

Borrowing From the Arts To Enhance Learning

Length: 30 minutes

Featured Schools

School:	Maria Mitchell Elementary School
Location:	Denver, Colorado
In this program:	Penny Suazo, fourth- and fifth-grade teacher
School:	Ridgeway Elementary School
Location:	White Plains, New York
In this program:	Monica Bermis, third-grade teacher
School:	Browns Mill Elementary School
Location:	Lithonia, Georgia
In this program:	Hazel Lucas, fifth-grade social studies teacher

About This Program

In this program, three teachers enhance learning in their classrooms by using arts-based techniques to engage their students.

At **Maria Mitchell Elementary School** in Denver, Colorado, Penny Suazo raises achievement in her class of active fourth- and fifth-grade boys who have a variety of special needs. Many of her students are English-language learners, some have cognitive delays, and some are identified by their teacher as gifted. Her challenge, says Suazo, is to see that “the gifted kids learn as much as they can and the kids with cognitive delays are not left behind.” To meet this challenge, she fills each lesson with color, rhythm, movement, drama, and other sensory experiences:

- She has the boys create a photo collage of each U.S. state in the shape of that state, fitting the finished collages onto a giant map. Each collage consists of pictures the students found in magazines that depict a state’s industry, economy, ecology, and population. They learn about the state and also about shapes and proportions.
- In a daily spelling exercise, the class and teacher call out letters in a rhythmic chant, clapping their hands in time. They stop frequently to engage in discussion about a word, its form, or its meaning. Suazo calls this exercise “Word Tap.”
- The class explores math and science concepts and develops spatial and problem-solving skills by using a set of classroom building materials called Zomes to construct bridges and other structures. If Zomes are not in your school budget, the same concepts can be tackled with dry spaghetti or plastic straws and marshmallows.
- To test understanding of reading materials, Suazo has the class read the page backwards. This tells her whether the students know the actual meaning of words or are using context clues to help them discern specific words. She also acts out certain concepts to help her students understand the meaning of idiomatic words or phrases.

At **Ridgeway Elementary School** in White Plains, New York, third-grade teacher Monica Bermiss has her students act out skits to help them better understand the concept of cause and effect:

- First, she acts out the concept herself, by pretending to stumble. She asks students to identify the cause (not looking where she was going) and the effect (the stumble).
- Students in groups then mime brief skits of cause-and-effect situations, such as “Children are teasing the child; the child teases back.” The rest of the children discuss what they see.

Bermiss believes this is an improved teaching practice from the previous year, when the children simply read about cause and effect and discussed it.

“It is a reading skill presented in a different way to get them to have a different understanding,” she says. “The children I had last year looked to me for a response about their work. Children this year get positive reinforcement from each other more because we’re listening to each other, looking at each other, saying, ‘You really did a great job.’”

At **Browns Mill Elementary School** in Lithonia, Georgia, Hazel Lucas integrates visual art into her fifth-grade social studies classes:

- As a culminating project for a unit on family history, students create personal “quilts” consisting of images and items that are important to them—for example, a favorite compact disk, a photo of a pet, or a trading card of a favorite baseball player. To lay out their quilts, students refer to principles of art and design that they have learned, such as repetition and composition. Individual student collages are assembled into a class “quilt” that hangs at the front of the room.
- Lucas concludes by having the students reflect on the project, asking them why it was important to do it, how it illustrates their personalities, and how an artist might approach the project. When she asks the children if they feel that they are artists, their answer is an enthusiastic “yes.”

About This Program, cont'd.

Arts Education Standards Addressed in This Program

Visual Art (Maria Mitchell Elementary School)

- **Content Standard 3**—Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas

Achievement Standards for Grades K–4:

- Select and use subject matter, symbols, and ideas to communicate meaning

Music (Maria Mitchell Elementary School)

- **Content Standard 2**—Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music

Achievement Standards for Grades K–4:

- Echo short rhythms and melodic patterns

Theatre (Ridgeway Elementary School)

- **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

Visual Art (Browns Mill Elementary School)

- **Content Standard 3**—Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas

Achievement Standards for Grades K–4:

- Select and use subject matter, symbols, and ideas to communicate meaning

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.

Other Standards Addressed in This Program

Geography (Maria Mitchell Elementary School)

- **Content Standard 1**—Understand the characteristics and uses of maps, globes, and other geographic tools and technologies

Achievement Standards for Grades 3–5:

- Knows the basic elements of maps and globes (e.g., title, legend, cardinal and intermediate directions, scale, grid, principal parallels, meridians, projection)

Mathematics (Maria Mitchell Elementary School)

- **Content Standard 1**—Effectively use a variety of strategies in the problem-solving process

Achievement Standards for Grades K–2:

- Represent problems using physical objects

Achievement Standards for Grades 3–5:

- Constructs physical representations for complex problems

About This Program, cont'd.

Language Arts (Maria Mitchell Elementary School)

- **Content Standard 5**—Demonstrate competence in the general skills and strategies of the reading process

Achievement Standards for Grades K–2:

- Create mental pictures for concrete information one has read

Achievement Standards for Grades 3–5:

- Effectively decodes unknown words using a variety of context clues

Language Arts (Ridgeway Elementary School)

- **Content Standard 5**—Demonstrate competence in the general skills and strategies of the reading process

Achievement Standards for Grades K–2:

- Create mental pictures for concrete information one has read

History (Browns Mill Elementary School)

- **Content Standard 1**—Understand family life now and in the past and family life in various places long ago

Achievement Standards for Grades 3–4:

- Understands the ways that families long ago expressed and transmitted their beliefs and values through oral tradition, literature, songs, art, religion, community celebrations, mementos, food, and language

Source: Kendall, J. S., Marzano, R. J. *Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K–12 Education*, 3rd edition. Copyright 2000, Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning. www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks. Reprinted with permission.

Viewing Suggestions

Who Should Watch This Program

“Borrowing From the Arts To Enhance Learning” shows students involved in active learning experiences through the use of arts-based elements such as movement, rhythm, symbols, and design. These ideas can enhance learning in any classroom.

Arts-based techniques can be particularly effective in classrooms such as Penny Suazo’s, where some or all of the students have special needs. Thus, teachers of special education students, English-language learners, or mixed student populations all can benefit from seeing this program in a professional development setting.

Other audiences for this program might include:

- classroom teachers, arts specialist teachers, arts specialists, and special education teachers, to build effective collaborations, and
- parents, school administrators, or government officials, to help build support for arts-based programming or funding.

Before Watching

This program presents three approaches to using arts-based learning in general classrooms:

- Penny Suazo uses arts elements to enhance student learning across the curriculum and to build basic skills, such as critical thinking, teamwork, and problem solving.
- Monica Bermiss uses techniques of acting and role-play to enhance story-telling skills.
- Hazel Lucas uses a culminating visual art project in her social studies class to encourage student self-expression and for reflection on a family history unit.

As you watch this program, look for ways in which each teacher’s approach engages students and impacts their learning. Are there situations in which one approach would be more effective than another? Are there opportunities to use any of them together?

Finally, would you consider these methods to be teaching arts subjects as core subject areas or integrating the arts with other subject areas? How are these approaches different? Can you find examples of each in this program?

Watching the Program

Watch “Borrowing From the Arts To Enhance Learning” (30 minutes).

Viewing Suggestions, cont'd.

Suggested Activities and Discussion

Consider the following questions for reflection:

- How can you use techniques from the arts to reach students who have difficulties with reading and spelling?
- Are there other ways you can incorporate the arts into your classroom?
- How do the arts provide a forum for student inquiry that can enhance learning in other subjects?
- How could you use the arts as a way to ask questions that would deepen your students' learning about other subjects?

Below are some additional ways you can build on the ideas in this program in a variety of school and community settings.

Professional Development Sessions for Teachers

- Consider a unit of study that you will be using this year. Examine one or two lessons for opportunities to use movement, rhythm, imagery, and role playing to help make your teaching more effective.
- Make a list of the challenges and special skills of each child in your classroom. How could you use techniques from the arts to bridge language barriers or developmental gaps? How would each child benefit from opportunities for self-expression and reflection?

Classroom Instruction

- Invite a painter, actor, musician, storyteller, or other artist to sit in on some of your classes. Invite the artist to identify opportunities for you to incorporate arts-based activities or techniques.
- Build in opportunities for students to reflect on what they have learned at the end of each lesson or at the end of the day.

Curriculum-Planning Sessions

- Consider how you might incorporate techniques from the arts into assessments.
- Include an arts specialist teacher in your planning session. With the specialist, plan how you can include more elements of the arts in your daily teaching.
- Use the Internet to explore resources for arts-based or whole-brain learning.

Additional Resources

Related Video Library Programs

Watch these programs for more information on ideas explored in “Borrowing From the Arts To Enhance Learning”:

- What Is Arts Education?
- How Do You Know They’re Learning?
- Expanding the Role of the Arts Specialist
- Developing an Arts-Based Unit
- Working With Local Artists
- Collaborating With a Community Resource
- Bringing Artists to Your Community

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

Organizations Mentioned in This Program

Denver Public Schools: www.denver.k12.co.us

Related Organizations and Resources

The Creative Classroom: www.creativeclassroom.org

Teachers Net Lesson Exchange: Word Wall Activity List: <http://teachers.net/lessons/posts/1138.html>

Zometool: www.zometool.com

Recommended by Hazel Lucas

Getty ArtsEdNet: www.getty.edu/artsednet

Michael C. Carlos Museum, Emory University: www.cc.emory.edu/CARLOS/carlos.html

Education World: www.educationworld.com

Eyes on Art: www.kn.pacbell.com/wired/art/art.html

High Museum, Woodruff Arts Center: www.woodruff-arts.org

Incredible Art Department: www.artswire.org/kenroar

Mark Kistler’s Imagination Station: www.draw3d.com

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

Notes
