

Developing an Arts-Based Unit

Length: 30 minutes

Featured School

School:	Lusher Alternative Elementary School
Location:	New Orleans, Louisiana
In this program:	Geralyn Broussard, first-grade teacher Megan Neelis, second-grade teacher Paul Reynaud, first-grade teacher Kathleen Hurstell Riedlinger, principal

About This Program

A team of first- and second-grade teachers at **Lusher Alternative Elementary School** in New Orleans, Louisiana, plans a year-end project that lets students show what they have learned in science, math, English, and the arts. Their classes work together to create an original, multi-arts performance based on works of art with similar themes: *The Entry of the Animals Into Noah's Ark*, a painting by Jan Brueghel, and *The Flood*, an opera by Igor Stravinsky.

Teachers Geralyn Broussard, Megan Neelis, and Paul Reynaud meet with principal Kathy Riedlinger to discuss what children will need to know to complete the project. They also organize each teacher's responsibilities and discuss how the planned activities are geared to state standards.

Meeting with their individual classes and in combined-grade sessions, the teachers use inquiry-based methods to introduce the project to students. They ask children what they observe in the painting and how they would bring the characteristics of the animals to life. Students work in groups on dialogue, props, costumes, scenery, music, or other aspects of the production that interest them. In each phase of preparation, teachers look for opportunities to integrate arts-based inquiry with other art forms and subjects:

- In writing dialogue, students role-play conversations with each other, assuming the roles of various animals and brainstorming what they might say. "The students are having the kinds of conversations that young kids need to have in order to grow and develop as good successful persons and not just to be successful academically," says Broussard.
- Some students listen to the Stravinsky music while thinking of an animal in the Brueghel painting. They imagine how the animal would interpret the music, draw pictures of the animals dancing, and use vocabulary words to describe the dances.
- Other students research how the animals act and move, then design puppets with those features. Neelis challenges them to think about how the animals move—"How would you flap as a bird? What would you do as a jaguar? How would a rhino move?"—and come up with action words for their answers.

Members of the instructional team are convinced that such projects are an important use of instructional time.

"There are kids who struggle academically but feel good about themselves because we do other things," says Broussard. "The arts let you learn through so many different modalities.... It becomes so much more tangible and real to them that it's almost a painless learning experience."

"Every new artist we study, I have to do research on... A lot of times, first-grade teachers don't have to do that. If you have to go on the Internet and do research to share with your kids, then you remember what it's like to be a learner," says Broussard.

"Our kids have to learn how to take pencil-and-paper tests—and they have to learn how to take them well," says Riedlinger. "But that's not how I measure the real learning going on. I think you can measure that by sitting in a classroom and watching the kids grow over the years and watching them take ownership of their own learning."

Reynaud likes the dual role that the arts play in his teaching: "In your classroom, you're constantly looking for new things to make what you're doing vivid and exciting and challenging and meaningful and fun—and the arts are good materials... But part of what we do with the arts is say that the arts are valuable on their own."

About This Program, cont'd.

Arts Education Standards Addressed in This Program

Dance

- **Content Standard 2**—Understanding choreographic principles, processes, and structures
Achievement Standards for Grades K–4:
 - Improvise, create, and perform dances based on their own ideas and concepts from other sources
- **Content Standard 7**—Making connections between dance and other disciplines
Achievement Standards for Grades K–4:
 - Create a dance project that reveals understanding of a concept or idea from another discipline (such as pattern in dance and science)

Music

- **Content Standard 6**—Listening to, analyzing, and describing music
Achievement Standards for Grades K–4:
 - Demonstrate perceptual skills by moving, by answering questions about, and by describing aural examples of music of various styles representing diverse cultures
- **Content Standard 8**—Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts
Achievement Standards for Grades K–4:
 - Identify ways in which the principles and subject matter of other disciplines taught in the school are interrelated with those of music (e.g., foreign languages: singing songs in various languages; language arts: using the expressive elements of music in interpretive readings; mathematics: mathematical basis of values of notes, rests, and time signatures; science: vibration of strings, drum heads, or air columns generating sounds used in music; geography: songs associated with various countries or regions)

Theatre

- **Content Standard 1**—Script writing by planning and recording improvisations based on personal experience and heritage, imagination, literature, and history
Achievement Standards for Grades K–4:
 - Improvise dialogue to tell stories, and formalize improvisations by writing or recording the dialogue
- **Content Standard 2**—Acting by assuming roles and interacting in improvisations
Achievement Standards for Grades K–4:
 - Assume roles that exhibit concentration and contribute to the action of classroom dramatizations based on personal experience and heritage, imagination, literature, and history
- **Content Standard 3**—Designing by visualizing and arranging environments for classroom dramatizations
Achievement Standards for Grades K–4:
 - Visualize environments and construct designs to communicate locale and mood using visual elements (such as space, color, line, shape, texture) and aural aspects using a variety of sound sources

About This Program, cont'd.

- **Content Standard 4**—Directing by planning classroom dramatizations

Achievement Standards for Grades K–4:

- Collaboratively plan and rehearse improvisations and demonstrate various ways of staging classroom dramatizations
 - **Content Standard 6**—Comparing and connecting art forms by describing theatre, dramatic media (such as film, television, and electronic media), and other art forms
- Achievement Standards for Grades K–4:*
- Compare how ideas and emotions are expressed in theatre, dramatic media, dance, music, and visual arts

Visual Art

- **Content Standard 2**—Using knowledge of structures and functions

Achievement Standards for Grades K–4:

- Describe how different expressive features and organizational principles cause different responses
 - **Content Standard 6**—Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines
- Achievement Standards for Grades K–4:*
- Identify connections between the visual arts and other disciplines in the curriculum

Source: *National Standards for Arts Education*, published by Music Educators National Conference (MENC). Copyright 1994 by MENC. Used by permission. The complete National Arts Standards and additional materials relating to the Standards are available from MENC, The National Association for Music Education, 1806 Robert Fulton Drive, Reston, VA 20191, telephone 800-336-3768.

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Viewing Suggestions

Who Should Watch This Program

“Developing an Arts-Based Unit” is a useful model for multiclassroom, multigrade, and multi-arts planning, though it also can be a model for single-classroom work. It can be used in professional development sessions for mixed groups of classroom teachers, arts specialist teachers, and administrators to develop more effective ways of sharing ideas and skills, planning a unit, and organizing tasks.

Before Watching

This group has developed projects together for several years and has learned to work together well. Look for instances where good communication among planning team members makes it easy to anticipate and avoid problems:

- What barriers might you encounter in developing a project with teachers of other grades or subjects?
- How could you anticipate and avoid these barriers?
- How would you assess this kind of unit—by paper-and-pencil tests or other methods?

Watching the Program

Watch “Developing an Arts-Based Unit” (30 minutes).

Suggested Activities and Discussion

Consider the following questions for reflection:

- Do you believe that it is valuable to teach the arts for art’s sake? How would you convince a parent, teacher, or principal of the value of teaching the arts?
- Consider asking your students to create a “program” for a performance or film or television show they’ve seen. What are all those jobs? Who does them in school performances? Could they be careers?
- One of the teachers in this program shares her reason for being a teacher—to help the children who need it most. Why did *you* become a teacher?

Below are some additional ways you can build on the ideas in this program.

Professional Development Sessions for Teachers

- Identify the skills that would help teachers work together on a multigrade or multi-arts team. Plan a workshop or course around these skills.
- Partner with a community arts institution to develop a workshop or seminar to help teachers use the Internet or other tools to research artists and works of art in various art forms.
- Organize a skills-sharing session for members of your planning team.

Additional Resources

Related Video Library Programs

Watch these programs for more information on ideas explored in “Developing an Arts-Based Unit”:

- Expanding the Role of the Arts Specialist
- Teaching Dance
- Teaching Theatre
- Students Create a Multi-Arts Performance

Web Resources

The Arts in Every Classroom video library Web site: www.learner.org/channel/libraries/artsineveryclassroom

The Arts in Every Classroom workshop Web site: www.learner.org/channel/workshops/artsineveryclassroom

Standards for the Arts

National Standards for Arts Education: www.ed.gov/pubs/ArtsStandards.html

State Standards for the Arts: www.ncsl.org/programs/arts/artsed/artedhom.htm

Related Organizations and Resources

Getty Museum: www.getty.edu/museum

Getty ArtsEdNet: www.getty.edu/artsednet

Southeast Center for Education in the Arts: www.sceaonline.com

Who’s Dancin’ Now?: www.pbs.org/wnet/dancin

Information on Jan Brueghel: www.getty.edu/art/collections/bio/a696-1.html

Information on the Painting *The Entry of the Animals Into Noah’s Ark*:
www.getty.edu/art/collections/objects/o1034.html

Information on Igor Stravinsky: www.wwnorton.com/classical/composers/strvnsky.htm

Print Resources

Where’s the Bear? A Look-and-Find Book, J. Paul Getty Museum, 1997 (which includes a reproduction of Brueghel’s *The Entry of the Animals Into Noah’s Ark*)