

# Purposes of Art

*The arts fulfill diverse roles in society: from fine arts expressing imagination and aesthetics, folk arts preserving cultural heritage, to entertainment arts engaging audiences, and ceremonial arts facilitating rituals and spiritual expression. Through these genres, the arts contribute to cultural enrichment, entertainment, learning, identity formation, and social cohesion.*

## The role of arts in society

The arts play a significant role in our lives and impact us in myriad ways. The arts allow the expression of individual voices and represent the collective voice of a community. To foster discussion of the roles of art and examine its impact on daily life and society, we created the following list that describes many possible purposes for the creation and performance of art. We recognize that this list is not exhaustive.

Please note that an artist's aesthetic choices are influenced by their message, audience, and the purpose for their work of art. An artist's work sometimes begins with a specific purpose and aesthetic preference, but the purpose and aesthetic preference can also evolve. A work of art could accomplish several purposes simultaneously, similar to how a work of art may represent multiple aesthetic theories.

## Education

The arts can be used for deep learning in any content area. As individuals study works of art, create them, or discuss them with others, they examine the world around them and discover the inner landscape that informs their relationship to our world. The arts can support student learning in math, science, English language arts, and social studies. Arts education encourages students to express their ideas and to reflect on the ideas of others, helping them understand themselves and others. The arts play a role in the development and progress of the whole child: physically, socially, emotionally, cognitively, and spiritually.

See the section titled "Purposes of Art in the Elementary Classroom" below.

## Fine Arts

Our definition: Creative works of art produced to be appreciated primarily or solely for their imaginative, aesthetic, intellectual content or technical skill.

The purpose of fine arts is to display the potential for excellence and accomplishment in an art form. Fine arts practitioners seek to develop, refine, and display elite and revolutionary skills and nuance within the creative, technical, and performance elements of their art form. Fine arts are creative works of art whose products are to be appreciated primarily or solely for their imaginative, aesthetic, and intellectual content or technical skill. Participation in fine arts can

be transformative to the viewer or participant because of the exceptional level of expertise and preparation by the artist or performer.



### Discussions on Fine Art

- Fine art reflects the present and can see the future! Watch [What is Fine Art?](#) with contemporary artist Dominic Shepherd.
- Fine art is just more expensive. Watch [Fine Art vs. Decorative Art](#) with Mike Svob, 30-year visual art instructor.
- Fine art is good art, it is not boring. Watch [Biggest Difference Between Bad Art and Great Art](#) by UCLA Professor of Screenwriting Richard Walter.

## Folk and Community Arts

Our definition: works of art made in the context of folk or traditional culture, often produced to unify communities and demonstrate or teach group values or skills for everyday life.

Works of art created in the context of folk or traditional culture are often produced to unify communities, demonstrate hands-on cultural skills, traditions, or daily practice, and/or teach group values for everyday life. Folk art festivals display the long-treasured arts and crafts passed down through generations. The performance and display of these art forms preserves their purpose as a reminder of those who have gone before and the importance of carrying those values forward to the present.

State agencies and local county or city arts councils often support local folk arts. The Utah Division of Arts and Museum has sponsored the [Alice Merrill Horne Folk Art Collection](#) since 1976 and manages the [Chase Home Museum of Utah Folk Arts](#) in Salt Lake City.

Fun Fact: “The Chase Home Museum of Utah Folk Arts is the only museum in the country dedicated to displaying a state-owned collection of contemporary folk art. It features objects made by Utah artists from the state’s American Indian, rural, occupational, and ethnic communities. The Museum offers a snapshot of Utah’s heritage and contemporary culture” (Chase Home Website).



### Examples of Folk Arts

- [What It Takes to be a Hula Champion](#), documented by Great Big Story.
- [What is Adowa?: A Traditional Akan Dance](#), shared by Britney Dufie, a Ghanaian Londoner sharing Ghanaian traditions on YouTube.
- [Día de Los Muertos / Day of the Dead](#), a PBS special episode on the modern traditions and expressions of Day of the Dead inspired by traditional Oaxacan traditions.

## Entertainment Arts

Our definition: works of art produced to entertain an audience and cater to trends in mass media.

Artists create work to entertain an audience and/or cater to the trends in mass media. Entertainment arts may include cheerleaders performing at half-time during a sports event, pop singers playing sold-out stadiums, or commercial filmmakers collaborating with dancers and choreographers to sell the latest trends in back-to-school fashion. If the primary focus or function of the art work is to entertain the audience, it fits into this category.

This category is for all you “[Swifties!](#)” Think big box-office movie hits, sold-out concert arenas, the Super Bowl half-time show, and shows like “Dancing with the Stars” or “The Voice.” We love our entertainment art!

On the local level, entertainment art may be a marching band half-time performance at the high school football game; the dance company performs a hip-hop piece at a basketball game; your digitally produced visual- and audio-studded, student-produced school announcements: these are examples of art where the primary focus is to entertain and/or make a profit!





### An Example: Cosmo the Cougar & the Cougarettes Dance

A school mascot and dance team provide rousing entertainment at athletic events to ignite passion and support from fans. Here's a local example that has made a splash on the National college sports scene, Cosmo the Cougar and the BYU Cougarettes!

[Cosmo the Cougar & the Cougarettes Dance - BYU Vs Boise St 2017](#)

## Ceremonial and Ritual Arts

Our definition: works of art produced to facilitate sacred, spiritual, secular, or religious ceremonies or rituals.

Ceremonial and ritual arts are produced to facilitate sacred, spiritual, secular, or religious ceremonies or rituals. Ceremonial art may be used as religious worship. Or ceremonial art may mark the celebration of a life event. It might include a ritual to observe a young person's rite of passage into adulthood or a sacred event meant only for a small exclusive group to witness. Rites of passage that mark milestones in a person's life, sacred ceremonies, and secular or political customs are often integrated with producing works of art meant to express the event's emotion, import, or meaning.

Often, these art forms are designed to express specific cultural purposes and limit participation by members of the general population.



### Examples of Ceremonial and Ritual Arts

- Artists are invited to perform at the inauguration ceremony for the President of the United States. A recent example is Amanda Gorman's performance of her poem ["The Hill We Climb"](#) in 2021.
- [Ojibwe jingle dress dance](#) is performed by Native American women on special occasions as a healing dance. The women wear specific regalia adorned by beads that emit a jingling sound as they dance.
- A ceremonial art may be the singing of the National Anthem at community and sporting events. Here is a video of Whitney Houston singing the [Star Spangled Banner](#) in 1991.

## Recreational Arts

Recreational arts are activities done within an art form for enjoyment during leisure time. They may include community arts events that unite individuals and groups to celebrate, share, mourn, and advocate for an issue. Participants may perform in a community theatre or symphony concert or attend a performance or exhibition for fun. In the summertime an outdoor amphitheatre or park can host a variety of arts experiences for recreational purposes. Families water-coloring while camping or creating and crafting decorations with friends during the holidays are all examples of recreational arts.

## Therapeutic Arts

Art therapy is a way of facilitating mental health services through experiences in an art form. Therapeutic arts conducted by certified art therapists can help individuals explore social-emotional and mental health including stress, trauma, depression, anxiety, self-esteem and addiction management.

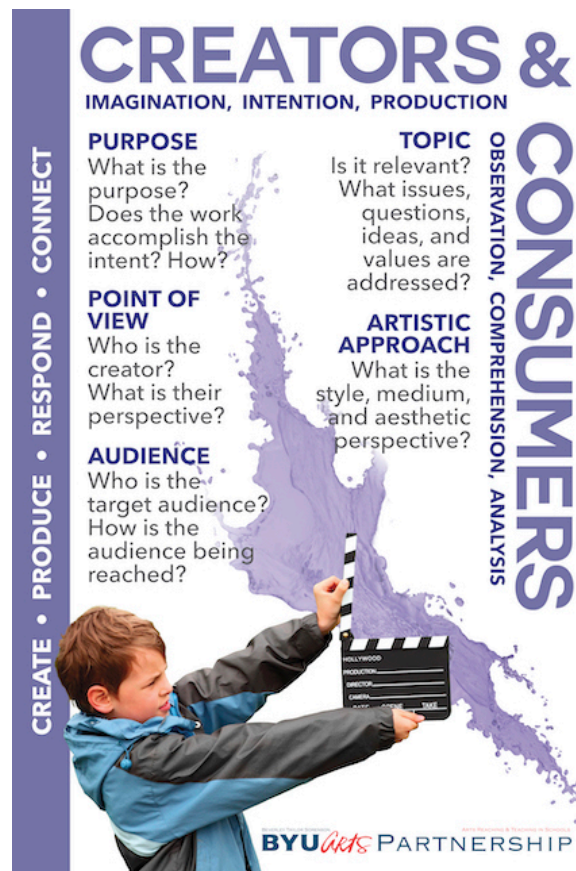


## Artist Intent and Aesthetic Preference

The purpose of a work of art is related to the message of the artist, the intended audience, and the artist's personal aesthetic preferences. Conversely, an artist's aesthetic choices could be influenced by their message, audience, and purpose of a work of art. The development of a work of art sometimes begins with a specific purpose and aesthetic preference, or the purpose and aesthetic preference can evolve over time. A work of art could accomplish several purposes simultaneously, similar to the way a single work of art may represent multiple aesthetic theories.

How an artist approaches the creative process is often determined upon reflection on questions like these:

- What is the purpose? What do I want to say?
- Does the work accomplish my intent? How?
- Who is the creator? What is their perspective?
- Who is the audience? How do I want my audience to feel?
- How is the audience being reached? How will my audience best receive my message? What are the cultural parameters of my work?
- Is the topic relevant? What issues, questions, ideas, and values are addressed?
- What is the artistic style, medium, and aesthetic perspective? Do I need new artistic tools or do I use ones I've used before?



# Purposes of Art in the Elementary Classroom

## Deepening Student Learning Through the Arts

There are a variety of compelling reasons to infuse, integrate, and include the arts in the classroom. In general, teachers bring the arts into the classroom with the ultimate goal to support student learning. Student learning is achieved when subgoals such as engaging students, building relationships, assessing knowledge, addressing individual needs, and enacting learning routines are also achieved. The following list breaks down some (but not all) of the specific roles the arts can play in the elementary classroom and how they directly support the ultimate goal of deepening student learning.

**Build Relationships:** When students and teachers engage in the creative process, they are given the opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings, practice communication, and develop collaboration skills. This gives a teacher a window into the student's understanding of their inner life. The development of empathy and the opportunity to listen and reflect on the lived experience of another human being deepens the relationships that aid student learning.

**Assess Student Knowledge:** When students describe the product or process of their artistic endeavors, they reveal the depth and breadth of their background knowledge and understanding of the world around them (depending on the content of the artistic work). Students' drawings, songs, gestures, scripts, stories, and artist statements reveal what a

student is connecting to and how their skills are developing. Technical art skills as well as competencies in many other disciplines can be assessed through engagement in the arts.

**Support Student Self-Regulation and Agency:** Students disengage and misbehave in the classroom when they have unmet needs, lack self-regulation skills, are challenged too much, or challenged too little (among other things). Arts activities designed to stimulate students' creative agency will help students make choices to meet their own learning needs, develop self-regulation skills, and work within the optimal level of challenge for them. These benefits reduce the frequency of events disruptive to learning.

**Develop Classroom Rituals and Routines:** The arts can serve as engaging and effective classroom routines and rituals. They can provide an avenue for routines that prepare students to learn, act as transition activities, and provide rituals to signal events such as the beginning or end of the school day. Singing songs together when cleaning up materials, preparing listening skills with a percussive call-and-response activity at the opening of a new activity, sharing shapes and gestures while waiting in line for lunch or recess—there are multitude of ways to enact artful routines in the classroom. [Find more ideas for artful classroom routines by clicking here.](#)

**Streamline Instruction:** Using arts integration allows educators to hit a multitude of subjects and standards in a single arts learning activity. As students investigate their world through art making, they experience the interdisciplinary way the world is connected and woven together. For example, while studying butterflies, K-2 students may be creating watercolor pieces to show what they see in pictures or cages, while simultaneously engaging in geometric pattern observation, counting, scientific inquiry, and vocabulary acquisition. The need to set aside individual time for vocabulary, science, and math in the school day disappears when one project-based arts activity can address all three disciplines. A strategically layered activity increases the relevance and improves retention of the information.

**Develop Competency with the Six C's:** Art making provides fertile soil for the growth of students' soft skills including collaboration, communication, creativity, critical thinking, character, and citizenship. If art making is prescriptive and restricted to a coloring page or copying a template, then these skills remain rudimentary. However, if art making propels thinking by allowing student choice, inviting collaboration, and including time for students to reflect verbally and in writing, then teachers can explicitly connect the artful activity to these soft skills. These skills are referenced in the [Portrait of a Graduate at USBE](#).

**Demonstrate Learning to Parents and the Community:** Art exhibits and performances are a great way to share student learning with parents and the community: it's one of the best ways to recruit stakeholders in your building! Performance and exhibition give the parents and principals a window into formal and summative learning at school. Audiences can be invited to see students' work in progress or the final product: both activities are valuable to witness.

**Engage the Whole Body in Learning:** For those wigglers, chair-tippers, desk-crawlers, and regular seat sitters, the arts provide a multi-sensory, embodied learning experience that can leverage the whole body towards the purpose of learning. [Check out the Brain Dance for a way to get the whole body moving.](#)

**Make Learning Memorable:** Adults often report that their favorite memories from their school days were art projects, exhibits, and performances. Art making and performance and exhibition and stick with children throughout their lives. If you want it to make learning stick, give 'em the ol' arts trick!

## Improving School Culture Through the Arts

When student learning is deepened through engagement in the arts, this learning can change a school. Students learn how to learn, think, and create. Students make choices and decisions developing personal voice and self-responsibility. School hallways fill with student artwork. Collections of student artwork evolve into grand visual encyclopedias of the student's learning. Classrooms are filled with melody, rhythm, and movement. Students sing and skip on the playground and in the hallways. In this stimulating environment, students and staff look alive, they feel alive, they act alive.

Check out these teacher stories on the Artful Teaching Podcast:



- [Episode 28](#): Tina McCulloch, sixth-grade teacher, shares Visual Thinking Strategies for SEEd Phenomenon Observations
- [Episode 29](#): Chris Roberts, elementary educator and arts coach, shares his journey from dance dad to Mr. Dance
- [Episode 4](#): Ryan Ferre, fifth-grade teacher, shares his experiences integrating the arts during the COVID-19 pandemic

Arts pedagogy, arts appreciation, and engagement in the arts can change the culture of a school. For example, when one grade-level team member adopts arts integrated pedagogy, their success may spread and the interest and curiosity across school staff may begin to grow. When a team of teachers who appreciate the arts brings a lecture demonstration or performance to the school, they are providing all children access to engage with the arts. This experience can help admin, staff, and teachers see students in new ways as they respond, reflect, and engage with the performance.

As the visionary leader, the principal is a key part of building an arts-rich culture in a school. Supportive administrators can make it easier for teachers to achieve their goals for student learning experiences.

Consider the impact of the arts on the following elements of school culture, and/or how these elements of school culture can support arts learning:

- Mission, vision, and school goals
- Well-being of staff, admin, teachers, and students
- Collaboration between staff, students, parents, and community
- Professional Learning Communities
- Pedagogy and learning theory (problem-based learning, experiential learning, project-based learning, self-directed learning, deep learning)
- Student attendance
- Discipline practices
- School events, programs, celebrations, and initiatives (performances, field trips, PTA, after-school activities, assemblies, competitions, fairs, etc.)
- Teacher autonomy and efficacy (how teachers' judgment, expertise, and strengths are valued within the school)

Americans for the Arts partnered with Vans Custom Culture to produce a series of Ebooks titled the [Arts Education Navigator](#). Ebook #3, "[Facts & Figures](#)," draws on classic arts education research such as "Champions of Change," as well as new reports like "Arts Education in America: What the Declines Mean for Arts Participation" to present key data points about the impact of the arts on students and schools.



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