

PARENTS' GUIDE TO ARTS LEARNING IN CALIFORNIA SCHOOLS GRADES 6-7-8

Dance • Media Arts • Music • Theatre • Visual Arts

Snapshot of Arts Learning in Middle School

When sixth, seventh and eighth grade students have attained basic knowledge and skills in the five arts disciplines of dance, media arts, music, theatre and visual arts throughout their elementary school years, they are prepared to refine and broaden their expressive and technical skills in the middle grades. The offerings and scheduling of the arts classes in middle schools vary. Students may have choices in what arts classes they elect to take or they may experience the arts as part of an elective wheel in which they explore several different subjects.

During these middle years, students apply and refine their knowledge and skills in the arts so they can express their own voice. Their self-confidence increases through this expression of their individuality. Increased skills and originality are exhibited in their dance choreography and performance as they realize how expressive their movements can be. Students are refining media artworks to improve the technical quality and they intentionally accentuate stylistic elements to reflect an understanding of purpose, audience, and place. In music, students apply vocal and/or instrumental skills as they perform a varied repertoire of music as a soloist and in groups. They also learn more about composing and arranging original works.

Theatre students improve their acting skills and techniques as they perform and analyze the dramatic elements used by scriptwriters and directors. In the process of developing a series of related works to express a personal statement, visual art students are increasing their skills and identifying what they believe to be important to look for in works of art. Students engage in more in-depth research and analysis in their art learning. Learning outcomes for students taking arts classes in the middle grades occur at many levels, such as the ability to work collaboratively, technology literacy, creative thinking, innovation and problem solving.

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Dance • Media Arts • Music • Theatre • Visual Arts

The key examples of arts learning that follow are based on the California Arts Standards. The purposes of the Arts Standards are to promote students' lifelong appreciation and understanding of the arts in ways that are enjoyable, fulfilling, and transferable to personal, academic, and professional pursuits. Learning outcomes for all students are identified in the standards and they guide teachers to provide a unified quality arts education so that these outcomes are achieved. The Standards build from grade to grade and embody grade- and age-appropriate key concepts, processes, and traditions of study in each of the five artistic disciplines. They are process-oriented, grade-appropriate indicators of what students need to know and be able to do and communicate high achievable aims. Media Arts are now included in the Standards as a distinct, stand-alone arts discipline along with Dance, Music, Theatre, and the Visual Arts. Media Arts includes photography, imaging, sound, animation, video, web design, graphic design, virtual design, interactive design, as well as their combinations and emerging forms such as multimedia and virtual design.

Dance Education Grades 6–7–8

Examples of Dance Learning in Sixth Grade

- Determining artistic criteria to choreograph a dance study that communicates personal or cultural meaning.
- Refining partner and ensemble skills in the ability to determine distance and spatial design.
- Collaborating as an ensemble to refine dances by identifying what works and does not work in executing complex patterns, sequences, and formations.
- Comparing and contrasting a variety of possible production elements that would intensify and heighten the artistic intent of a dance.

Examples of Dance Learning in Seventh Grade

- Using a variety of choreographic devices and dance structures to develop a dance study with a clear artistic intent and articulating reasons for movement and structural choices.
- Using a variety of choreographic devices and dance structures to develop a dance study with a clear artistic intent and conveying the reasons for the movement and structural choices.
- Comparing and contrasting movement characteristics from a variety of dance genres or styles then discussing specific characteristics using dance terminology to describe them.

- Comparing, contrasting, and discussing dances performed by people in various localities or communities and formulating possible reasons why similarities and differences developed in relation to the ideas and perspectives important to each.

Examples of Dance Learning in Eighth Grade

- Implementing movement from a variety of stimuli (e.g., music, observed dance, literary forms, natural phenomena, personal experience, current news) to develop dance content for an original dance study or dance.
- Defining and applying artistic criteria to choreograph a dance that communicates personal or cultural meaning and discussing how the criteria clarify or intensify the meaning of the dance.
- Sculpting the body in space and designing body shapes in relation to other dancers, objects, and the environment, which may include complex floor and air patterns and/or pathways that require focus.
- Articulating personal performance goals and practices to reach goals and documenting personal improvement over time by journaling or keeping a portfolio or timeline.



Media Arts Education Grades 6–7–8

Examples of Media Arts Learning in Sixth Grade

- Demonstrating and rationalizing how integrating multiple contents and forms can support a central idea in a media artwork, such as media, narratives, and performance.
- Determining and applying specific criteria to evaluate various media artworks and production processes, considering context and practicing constructive feedback.
- Identifying, describing, and analyzing how message and meaning are created by components in media artworks.
- Researching and showing how media artworks and ideas relate to personal life, and social, community, and cultural situations, such as personal identity, history, and entertainment.

Examples of Media Arts Learning in Seventh Grade

- Designing, proposing and evaluating artistic ideas, plans, prototypes, and production processes for media art productions, considering expressive intent and resources.
- Exhibiting an increasing set of artistic, design, technical, organizational and management skills through performing various roles in producing media artworks, such as creative problem solving and organizing.
- Exhibiting an increasing set of creative and innovative abilities, such as adaptive tool usage and exploratory processes, in developing solutions within and through media arts productions.
- Considering fair use and copyright, ethics, media literacy, and social media.

Examples of Media Arts Learning in Eighth Grade

- Generating ideas, goals, and solutions for original media artworks through application of focused creative processes, such as divergent thinking and experimenting.
- Refining media artworks, improving technical quality and intentionally accentuating stylistic elements to reflect an understanding of purpose, audience, and place.
- Demonstrating a defined range of artistic, design, technical, and soft skills through performing specified roles in producing media artworks, such as strategizing and collaborative communication.
- Demonstrating and explaining how media artworks and ideas relate to various contexts, purposes, and values, such as democracy, environment, and connecting people and places.

Music Education Grades 6–7–8

In middle school, students participate in Music instruction and may also receive instruction in Harmonizing Instruments and Ensembles. A description of learning in each of these areas follows the Music examples of learning.

Examples of Music Learning in Sixth Grade

- Generating simple rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic phrases within AB and ABA forms that convey expressive intent.
- Using standard and/or iconic notation and/or audio/video recording to document personal simple rhythmic phrases, melodic phrases, and two-cord harmonic musical idea.
- Explaining how understanding the structure and the elements of music are used in music selected for performance.
- Performing music, alone or with others with technical accuracy to convey the creator's intent.





Examples of Music Learning in Seventh Grade

- Selecting, organizing, developing and documenting personal musical ideas for arrangements, songs, and compositions within AB, ABA, or theme and variation forms that demonstrate unity and variety and convey expressive intent.
- Evaluating personal work, applying selected criteria such as appropriate application of elements of music including style, form, and use of sound sources.
- Presenting the final version of documented personal composition, song, or arrangement, using craftsmanship and originality to demonstrate unity and variety, and convey expressive intent.
- Selecting contrasting music to listen to and comparing the connections to specific interests or experiences for a specific purpose.

Examples of Music Learning in Eighth Grade

- Applying personally developed criteria for selecting music of contrasting styles for a program with a specific purpose and/or context, and explaining expressive qualities, technical challenges, and reasons for choices.
- Identifying how personal, social, cultural and historical context inform performances and result in different music interpretations.
- Performing contrasting pieces of music, demonstrating and explaining how the music's intent is conveyed by interpretations of the elements of music and expressive qualities (such as articulation/style, and phrasing).
- Examining and demonstrating how personal interests, knowledge, and ideas relate to choices and intent when creating, performing, and responding to music.

Harmonizing Instruments

Students create and make music with harmonizing instruments, such as ukulele, guitar, and piano. They work either individually or collaboratively with their peers to listen, create, share, and engage in music. While connecting with their musical interests and ideas, students experience music making, arrangement, composition, and performance, while also personally responding and connecting to various current and past genres and styles. Students engage in informal music learning as they explore their instrument to make sounds, sing as they play, improvise, compose, listen to, and learn or perform a piece they have heard.

72% of
business
leaders say
creativity is
#1 skill*

Ensemble

An ensemble is a group who perform instrumental or vocal music together. Ensemble instruction requires students to generate musical ideas and provides the foundation for music creation, while inviting students to explore sound and its many elements within a diverse ensemble. Students playing within ensembles work collaboratively with their peers to listen, share, and engage in music. While sharing their musical interests, connections, and ideas, students experience music making by arranging, composing, and performing with various instruments and timbres. They play and perform in different genres and in a variety of styles, as well as improvise and create original rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic ideas, which are connected to various current and past genres and styles.

*Source: Arts Ed Navigator by Americans for the Arts
issuu.com/americans4arts/docs/afta_navigator_facts-and-figures

Theatre Education Grades 6–7–8

Examples of Theatre Learning in Sixth Grade

- Exploring a scripted or improvised character by imagining the given circumstances in a drama/theatre work.
- Receiving and incorporating feedback to refine a devised or scripted drama/theatre work.
- Experimenting with various physical choices to communicate character in a drama/theatre work.
- Investigating the time period and place of a drama/theatre work to better understand performance and design choices.

Examples of Theatre Learning in Seventh Grade

- Explaining and presenting solutions to design challenges in a drama-theatre work.
- Demonstrating mutual respect for self and others and their roles in preparing or devising drama/theatre work.
- Developing effective physical and vocal traits of characters in an improvised or scripted drama/theatre work.
- Identifying how the intended purpose of a drama/theatre work appeals to a specific audience.

Examples of Theatre Learning in Eighth Grade

- Imagining and exploring multiple perspectives and solutions to staging problems in a drama/theatre work.
- Practicing collaboration, analysis and reflection to refine a devised or scripted drama/theatre work.
- Using a variety of acting techniques to increase skills in rehearsal or drama/theatre performance.
- Recognizing and sharing artistic choices when participating in or observing a drama/theatre work.

Visual Arts Education Grades 6–7–8

Examples of Visual Arts Learning in Sixth Grade

- Formulating artistic investigation of personally relevant content for creating art.
- Demonstrating openness in trying new ideas, materials, methods, and approaches in making works of art and design.
- Assess, explain, and provide evidence of how museums or other venues reflect history and values of a community and/or culture.
- Developing and applying relevant criteria to evaluate a work of art.

Examples of Visual Arts Learning in Seventh Grade

- Applying methods to overcome creative blocks.
- Demonstrating persistence in developing skills with various materials, methods, and approaches in creating works of art or design.
- Reflecting on and defending important information about personal artwork in an artist statement or another format.
- Comparing and contrasting how technologies have changed the way artwork is preserved, presented, and experienced.

Examples of Visual Arts Learning in Eighth Grade

- Collaboratively shape an artistic investigation of an aspect of present day life using a contemporary practice of art and design.
- Selecting, organizing and designing images and words to make visually clear and compelling presentations.
- Creating a convincing and logical argument to support an evaluation of an artwork.
- Distinguishing different ways art is used to represent, establish, reinforce, and reflect group identity.



Talking to Your Child's Middle Grades Arts Teacher About the Arts Program

The arts programs vary widely throughout the state as to what is offered, how much time is spent on arts learning and who teaches the arts. If your child has not participated in sequential arts learning in the elementary grades, it will be important to ask if he or she will have the opportunity to learn basic skills and content during these middle grades.

At the middle school level, the arts are taught by teachers who have a credential, certification, or the equivalent to teach dance, media arts, music, theatre or visual arts. When you talk to your child's arts teacher about the class your child is taking, it will be helpful to get a clear picture of your child's opportunity to engage in standards based arts learning to advance their skills. Following are some sample questions to ask.

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Questions regarding the arts program:

- What is my child's access to instruction in the arts? Are the arts available to my child every year during the middle grades?
- Are there beginning and advanced courses in each of the arts?
- Are the arts taught by credentialed or certified instructors in dance, media arts, music theatre, and visual arts? If not, who teaches the arts?
- Is there communication between the middle school arts teachers and the teachers at the high school my child will be attending as to how their programs are articulated so there is a progression of learning objectives from grade to grade?
- Are students who are particularly interested in one or more of the arts introduced to possible careers in the arts?

Questions regarding my child's progress in the arts courses:

- What does my child particularly enjoy and/or need to work on in his or her achievement in this arts course?
- Reflecting on the lists of what students will be learning in the middle grades provided in this document, what are two or three of your curricular goals for the students at this grade level?
- Are there more advanced courses available to my child in this arts discipline in the middle school grades and/or at the high school level?
- How can I support or enhance my child's learning in this arts course?



Helping Your Child Learn in the Arts at School, at Home and in the Community



At school:

- Share your personal expertise in one or more of the arts through school or classroom performances, demonstrations and lessons.
- Assist with costumes, props, and/or lighting for theatre and dance.
- Share your expertise in a folk or traditional art form with your child's class.
- Join and participate in the band or orchestra support group or other groups that support one or more of the arts programs.
- Help with student performances in the arts and with exhibitions of students' visual or media artwork.
- Offer support for the arts program by donating supplies and/or equipment.
- Help the teacher access a community artist or media art production team to visit the school.

At home:

- Research and watch videos of contemporary dance and folk/traditional dances from your family's heritage.
- Ask your child to teach you a song he or she has learned in the music class and sing it together for family or friends.
- After watching a dramatic program on television, do a critique of it in terms of the acting, staging, costuming.
- Set up a place for your child to work on visual arts projects where they can leave their supplies and works in progress.
- Talk to your child about what is being taught in the arts class and what they still want to learn.
- Have your child teach you some things that he/she is learning in the arts classes.
- Ask your child to describe and/or demonstrate what they are expressing or communicating in their work in the arts.

In the community:

- Support your child's learning in the arts with lessons and study outside of school at art museums or art centers, with community dance, theatre and music groups or teachers, and through distance learning on the computer.
- Check at the local art museum for free tours and activities for students and families.
- Take your child to art gallery exhibits and performances of dance, music and theatre that are appropriate for this grade level.
- Make arrangements for your child to talk to or interview visual and performing artists and to visit their studios and/or performance spaces remotely or in person.

Learn more about expanding or improving the Arts Education Program at Your Child's School in Appendix 1.

Find more resources by contacting other statewide organizations that support arts education in Appendix 2.

