

ART vs Crafts

P'kolino Playful Art Set (12 Markers, 12 Crayons, and 16 Pencils) by P'kolino

The terms art and crafts are often used interchangeably to describe the same activities for children, but they actually have important differences and learning implications. We are not talking about traditional crafts like candle making or basket weaving; we are talking about what most adults call "crafts" - that is, anything a child makes or creates: craft time at the library, crafts at camp, crafts class in school, crafts at church or synagogue, or the craft corner at daycare. Crafts have their place in a child's educational life, but it is art that is the truly important creative activity for children. How do we know the difference?

Art and Crafts: What's the difference?



Because art and crafts are so different, it's good to know what makes them special and call them by their proper names. When children create art, they are exploring, discovering, and thinking. Art encourages a child's originality and unique expression with an unknown outcome. Crafts, on the other hand, involve the child's reproducing an adult's idea, while following directions to make a specific "thing" - a known outcome. Making crafts is about imitating what an adult has made and, as such, it requires no original thinking. Crafts are meant to be useful or practical, or to reinforce a fact or learning theme. Craft activities have value in this way, but art is a unique form of creativity that inspires each individual child to be original and inventive and to think for himself.

Comparison Chart: Art vs. Crafts



Value both art and crafts experiences for exactly what they are. Be clear when doing activities with kids and use the words "crafts" and "art" correctly. The chart below is useful for explaining differences:

Art	Crafts
creative, unique, original	similar (or identical) to other children's
comes from within the child	directed from the adult
open-ended, end results unknown	closed, directions-oriented, end results known
process is valued over finished product	finished product is valued over process
self-expression	copying and imitating

Why Art? Process, Not Product



Adults often prefer to give kids cute crafts projects because the nearly cookie-cutter perfect results reflect well on the adult. (If

the child's work looks good, then doesn't this mean the adult is doing a good job teaching?) The truth is actually the opposite: If a child is exploring and discovering while creating art, the child is learning far more than if he were merely copying an adult's idea of a finished product. Creating through open-ended art places the value on the process rather than the final product. The process involves discovering, exploration, and learning to trust one's own choices. The product is only the outcome of the exploration and discovery, a reflection of deeper learning. Children's art should be about process more than product, about feeling free to create, and about visually sharing a child's own thoughts and feelings. As children create art, there will be repetition and remaking and tweaking and manipulating materials to various outcomes and experiences, all unique to that child. Art pleases the child and honors unique individuality and diversity.



Art is creative and free, with only some very basic techniques to guide the experience; the process is heavily valued, and the finished product is not the main goal: It is the creative process that holds the most value. For young children, the exploration and discovery is foremost, and the finished product may not even exist! Sometimes children will value the finished artwork as a by-product to their creative explorations, and sometimes it is a way of telling what they experienced. Other times they set it aside and start something new -- because it was the doing that mattered, not the outcome.

Art: Learning Skills

Children learn through creating art. Art impacts a child's learning and development in the following areas:

Thinking and reasoning skills

- Problem-solving
- Trial and error
- Planning, organizing
- Estimating and measurement
- Matching, patterning, sequencing
- Spatial relationships

Language skills

- Communication
- Symbolic representation of ideas
- Vocabulary
- Memory

Physical skills

- Hand-eye coordination
- Fine motor and large motor skills

Emotional skills

- Self-expression
- Purposefulness
- Self-worth

Aren't Crafts Important, Too?

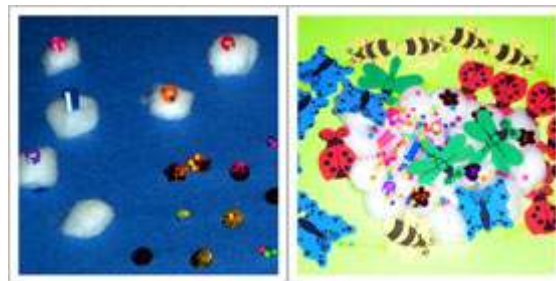


Crafts often have practical uses or are meant to reinforce a specific topic or learning theme in the classroom like safety, pets, or transportation. Crafts may go along with Math, Science, or other academic areas. When making crafts, children are often forming useful items or following directions to make projects or things that other kids are making too -- even if they don't look exactly identical when complete. There will be uniformity to the work and an expected outcome for all participants. Crafts are designed to please adults as much as to offer children specific facts to learn or to reinforce the exercise of following directions. It's not that crafts are bad; it's just that crafts are not art. Use

the word "art" when children create art, and "crafts" when they do crafts. This way, everyone understands the difference and learns to respect each activity for what it truly is. Crafts are fun and cute and a supplement to a child's learning and doing, but art should be the larger portion of a child's creative time.

Examples of Art and Crafts

To further illustrate art and crafts, here are two examples based on the use of the same main material - cotton balls:



Art Example: Cotton Ball Gluing

Provide cotton balls, glue, and collage materials like buttons, cardboard, and other materials on hand. Each child combines his unique choice of materials and glues them on a chosen background -- for example, cardboard, paper plate, or construction paper. The child might conceivably make a bunny, but more likely, the child will create a collage (or something no one thought of before) that is his own process-rendered experience. The expectation is to create, using cotton balls and glue, with no planned outcome or product.



Craft Example: Cotton Ball Bunny

Glue cotton balls on a pre-cut cardboard bunny shape, filling the

space. Next add pink construction paper ears. Glue on two buttons for eyes. The craft product is a fuzzy cotton ball bunny. Though no two will look exactly alike, all the bunnies use the same basic directions and materials with a uniform expectation, which is: Make a bunny on a pre-determined shape with cotton balls and glue. The outcome is cute. The process is pre-determined.

Basic Supplies

For kids to explore art as a process, they need basic materials to work with. Whatever you have on hand will do, but if you're looking for some great basic supplies, here are suggestions of products found at BN.com: Paint: *Deluxe Poster Paint Set by Melissa & Doug*

Crayons: *Triangular Grip Crayons by Creativity for Kids*

Markers: *Washable Broadline Markers by Creativity for Kids*

Colored Pencils: *Color Grip Color Pencils by Creativity for Kids*

Oil Pastels: *Boat Ride Oil Pastels by eeBoo*

Marking Tools Set: *Playful Art Set (12 ea. Markers, Crayons, Pencils) by P'kolino*

Scissors: *Children's Safety Scissors by Creativity for Kids*

Clay: *Model Magic Primary Colors by Crayola*

Paper: *Doodling Pad by Creativity for Kids*



Recommended books to inspire art with children found at BN.com:

Scribble Art

Preschool Art

Primary Art

Big Messy Art

Conclusion

It's a great feeling to relax and trust that your child is learning from art. Feel good that you allow the children you care about to create from their own explorations and ideas. Remember that, more than anything, it is the creative process that is most important for a child's learning through art. The final product is the delightful by-product of these precious early experiences with creativity -- like a road-map of the learning that just took place.

