in the first place.

### Images from advertising.

Young people are very familiar with advertising images. They form a reference point for them. Take advantage of the fact that advertising often uses the history of painting: make it clear and this is not a coincidence and help them find images that have been used in this way. If you find a picture, or a detail of one, that has been used in an advertisement, show the students a reproduction. The graphics used on L'Oreal's Studio Line products are based on Mondrian's



paintings.

If you are doing a lesson on negative space the Fed Ex logo is a great example of negative space.



### The raison d'être of paintings (the purpose that justifies a thing's existence).

This is a key question. Discovering something that legitimizes a painting in their eyes will make children want to look at something that might not have appealed originally. In that sense, insights into the artist's personality begin to interest them. For example, I use the Mona Lisa as a good example of neutral colors. When I give information regarding the painting and a little tid-bit about the history I notice the children are much more engaged in the lesson.