



How to raise Creative Kids



HOW TO TALK TO KIDS ABOUT ART.

Matthew Rodgers

“Kids are not little adults. But they are professionals. Their job is to play, their job is to experiment, their job is to try different things.”

Chuck Jones (the guy who drew Bugs Bunny)

No matter the age, art making is personal. Let me say that again, art making is personal.

And that's why it can be hard to know how to talk about it, in a way that everyone is learning, and no one is getting hurt, or defeated about their art ability.

Young children naturally create. They love to draw and paint, and rarely can adults "tell" what they are drawing and or painting. In fact sometimes they're creating something that doesn't exist, and doesn't have a name, that's okay.

So how can you talk to you kids about their art in way that creates space for a conversation, allows your child the freedom to dream and be creative, and gives them the confidence to continue to create and decide what is and isn't good?

The first and easiest, is to not expect them to identify what they just drew or painted. Stay away from asking, what is that, or trying to identify it yourself by saying, oh you drew a dog, or a cat or a horse. Instead ask questions.

Questions to ask:

Can you tell me about your drawing? *(as they tell you about their drawing or painting, you can add in more specific questions based on what they are telling you. But work to keep your opinion out of it, and stay focused on asking them questions.)*

What is your favorite thing about the painting that you made?

Why is this your favorite?

How did you feel when you were making the piece of art?

As they are working, you want to try to keep your thoughts, feelings, and opinions out of the process and focus on understanding the child's.

While it can be tempting to do a lot of praising. Like I love your painting. Or I love that color. Try not to praise too often, and instead enjoy watching them explore and imagine. Each time you praise, you're telling them that , that choice was better than something else.

Things not to say:

" is it done yet?" (*they'll let you know*) While you will likely be tempted to stop them before their whole painting turns black, remember that for kids a big part of art making is about the process and not the end result. They're having fun, exploring, experimenting, and imagining. They'll tell you when they want a new piece of paper.)

" Who ever heard of a purple dog?" (*they will likely want to create things that don't exist and that's fine. While you're saying this might even be sarcastic, they likely won't understand , and will think that making a purple dog it wrong.*)

“What is it?”

” Try to be cleaner next time.... *sorry folks, but art making is messy, and usually a part of the process.* “

“Let me do it for you.” (*there’s nothing wrong with helping your child practice something that they’re having trouble with, or helping if they ask. But I suggest helping them on a separate piece of paper, and then allowing them to try on their own piece of paper.*)

When talking about their art, work to focus on colors, shapes, textures and lines, instead of what you ” think” it is.

You might say, I enjoy the repeated circles.

The first thing that I see in your work is....

If your child made several pieces throughout the day, you can ask them which one is their favorite. Or talk to them about where and how they wish to display their work.

The main thing, as hard as it , is to keep your opinion out of it. Ask questions , instead of giving answers.

When students ask if they’ll get an “A” I might ask:

– Do you think that it deserves an “A”. (they usually know)

When they ask if something is good.

I might respond, what do you think?

or , did you use the composition guidelines?

Most of the time, if you don't give an answer, they do have an answer and opinion.



10 Ways to help your child stay creative

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1. Talk about why rules exist and which ones to break

Children and students need to understand the reasons behind the rules. Have conversations about what the rules are, and why they exist both at home and at school. (*this is likely to be a challenge, as there are a lot that don't make sense*)

Rules and their relationship to creativity: to be creative your child is going to have push boundaries, solve problems and ask questions, in order to do this well, they need to understand what rules shouldn't be pushed or broken, and what rules can be ignored. they're going to need to learn how to play the system.

2. limit their time on the phone and computer.

Why? Well, there are a lot reasons, but constant checking inhibits daydreaming and getting into the flow state, both are important to coming up with creative ideas

3. allow/ encourage them to explore, and make mistakes.

While it can be hard not to jump in and redirect to ensure that your child gets the right answer, sometimes you need to allow them to fail, and problem solve through the failure.

One of my friends has a young son, who wants to be a construction worker. He dresses in the full uniform, hard hat and all. His construction site is located in their back yard, where he has successfully created a giant mud pit. It's not pretty, I can only imagine how messy he is most days when he returns from working in his mud pit. However the exploration that his parents are allowing him, is priceless. He's dreaming, imagining, building and solving problems. This in of itself makes that mud hole look like the most beautiful masterpiece.

4. don't give them everything that they want

Last week I was spending some time with my parents and we began reflecting on the cell phone (*I'm not sure you can actually call it that*) that I had in high school. Our parents were never much for making purchases to help my brother and I fit in with the latest trends.

Cell phones started to become popular and commonplace while I was in high school. All of my friends had one, and all were smaller than an index card. Mine on the other hand could be better compared to carrying around a brick. It was,

bulky, and was only allowed to be used in the case of an emergency. My friends were thrilled if for some reason I needed to pull out the giant phone, flip down the mouthpiece and call my parents, so thrilled that they never offered to let me borrow their phone. And because needing a ride home from school or sports practice was not viewed as an emergency (*meaning I better not use my giant phone*) I would call my dad collect, when it asked for me to state my name, I would say, "dad I need a ride home from school", he would then reject the call, leaving me to assume that he was on his way.

My brother and I learned as we were growing up that we didn't need all of the latest gadgets to survive or even to fit in. If we really wanted them, then we needed to figure out a way to afford them on our own. Creative people rarely, fit in. They're not hanging out or following the crowd, they're on the edges, where it's uncomfortable. The sooner that your children learn to hang out on the edges the better.

5. limit phrases like:

" I don't know how to draw."

" I'm not creative"

While you might feel this way, when kids hear this enough they begin to adopt those phrases as well. The reason that you aren't a great drawer is because over and over you said that you couldn't and eventually you began to believe that. You also never practiced. Artists are not good at their art or their craft simply because, they are good because they practice all

of the time. Trust me, if you saw me [weaving](#) for the first time, you would have told me that I didn't know how to weave, and that was the truth, I didn't. But after hours and years of practice I make it look simple.

6. create a space where they can be creative

Designate a creative space for them where they can make messes and explore, this is especially important if you're super neat. I've watched parents attempt to allow their child to be creative, then they go and tell them that they're holding the brush wrong, they shouldn't paint with the fingers, and ask the child to identify everything that they just painted. Then the child spills the water and it's all over.

Let them explore, there's a time and place to help them understand how to hold the brush, but it isn't now. If you want to talk to them about their painting, simply ask them to tell you about, but don't try to identify the objects (*they might not be anything real*) by asking to have each object named with something that actually exists, you're limiting their imagination. Remember everything that now exists at one point was only a crazy thought without a name in someone's head.

At some point in my childhood, I discovered that one could melt crayons on light bulbs (I loved melting things) I loved watching the colored wax melt, and seeing the lightbulb change colors. At the time, it seemed like a logical thing to do ,

and as an adult I assumed everyone had this experience as a child (I've been told that's not true) it turns out there aren't many parents that allow their children to melt crayons on lightbulbs. (my parents limited my melting to my desk light)

7. ask questions more than you give answers

This isn't easy, and it will test your patience, but it's important. If your child asks you if something looks right, don't give a yes or no, instead respond, do you think that it looks right? Or what do you like best about it? What don't you like about?

This will keep the conversation going, and much more learning will take place.

8. let them get the answer wrong

My parents were pretty good about letting me do my own thing. One year for an english project I decided that I needed to make a 3D mockingbird as part of a book report on To Kill a Mockingbird. I pulled out the chicken wire and paper mache and went for it. The bird just got bigger and bigger, it was to be hung on a bulletin board, there was no way that this was going to happen. I'm sure that as my parents watched me, they knew that this wasn't going to work, but that let me go, in fact the only time they helped , was when I discovered that I'd built the giant mockingbird with a live mouse trapped inside. At this point my dad had to step and do some surgery to let the mouse free.

Had they tried to redirect my giant bird making project the finished product may have turned out better, however I learned much more by having to problem solve on my own.

9. encourage independence

If they're going to remain creative, independence is a must. They'll need to learn how to go against the herd.

10. avoid coloring books and paint by number

If kids are never given either they'll be just as happy with a blank piece of paper and they'll begin to explore drawing and creating what they see around them. Coloring books also teach children symbols instead of them learning to see how things really look. If you're already using coloring books, don't panic, it's not the end of the world. Try to slowly fade them out and just replace them with blank sheets of paper.

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UNCOVERING THE REAL MISSION STATEMENT

THE UNSTANDARDIZED STANDARD

Uncovering the real mission statement

IGNORE THE MISSION STATEMENT

Want to get down to the heart of what a school is about, ignore the mission statement and have conversations, ask questions. Ask for concrete examples of how the mission statement is put into action.

Here's my teaching philosophy

Learning to be empathic through exploration, discovery, and creativity.

You don't need to ask for a copy of every teacher's philosophy, that's going to be a waste of your time, and it's likely that you aren't going to get it. But go ahead and ask for a few. The teachers that really know why they're teaching (*those are the ones that you want teaching your kid*) are going to be able to tell you pretty quickly. The rest will use a lot of educational terms that you don't understand. Please don't get me wrong here, there are a lot of great teachers out there, that are fighting a hard battle.

There is not a right or wrong philosophy, but a teacher that doesn't know why they're teaching, isn't going to be very effective.

Ask:

Why do you teach?

What is the purpose of what you teach?

What is the main goal of the school, and what things do you have in place to make that happen?

Does your school really value the arts?

a guide to uncovering if a school really values the arts or is just pretending.

Who should you ask? Administrators , school board members, art, music, and dance teachers.

What does creativity and divergent thinking mean to you?

Why do you believe that creativity is important?

Do you encourage your art, music, and dance teachers to include reading, writing, and math in their lessons? (you want a no here)

How is creativity brought into all of your classes?

Do you have any teachers that practice discovery learning, or design education?

How much time do you give to the arts each day?

PS: if they start jabbing about standardized test scores, forget the questions and walk out the door.



Creativity

Reading List

Out of our Minds; Learning to Be Creative : Ken Robinson

The Element: Ken Robinson

World Peace and Other 4th Grade Achievements: John Hunter

Imagine: How Creativity works: Jonah Lehrer

Zig Zag: The surprising path to greater creativity: Keith Sawyer

The War of Art: Break through the blocks and win your inner creative battles: Steven Pressfield

Die Empty: Todd Henry

The Accidental Creative: How to be creative at a moments notice: Todd Henry