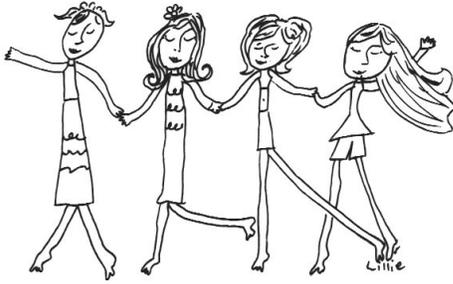




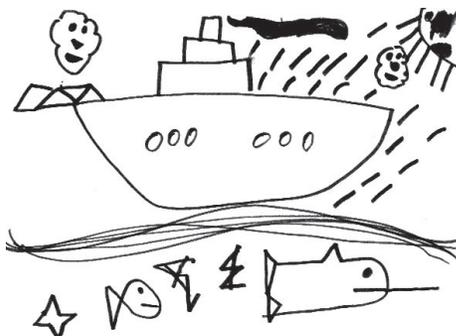
# What is Child Art?

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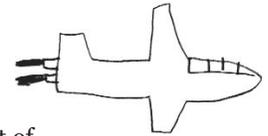


*“Every child is an artist.  
The problem is how  
to remain an artist  
once he grows up.”*

—PABLO PICASSO



**C**HILDREN love art because it's fun and provides them with authentic self-expression, but how important is art to a child's healthy development? Children's art is many things to many people. To a parent, art is a display of a child's imagination. To an educator, it's a teaching tool. To a psychologist, art is a way to understand a child's mind. To a grandparent, it's a way to feel connected. To a librarian, it's a way to enhance book knowledge. To a child, art is a way to have fun, make decisions, and express choices.



Picasso wrote, “Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once he grows up.” Is children's art an act of genius? Are children more creative than adults? Perhaps Picasso was simply impressed by the spontaneity of children's art. Child art, like most child behavior, is direct and uncensored. A young child doesn't critique his work – he paints freely and with pleasure, enjoying the fine and gross motor experience of moving paint over paper and watching lines, shapes, and colors come to life. Art puts a child in the “driver's seat” and provides freedom: the freedom of choice, thought, and feeling.

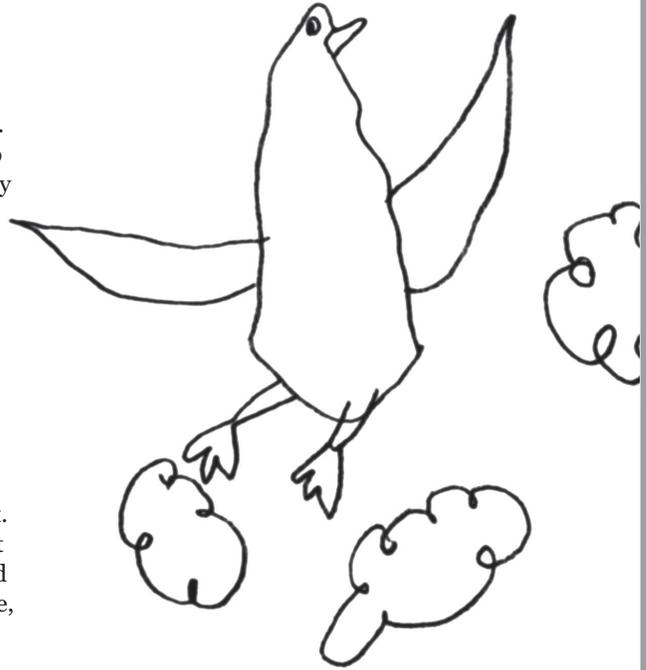
## Art is a Language

Do you remember seeing a photograph that communicated a whole world of feeling? Perhaps it was a famous photograph or simply a family snapshot that captured the richness of a special moment. A picture is often worth a thousand words. Visual images communicate emotions and complexities in a way that words cannot. The ability to communicate non-verbally is particularly important for children. Art is a powerful tool that gives children the ability to express their thoughts and emotions long before they can fully express themselves with words.

Once you acknowledge that art is a language, the importance of respecting a child's artwork becomes obvious. Yet too often adults praise art before really looking at it, offering routine comments like, “What a pretty picture!” Comments like these can actually be damaging to a child's self-esteem, causing him to feel misunderstood. Pictures sometimes communicate sad or angry feelings that are not “pretty” at all. It's far better to view a child's art slowly and with quiet interest before making any comments. Over time, with authentic and respectful support from adults, children will use art as way to express real feelings.

## What Art is Not

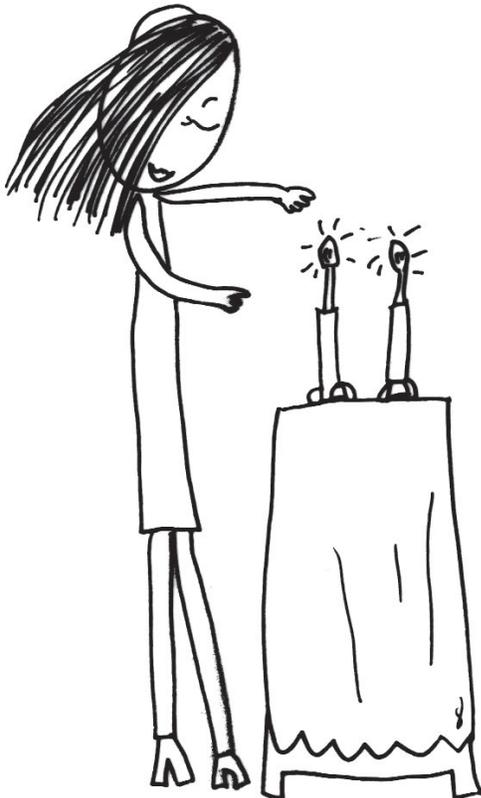
Art is not coloring books or mimeo sheets. Art is not copying or coloring between the lines. Art is not restrictive. To be art, a work has to demonstrate individuality. I like to distinguish between “fine art and applied art”—another way of saying “arts and crafts.” Both fine and applied arts can demonstrate individuality. If a child’s painting or Treasure Box looks like everyone else’s, then there’s no creativity or imagination involved. What’s the quickest way to tell if it’s art? If a child can’t recognize which project is his at the end of the day, it’s not art!



## Parent Involvement

Research shows that parent involvement in their child’s education is positively related to learning and achievement. How can parents nurture children’s creativity at home? Art can be a wonderful family activity. Parents who understand the value of art are more likely to keep art supplies at home, designate a household area for “messy art,” and become involved in art themselves. Parents and teachers working together to nurture creativity—imagine the possibilities!

*Art is Communication ~ Art is Self-Expression ~ Art is Creative Energy ~ Art is Seeing*



### Encouraging Creativity

- Take time with a child’s art.
- Show respect for the art and the artist’s process.
- Comment on lines, shapes and colors: “I see you used three colors.”
- Show curiosity: “How did you get this effect here?”
- Comment on changes: “Your drawings look bigger these days.”
- Ask open-ended questions: “Will you tell me about your picture?”
- Provide fuel for creativity: “What other materials do you need?”
- Collect recycled boxes, tubes, and lumber scraps. Make 3-D creations.
- Provide a variety of drawing, painting, and clay materials.
- Avoid coloring books.