

Time to Create

Hands-On Explorations in Process Art for Young Children



Christie Burnett
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by Christie Burnett

Dedication

For Immy and AJ—may you always find time and space to dream

Acknowledgements

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Christie Burnett

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Foreword


by **MaryAnn F. Kohl**

How rich and rewarding the young child's life becomes when art is an important part of the learning process! Art gives every child an opportunity to be individually creative and original, to plan and test ideas, to wonder and explore, and most important, to imagine and to think.

Christie Burnett offers us pages filled with creative art ideas for young children—ideas she has tested, observed, and fine-tuned for success and appeal. What I most appreciate about her work is that she helps us understand the difference between process art and what most people call crafts. It is process art upon which she focuses most strongly. For the purposes of this book, process art is defined as open-ended creativity and exploration of materials; craft is a product-oriented use of materials. Crafts have value within certain contexts, for certainly they ask children to follow directions and complete a project—important skills. But process art encourages children to learn how materials work and behave, to test and try new ideas, and to think! Exploration and learning by doing is a developmentally natural and appropriate way for young children to learn.

I have long been a proponent of process art. In this well-organized, inspiring, and creative book are lots of creative suggestions and ideas that will meet children's needs and encourage them to explore. You can fully expect children will often love their products, too; but, it will be the process that challenges their minds while delighting their sense of aesthetics.

Time to Create: Hands-On Explorations in Process Art for Young Children will bring art to children in ways that foster natural creativity. Children will build communication, self-expression, emotional security, and problem-solving skills. Process art opens a door to the mind where exploration, discovery, and imagination are praised and valued. The end result of all this exploration and imagining is a child who can think and has confidence to look about his world, open to possibilities and wonder.



INTRODUCTION

Children and Art

We want our children to grow into intelligent, socialized adults who make meaningful contributions to their communities. We put a lot of thought, time, and effort into ensuring they develop academically, socially, and even physically, but often put much less emphasis on their creative development. Art experiences provide for a child's development well beyond learning the names of colors or how to draw with a pencil. Well-chosen art experiences offer learning and development opportunities in many areas:

Cognitive skills

- Problem-solving
- Planning
- Trial and error
- Matching attributes
- Patterning
- Sequencing
- Understanding spatial relationships
- Measurement

Language skills

- Communicating both existing knowledge and new ideas
- Symbolic representations of ideas
- Development of vocabulary
- Visual memory

Physical skills

- Fine motor control
- Eye-hand coordination
- Gross motor control

Emotional skills

- Self-expression
- Perseverance
- A sense of self-worth

In order for this development to take place, young children need both time and opportunities to regularly create with a range of art materials. Give your child lots of opportunities to express her unique self and to explore.

In creating with children, the terms *art* and *craft* are often confused. Craft typically involves reproducing an idea or practicing a technique (for example, the initial stages of learning to crochet or knit). Art, however, provides an opportunity for the child to express his individual creativity. Art includes an element of originality as the child's unique response is expressed with open-ended materials. Making art with children is less about the end product (or what it looks like) and more about the process of doing.

I have worked with many parents who are reluctant to offer young children creative materials, as they are concerned about the time these experiences take to prepare and the mess that will result. However, children need very little to be creative or artistic: They will often find joy in a simple paintbrush or crayon and a surface to embellish. Extending their creativity involves expanding the range of materials and surfaces provided, and allowing regular opportunities to express their own ideas and understandings—opportunities to create art.

Children's art is about process above product, about feeling free to create, and about visually sharing their own thoughts and feelings. **Time to Create** will help you to foster children's creativity, allowing you to dip in at a moment's notice and find new ways to engage and involve them in creating wonderfully individual works of art.

Christie Burnett



Reasons Why We Don't Do Art with Children

- I am just not creative or artistic.
- It doesn't look like my child is learning a whole lot.
- It's so messy.
- I don't have the time.
- It takes longer to set up than my child spends creating.
- I don't have the space.
- I don't have the resources.

Reasons Why We Should Do Art with Children

- Art experiences provide important sensory stimulation for young children. A wide range of sensory experiences (touch, sight, sound, smell, and taste) assist babies, toddlers, and preschoolers in developing brain connections essential to later learning. The more regular these experiences, the more these brain connections are developed and reinforced.
- Art provides a vehicle for children to freely and safely express their own ideas and emotions. With thoughtful encouragement, art experiences can be tools for children to communicate what they are learning.
- A child's creative response can tell us a lot about a child and her ideas, thoughts, emotions, and understanding of the world.
- Art experiences in childhood—and, importantly, our attitudes toward them—will influence how a child views her own artistic ability and the level of creative confidence the child has as an adult. What we do now impacts a child's lifelong self-perception as a creative individual.
- Art experiences involve children in communicating symbolically, an important understanding for learning to read and write.
- Being creative requires children to organize their ideas and use a range of thinking skills to manipulate materials and communicate their ideas.
- Many art experiences lay the foundation for a child's ongoing learning of many important language, mathematical, and physical concepts and skills.
- Creating art is fun!

Learning through Art with Infants and Toddlers

Babies and toddlers are continually absorbing information about their world through their senses. Sensory experiences impact directly upon the developing brain and its capacity for lifelong learning. These experiences create new brain connections and strengthen existing ones. The opportunity to explore with age-appropriate artistic materials is the perfect way to engage a young child's senses. As he pushes paint around a page with a stubby brush, feels a chubby crayon in his hand, or bangs upon the tabletop to make handprints, brain development is occurring.

It is important for adults to remember that an infant's or toddler's initial responses to a new creative medium are about exploring the materials. Young children need regular time to explore without the pressure of having to make an end product—and adults must resist the urge to ask, "What is it?" At some stage, toddlers may begin to label their own artwork. This is a first step toward understanding that marks on a page have meaning, which is important to later reading and writing development. Consider the example to the right:

A toddler making circles in the paint with her finger spontaneously says, "Beach."

An adult responds, "What did you see at the beach?"

The toddler replies, "Waves. (pause) Splash."

This simple interaction demonstrates a 21-month-old making an association between experimenting with blue paint and a recent excursion to the beach. The painting experience was not set up to make a painting of the beach; it was simply an opportunity to play with paint and experience the wonder that is glossy, painted color gliding across the page. The association was completely spontaneous and child initiated. She made the mental and verbal connections between the paint and her real-life experience.



Learning through Art with Preschoolers

It is far easier for a child to record his ideas creatively when there are real-life experiences to draw on. A child who has touched, fed, and ridden a horse is much more likely to purposefully use an artistic medium to represent this experience than a child who has only seen a picture of a horse in a book. This is especially relevant to preschool and kindergarten children who are just entering the initial stages of being developmentally able to manipulate familiar art materials to represent their ideas and understandings.

Children enjoy creating when they have new and exciting ideas to express. It is the combination of life experiences and the encouragement to express these ideas through a creative medium that involves children purposefully in artistic endeavors.



How do real experiences help a child to understand and represent his ideas?

You are walking as a family and see a brightly colored rainbow. You talk about the colors you can see and wonder aloud, asking, ***How did that rainbow get up into the sky?***

Later, at home, you remind your child about the experience of seeing the rainbow: ***Where do we see rainbows? When do we see rainbows? How do you think the rainbow gets up into the sky?***

You listen to your child's theories and ideas and accept them, even if they are different from the scientific facts you know about rainbows. You invite your child to draw (or paint or collage) his idea of how a rainbow gets into the sky. This is different from inviting him to simply draw or paint a rainbow. By observing and talking with your child as he draws, you gain further insight into what he already knows about rainbows. This places you in the best possible position to support him in the process of using a creative material to communicate his own theories and understanding, and to support future learning about the topic. The experience can then be used as a prompt to learn more about the science of rainbows, maybe with a visit to the library for books to guide further research.

This process may feel unusual to your child at first, but repeated opportunities will help him to see that art is a useful way of sharing his ideas.

Accepting Children's Artistic Attempts

"But I can't draw a train. I don't know how."

It is amazing how quickly a child can lose confidence in her own creative abilities. Encourage your child to express her ideas, without judgment from others. There really is no one right way to draw, for example, a tree. Many people will draw a tree to look something like a brown stick with a green cotton ball on top. In reality, trees are all shapes, sizes, and colors. Support your child in her efforts to create in the way that makes sense to her.

To support a child's developing artistic confidence, be encouraging even when it is difficult to see what a child's creation represents. Children need to feel that their ideas will be accepted and respected; mastery comes through repeated attempts. The masters of drawing and painting did not paint an image only once; they revisited an image over and over again, representing it each time in different forms, from different angles, with different materials. Children need this same opportunity to try many different ways of creating and representing an idea without feeling pressured to produce in the one "right" way.



*I paint objects as I think them,
not as I see them.
—Pablo Picasso*

Creating alongside Children

Although it is important for children to see adults using creative tools to represent their own ideas and to see that drawing can be enjoyable and useful, be mindful of how your presence might hamper a child's creative efforts. Depending on the situation and materials at hand, your response to a request to "make with me" might include the following:

- Drawing alongside the child rather than drawing for her. If she needs help to express her own ideas, use questioning as a way of guiding the child's attempts.
- Imitating the types of marks the child is making. If she is exploring with spots, swirls, shapes, or blocks of color, do the same on your own page.
- Using the materials for pattern making rather than representing actual objects.
- Supporting verbally with questioning and encouragement, especially older children engaged in a creative experience that has been specifically designed for them to creatively represent a particular idea.
- Buying time by saying that you are still formulating your idea, thinking about what or how you want to draw. This works to give the child time to continue working on her own masterpiece without adult influence.
- Presenting an object a little differently. Remind yourself that there is never one way to create.

Encouraging Reluctant Artists

How do parents and educators work with a child who is reluctant to create, either because of a complete lack of interest or confidence or a fear of getting it wrong?

Ideas to Help a Child Who Isn't Interested

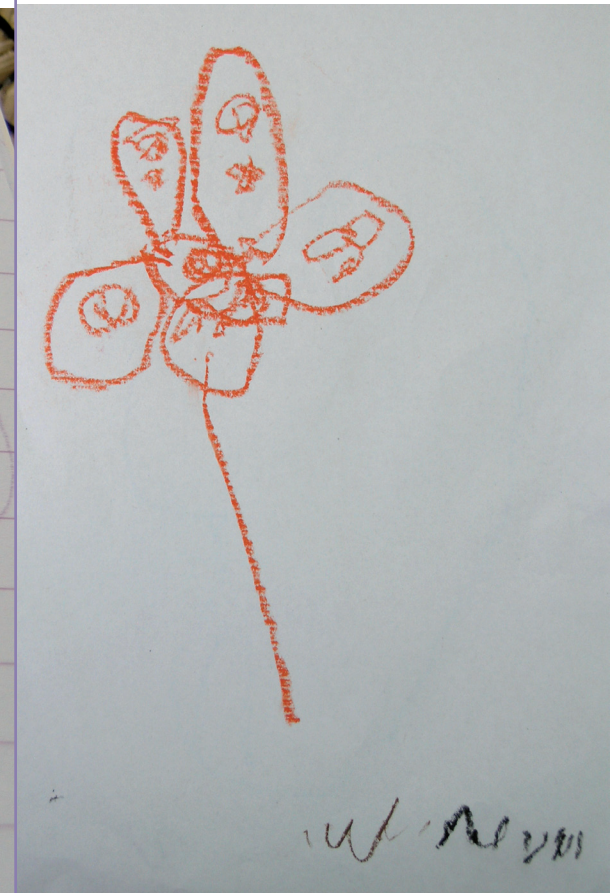
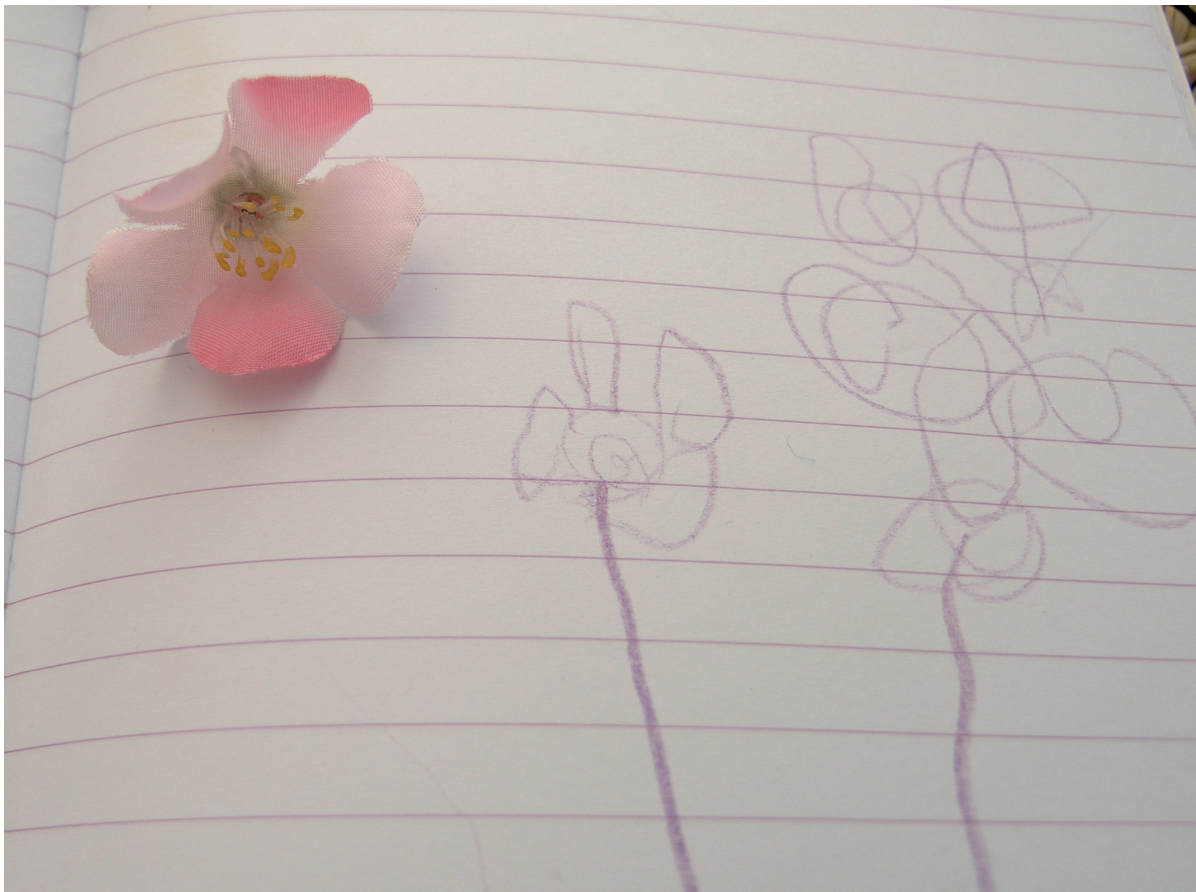
- Use a child's interests to motivate him to create. For example, a child who is interested in superheroes might like to create a box sculpture of Gotham City. Or, try drawing treasure maps with a child who loves pirates.
- Set a creative challenge. Ask, for example, "Can you use these materials to make a bridge to get from one side of the river to the other?"
- Choose materials and experiences most likely to engage the individual child. A child who doesn't like to draw pictures might like to draw a map or diagram. A child who doesn't like modeling with playdough might prefer to hammer or glue balsa wood pieces into a sculpture.
- Store art materials where they can be seen. You never know when a child might just notice them and ask to make something.
- Make the experience more social by inviting other children to join in, such as during a play date.

- Look for opportunities to take art outside, such as painting on large sheets of paper attached to the fence or drawing with chalk on the pavement.



Ideas to Help a Child Who Lacks Confidence

- Verbally help the child to focus on the task: "Which part of the flower would you like to draw first?"
- Encourage the child by continuing to ask relevant questions or making observations through each step of the process: "What will the pirate ship need to help it sail?"
- Use a photograph or model (for example, an animal figurine) as a visual aid.



Talking to Children about Their Art-Making Experiences

There is one golden rule to observe when talking with a child about her artwork—NEVER assume you know the story behind the creation. Try to avoid asking, “What is it?” or guessing what she has created, as this can be very discouraging if you are wrong (especially for a child who already lacks creative confidence). Instead, try encouraging the child to reflect upon her art making:

- Make a broad observation about what you see: “Wow, look at all those swirls,” or “That is very bright pink you have mixed.”
- Positively recognize the child’s efforts: “The tube was really tricky to attach, but you stuck with it and made it work!”
- Talk to the child about the way she is using the art materials: “That is an interesting way to use the crayon,” or, “How did you mix that shade of orange?”
- Ask open-ended questions that encourage thinking and discussion: “How did you do this part?” or, “What were you thinking about when you painted this?”



- Help your child to reflect upon her experience of using the artistic medium: “It’s interesting to try using the clay in different ways,” or, “What did you enjoy the most about the fingerpaint?”

Wait for answers and do not pressure children to talk, especially when they are engaged in the artistic process of creating. Allow your young child to enjoy a range of creative encounters as part of his growth, development, and learning. Our role as parents and educators is to provide the space, time, and materials for children to create, and to encourage and support them as they respond and share, each in his own unique way.

Choosing the Right Art Activities for Your Child

Before starting an art project or introducing a new art medium, consider whether or not the experience is relevant to the child's interests and level of development. To do this, try asking yourself the following questions:

1. What is my motivation for choosing this project? Is this project likely to be of real interest to my child? Sometimes we see an idea and think, "Oh, that is so cute!" or "I would love to try that." Unfortunately, this does not always mean that the idea is within the developmental capabilities of the individual child or even of interest to him.

2. Is my child likely to find this activity fun and engaging? Is it related to his interests or recent real-life experiences? Projects that are related to topics or ideas that fascinate a child or to experiences he enjoys provide a positive basis for engagement and are more motivating to the child.

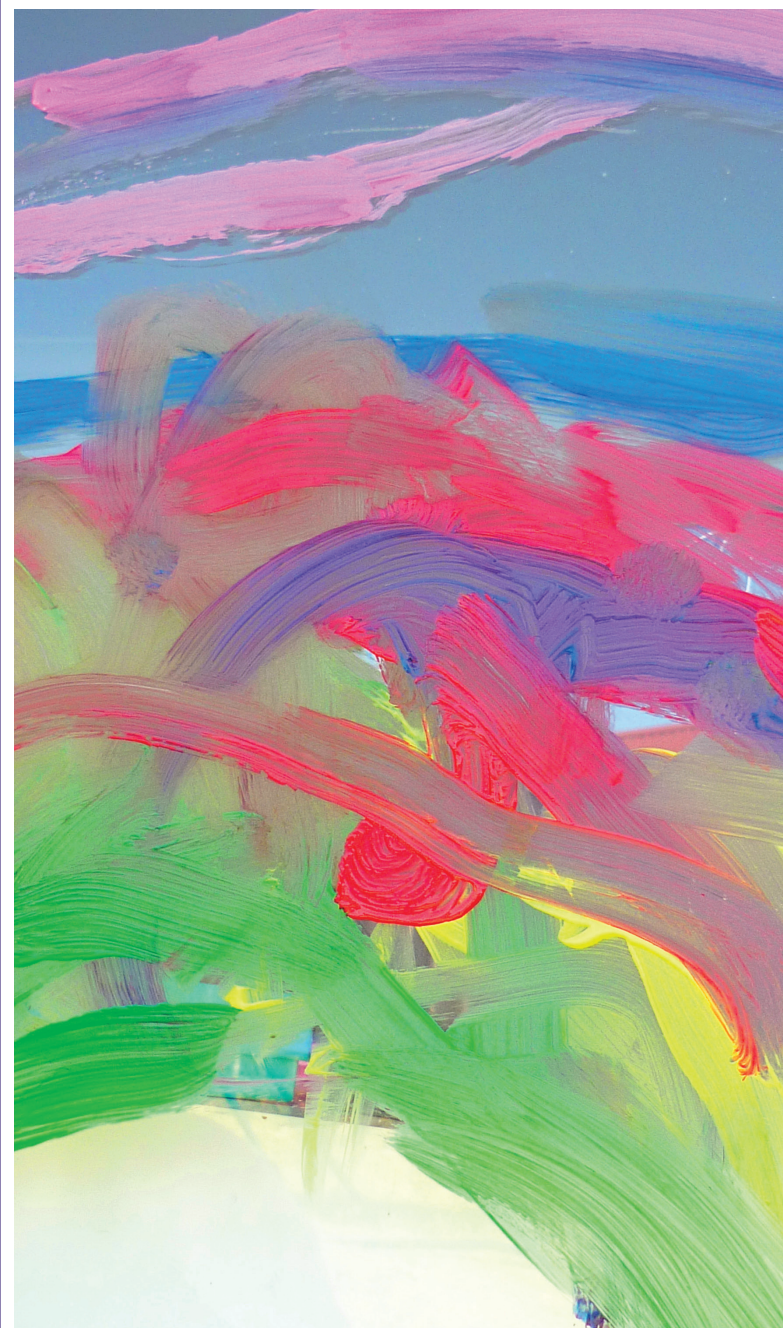
3. How much of this project can my child do independently? Children's art should be about the child making art. If you, the adult, are required to undertake 90 percent of the project yourself because it is too difficult for

the child to complete, then this may not be the best project to choose. A project that is too difficult can cause frustration and turn a child off from exploring creative activities at all.

4. Does this project allow my child to respond individually, to express his own ideas? Will the result be unique to my child?

Well-chosen art experiences are those that allow a child to use creative materials to express his own unique ideas in his own way. An art experience that focuses on the end results of five different children's efforts all looking exactly the same provides little room for creativity and individualism and raises a question about whether it can really be labeled art.

Always remember—*unique, individual, creative, experiential, and process* are all-important words when it comes to children creating art.





Five Quick and Easy Ways to Mix It Up

Sometimes we get stuck in a rut, offering children the same art materials in the same way, and we wonder why they don't seem as enthusiastic to create anymore. This is the perfect time to mix it up! Changing one little thing can often make a big difference in reinvigorating the creative process for your child.

1. Change the surface.

We don't always need to create on paper. Why not paint on a mirror or a window? Or, collage onto a cardboard box or block of wood? If your child always works on a tabletop, try pinning paper to an easel or taping it to a window.

2. Change the color selection.

Think about ways to change up the color selection—offer soft, pale pastels or shades of one color, or present only warm (or cool) colors.

3. Add texture.

Sand is a wonderful substance and can be easily added to glue, paint, and dough to provide a change in texture. Or, try sawdust, dried lavender, or dried rose petals. Look for other ways to add interest with texture—soft, hard, smooth, rough, wet, or dry.

4. Change the size.

Use a large canvas or roll of paper to create BIG! Or, go small with a tiny piece of fabric or paper.

5. Make it interest based.

Motivate your child by choosing a creative project that fits well with his current interests.

Making Room for Art: Space to Create

Creating an art space within your home or classroom where children can work regularly on art projects helps them to learn what behavior is expected of them when working in that space and with art materials. Decide whether or not the materials within your art space will be available to your child at all times or only on request. Set and reinforce reasonable boundaries, and make sure your child is clear about your expectations. Depending upon the age of your child, you might choose to keep supplies that require more assistance out of reach, and those they can use independently easily accessible. Having clear expectations and reminding your child regularly of the correct use of the materials and space should help to make the experience less stressful for both child and adult, especially for those who are uncomfortable with the mess that making art can generate.

Art spaces do not need to be large or particularly fancy. Space to work and a place nearby to store art materials will suffice.

- The space can be indoors or undercover outdoors.



- Ideally, the space should have room for a table to work on; a child-sized easel; and a cupboard, shelves, or set of drawers dedicated to storing art materials.
- For many families, an art space needs to work as a multipurpose space, such as the family dining table. Consider the quickest and easiest way to switch from one purpose to the other. In the dining table scenario, one possible solution would be to keep art materials and cleanup supplies ready for use in a dedicated art cupboard within the same room to make setting up and packing away as quick and easy as possible.
- Consider displaying prints or posters of artworks by famous artists within the space for inspiration.

Organizing Art Materials

The quality of art materials available to a child positively impacts the satisfaction found in creative experiences. When investing in good-quality materials, consider how these materials will be stored. Establishing a storage system that is easy to maintain will help your child to assist you in keeping both the art space and materials organized.

- Transparent containers help you to quickly and easily identify what is inside each one.
- Consider storing art materials in individual containers grouped according to type. For example, keep collage materials in transparent storage containers together on one shelf or in one drawer.
- Small baskets, glass jars, and decorative tins or boxes provide useful storage and also look great (which is important if your art space is within a family living space).
- Include a good-sized box or tub for storing useful recyclables.
- Magazine holders are handy for storing recycled magazines and store catalogs, and for books and magazines about art.
- An over-the-door hanging shoe rack with transparent pockets can be a useful investment for storing art materials, allowing you to keep mediums requiring supervision up high and out of reach; those that your child is free to use independently can be placed in the lower pockets.



Displaying Children's Art

One surefire way to show children that you value their artwork, creativity, and learning is to incorporate space for displaying completed pieces within your home or classroom. Incorporating the display space into your child's art space may be one possibility. Alternatively, consider creating a gallery along a hallway or within a shared family space. Once you have chosen a space for your display, there are plenty of hanging options available.

- One of the simplest is to hang string, twine, or ribbon between two hooks, attaching the completed work with miniature clothespins.
- A cork or fabric pin board or a magnetic whiteboard make regularly changing the artwork quick and easy.
- Mounting each piece of artwork on a piece of card stock of the same color takes a little more time but creates a consistent look that can be matched to the décor of the room.
- Displaying artwork in a collection of photo frames may be more time intensive, but it creates a real gallery feel, especially for special pieces. Add small description cards naming the artwork, artist, date, and medium.



Storing Artwork

Children can be prolific artists, creating a mammoth amount of precious artwork over the course of a year, month, or even a day, and decisions often have to be made about which to keep and which to recycle.

It is important to keep those that have special significance. They may have been a “first,” such as the first time a child drew a person; they may record an important event or keen interest, or they may even demonstrate a new understanding or mastery of a new skill. Whatever your reason for keeping a piece of artwork, make an effort to date it and note any special significance about the piece.

Once the difficult decision of what to keep has been made, the next step is to find a storage system that works best for you. Consider the following ideas:

- Photograph completed works, print them out, and add them to an album, journaling with the child’s name, date, and the story behind the work. Alternatively, photographs can be compiled into a digitally created photo book and printed commercially. Children love to revisit their own creations, and it is very easy to do when they are kept in this form.
- Keep artwork in large storage boxes or tubs (big enough to lay large-sized paper flat). This form of storage will allow you space to store some three-dimensional creations, such as collages or slab clay work, as well.
- Allocate a binder or large art portfolio for each child’s art. Larger paper-based artwork can be folded to fit in a plastic sleeve. Photograph three-dimensional works, and add the printed copies to the file.
- Purchase large spiral-bound sketchbooks for your child to draw and paint in. Label each new book with the date your child began using it and the date of completion.
- Scan paper-based artwork, reduce the scans in size, and combine multiple creations into an image collage. Having them commercially printed onto canvas or framing the printed compilation is a wonderful way to preserve and enjoy your child’s creativity.
- Share the joy of children’s art by using paper-based artwork as wrapping paper, on greeting cards, or as part of a gift.

Supporting Children's Creativity

Time to Create is about seeing the potential of children's art—the unlimited potential for learning, communicating, feeling, and expressing. The ideas within each of the creative medium sections and the included materials lists are intended as a springboard for inspiring your young artist.

As an adult supporting young children's creativity, a few final reminders:

- A child will have a much harder time drawing, painting, or otherwise creating that which he has never seen up close, touched, tasted, heard, or smelled. Rich experiences in the world shared with people they love provide children with a wonderful beginning for creative experiences.
- Listen closely as children wonder aloud about what they see, think, and feel to help you better understand what they know and are learning about the big, wonderful world you inhabit together.
- Accept and respect all of a child's attempts to create as a reflection of her own unique thoughts and ideas at that moment in time.
- Take time to ask good questions—questions that really make a child think.
- Wait to hear a child's answers; don't answer for her or make her rush to respond.
- Provide a place where it is safe to dream, to be curious, and to express ideas freely.
- Provide children with lots of different opportunities to create with different materials, in different ways, and for different purposes.
- Provide an abundance of rich art materials.
- Provide time to create—regular, large, unhurried blocks of time.

Trust and learn from your young child and her interactions with these materials, and remember that above all else, it is the process and the learning that is most important. The final product is just a delightful by-product of these precious early moments of creativity.



**Forget stuffy,
structured craft
activities—young
children need time
to create!**

Perfect for children of any age and ability, the hands-on process-art explorations in **Time to Create** encourage discovery through a variety of art mediums, from rock drawing to shaving-cream color mixing.

With ideas for encouraging your creativity as well as your child's, advice for choosing the right art project, and suggestions for minimizing the mess, you and your child will be embarking on fun-to-do art explorations in no time!

Time to Create is packed with everyday opportunities for children to create and discover, to plan and test ideas, to wonder, and to explore the world around them.

Includes a wide variety of areas for art exploration:

- Drawing
- Painting
- Printmaking
- Collage
- Sculpture
- Textiles
- Digital Photography
- Natural Materials



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