

5-6 Art: encouraging creativity

Children can express their thoughts and feelings in drawings, embody their mental images through empty boxes and containers, and enthusiastically create something grand by putting their ideas together. Through these art activities, not only do they learn about the proper use of tools and art techniques appropriate for their level of maturity, but also they develop persistence and creativity. In addition, the completed work brings an enormous sense of joy and satisfaction to them.

Art work

As soon as becoming able to hold pencils and crayons, at the age of one to two, children start drawing lines, dots, and circles. When they acquire the ability to draw a circle, they add eyes and a mouth to make a face and further draw hands and legs directly sticking out from the circle to create a man without a body. Sometimes, they draw a see-through house, or flowers and suns like faces with eyes and a mouth. These drawings are characteristic of kindergarten-age children. Japanese kindergartens make pencils, crayons, markers, and paints readily available to children, who in turn can draw anything whenever they feel like it. They can do thematic drawings, such as what they did at a field trip or a field day festival, or sketch plants or animals. These art activities enable children to learn the use of drawing materials and try out various art formats, further fostering their interests in the unlimited expression in art.

Educational goals

- **Developing imagination and creativity, through free and spontaneous expressions of one's thoughts and feelings.**
- **To appreciate beautiful and inspiring combinations of colors and patterns, and cultivate artistic sensitivity and aesthetic senses, through the drawing activity.**
- **Becoming familiar with the characteristics and proper use of various art materials, through using and experimenting with them.**
- **Developing spatial awareness, by arranging objects in relation to one another, paying attention to their shapes and sizes, and drawing a picture in perspective.**
- **Feeling relaxed and liberated, by expressing their thoughts and feelings in the art form.**
- **Feeling fulfillment and satisfaction, through group projects in which children jointly draw about a common theme on a large piece of paper.**

Drawing activities

Crayons are one of the art materials easily handled by small children. Children can take them out of their drawers anytime they like.

With watercolor paints that allow an unrestricted, large-scale drawing, children experiment to create a dynamic work of art, which consequently will bring them an immense sense of achievement.



Cut-outs of children's drawings are displayed on the wall to brighten up the classroom.

They are also practicing how to use scissors and glue by cutting and pasting things.



The surface of a crayoned drawing was brushed with diluted watercolor paints. The oil in crayons repelled the paint and unexpectedly created a lively piece of art.



Displaying children's drawings that portray their memories of an event lets children share a sense of community, where they talk about memorable scenes depicted in friends' pictures and respect individual differences in artistic senses and expressive styles.

Chairs have been moved out of the classroom to the deck, and children are sketching fallen leaves.

By seeing the limbs of a tree that once thrived with full of green leaves, children perceived the winter is approaching and wanted to express their feelings in drawing.



Keep in mind

- For children, the act of drawing is an outward expression of their thoughts and feelings. Do not instruct children about what to draw or interfere with their drawing. Try to set up a liberal atmosphere that encourages children's free and fun expression in art.
- Struggling with the use of pencils, crayons, brushes, and paints, some children may feel frustrated and become reluctant to draw, leading to loss of interest in art activities. Give proper instruction that is suitable to each child's level of development.
- Unlike adults' work, children's work of art is far less organized. Try to listen carefully to them and make notes of what was fun to them, what they saw, and how they felt when drawing.
- Due to individual differences in drawing skills, adjust your assistance to individual children's experiences and level of development, with consideration of their age, family environment, and parents' views on education.
- Although it is important to set art supplies readily available to children, you need to teach them not to waste paper by recklessly drawing one paper after another to compete with other children to make many drawings, or by throwing away the blank leftover paper after cutting out a tiny object from a big piece of paper.
- As it is difficult to judge where to draw objects on paper with limited space, you can sometimes add more paper to help children to enjoy their unlimited expression of art.

Tips and suggestions

- Crushed flowers or berries can be used as paints.
- Paper cut-outs of humans, animals, and plants with sticks attached in the back can become paper puppets.
- Try brushing thinly resolved watercolor paints over on the crayoned drawings, such as drawing a fish with crayons and then brushing it with sky-blue paint, or crayoning stars and then painting over them in black. Children will be inspired by the unexpected expression created by the oil in crayons that repelled the paints.
- You can create an ink pad by putting cotton or cloth that is soaked in paint, at the bottom of a thin plate. A hand, bottom or top of a bottle, twigs, and cut vegetables can make interesting patterns. These stamps can decorate a small card or be used as a token or a ticket in a play.
- The leftovers from paper cut-outs, magazines, newspaper, and wrapping paper can be saved for materials for collage art.

Construction art

Among various means by which children embody their thoughts and ideas is through construction art, an art form that utilizes empty boxes, containers and other used materials. Besides the completion of a constructed piece of art, the activity brings children a valuable artistic experience to create something out of diverse goods and materials used in everyday life, only limited by their imagination and creativity. Through the constructing process of cutting, pasting and combining objects, children realize the characteristics and beauty of individual materials such as color, quality, and shape, and will develop their color sensitivity and designing skills.

In a Japanese kindergarten, children engage in various creative activities including building toys they use for play and making a particular thing in class under supervision of a teacher. It is a happy and rewarding experience for children to play with their hand-made toys or to see their art work displayed in the classroom.

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- **Enjoying an immense sense of achievement and satisfaction upon completion of the art work, and through using one's work in play or everyday life, feeling attachment to the object and fostering the attitude to cherish it.**
- **Realizing the characteristic qualities and shapes of various materials, and cultivating creative thinking by producing something out of these materials while learning their proper use.**
- **Developing manual dexterity through such craft skills as cutting, folding, pasting, and rolling.**
- **Developing persistence, through completing large-scale time-consuming construction work.**
- **Nurturing creativity by thinking about what to make and how to use a finished art work.**
- **Acquiring knowledge about the usages and functions of a wide range of art tools.**
- **Realizing that constructing art work involves sequential steps and various linked tasks.**
- **Promoting communication with teachers and friends while describing and discussing one's idea of what to make.**

Constructing art activities at kindergarten



In the classroom, materials for constructing art (empty food containers, toilet paper tubes, empty boxes, etc) are always sorted out and ready to use.

Materials and tools that are harmless for children to use alone are stored within their reach.

Storage places for construction materials and tools are identified with pictures and words so that children can easily locate and return them.

A child is sorting materials brought from home into their appropriate storage places.

A child who wanted to be more like an alligator decided to put a tail on his back. Since the tail is made of a sturdy milk carton, it won't be ripped after days of use.

Children started playing with flyers by folding, cutting, and rolling. Depending on the size and thickness of flyers, they make fatter or thinner rolls.

A traditional Japanese toy, Cup-and-Ball, was created by combining a food container and a toilet paper tube, and a string taped to a paper ball. A teacher helped with a tricky part.



Colorful fallen leaves regained their beauty as a necklace charm. Children picked favorite shapes among circles, stars, and hearts outlined on colored paper by a teacher, and cut out the shapes along the line. Then they glued favorite leaves on cut-out paper to make a charm.

A child started gluing leaves and nuts on a plastic bag for decoration. Inspired by the child's idea, a teacher suggested turning the bag into a shirt. Other children also joined in a shirt-making project.



The decoration on the shirt can be broken when folded. A teacher hung it on a cloth hanger just like a real shirt. Eventually, the project spread to the entire class.

Keep in mind

- Try to prepare tools, equipment, and materials that are best suited for the children's level and stage of development and to think of ways to present these art materials attractively.
- Children should be well-informed about the proper use of potentially hazardous tools, and should only use these tools with a teacher or under a teacher's supervision. Moreover, these tools need to be immediately put away in a secure place after use.
- A teacher needs to give thorough, personal support to younger children who are struggling with how to spread glue, cut tapes, roll paper, and cut along a curved line with scissors.
- Even though many art materials and goods should be available, children will not be interested to use them if these supplies are disorganized. Put constructing materials in order so that children can easily pick them up.
- For those who are wondering how to put their ideas into shape, a teacher can give them a support in such ways as finding potential materials with them, helping with their work, and suggesting that they can refer to a book.
- A child's creative work that incorporated novel ideas or invention can be introduced to the whole class so that children can learn from each other.
- When displaying children's art work, try to find the best place and space to nurture children's aesthetic sensitivity.

Tips and suggestions

- It could be a wonderful idea to organize an art exhibition to display all the children's art works and show them to parents. At an exhibition where all the interesting pieces are shown, children can appreciate friends' works which are unique and interesting in their own way, while communications among teachers, children, and parents are promoted.
- A place to display children's art work is not limited to their classroom. Try to find other effective or unusual art spaces in kindergarten; Children's motivation in art activities will be all the more stimulated.
- It should be a stimulating experience for everybody if a child comments on his or her work in class so that other children can view his or her work from a new perspective.
- Try to introduce traditional play unique to your culture, such as 'Cup-and-Ball' in Japan, into constructing art programs. Especially in situations where toys are hard to find, children will surely love their hand-made toys.
- Anything that is easy to handle and free from danger can be acceptable as art materials. Try to think of some extraordinary materials unique to your country and region.

Playing with cardboard

Cardboard boxes are available everywhere in our daily lives. As they also are familiar materials to children, Japanese kindergartens often use them for constructing activities and other plays.

Because these big boxes are sturdy enough to endure even when children go in and out, and push or pull them, and are flexible in shape, and easy to handle, children can play by imagining them to be a bathtub, a house, a ship and other kinds of transportation. Children build or line up many big and small boxes, combine and connect them, or suppose an object created by chance as something in particular. Furthermore, they come across novel ideas when making or breaking boxes and feel excited about playing with invention, thus evolving the play by themselves. A cardboard constructing program is a comprehensive, cooperative, and systematic activity in which children's naive ideas are realized in creative plays.

Educational goals

- **Developing imagination and cultivating creativity while constructing something with cardboard through trial and error.**
- **Developing artistic expression skills while having fun in flattening out, reshaping, and constructing a three-dimensional object.**
- **Becoming interested in quantity and shapes as well as stimulating sensitivity to space and structures in terms of width, height, and brightness, through the play with cardboard.**
- **Feeling an enormous sense of accomplishment and satisfaction, by discussing and cooperating with friends in a big construction project in which a child can display more persistence than in independent art play.**
- **Becoming familiar with a wide range of materials, objects, tools and equipment, through the construction process.**
- **Developing motor skills and practicing how to balance and use one's muscle strength, while playing with the constructed object that involves hand-foot coordination and handling something big or heavy.**

Cardboard play at kindergarten

By passing a rope through, the cardboard box was turned into a fun thing to ride. Children take turns to tug or ride.

A child has to tug the rope very hard with a friend sitting on the box. The child learns how to use all his muscle strengths.

By standing the open cardboard box upright, children turned it into a huge clock with a pendulum.

The clock has a dial and the pendulum made of a recycled tape core.

Children gathered around the cardboard and decorated the clock with drawings.



Children made houses by connecting a few boxes.

They visited each other's house by greeting, 'Hello' and 'Welcome.'

They are securely settled in a cardboard house.

Inside the house is a comfortable space to snuggle up.

Children are asking a teacher how to open a hole for a window on the cardboard house.

Except for some tricky parts or tasks involving the use of a dangerous tool, a teacher tries to encourage children's independent activity to embody their imagination by giving advice and suggestions.

With a telephone stand and shelves, the box is arranged more like a house. By seeing from the outside, a friend gives some suggestions.

The connected cardboard boxes turned into a big boat to ride with a friend.

To sail on the sea of corridor by pushing and pulling, the boat has to be much stronger.

By bringing in a thick cardboard, they are discussing how to reinforce the boat.

Keep in mind

- Try to flatten out any used cardboard boxes and store them in a convenient place.
- Playing with cardboard requires a spacious, safe area to guarantee unrestricted activity. Secure a plenty of free space in the room and arrange tools and materials in a proper place.
- Choose in advance materials that children use and make them readily available.
- Supervise children when they are using cardboard saws, scissors, and gimlets.
- Let children bring play toys such as a pretend kitchen set, dolls, and picture books into the cardboard house.
- Help children build stronger friendship ties through interacting with others when playing with cardboard.
- Because of the stiffness, children may find it difficult to deal with cardboard. Though it is important to let children play on their own, a teacher should give a proper support anytime upon their request.
- Repairs and tidy-ups are joint work by a teacher and children.

Tips and suggestions

- Not limited to use as a box, by cutting it flat, cardboard can serve as a sturdy signboard or message board, or play toys such as number cards or paper puppets.
- With colored paper and decorations, children can turn a cardboard box into a nice wastebasket. By teaching that trash needs to be thrown away in an appropriate place, you can make children aware of the importance of keeping things clean and tidy.
- By entering into a crushed box and crawling forward like a caterpillar, children can exercise their whole body.
- With posted drawings of toys and tools that need to be put away in, cardboard boxes can serve as convenient storage boxes.
- You can build a stage for a puppet show or an entrance gate for a field day festival by stacking up several boxes, or use a box as furniture such as a showcase stand and a desk.
- If the construction or play activity cannot be finished in a day, it can be stretched to another day. Also, complex facilities such as a maze, an amusement park, and a haunted house can surely be played for several days.