

HUMAN COMMONALITIES/MAJOR THEMES

Understanding Myself And Others Through Art

In a multicultural world it is extremely important for children and young adults to realize that all human beings share mutual experiences and basic commonalities. These common experiences have been reflected and expressed by artists throughout history and will continue to inspire artists of every age. An art program provides an ideal environment for recognizing uniqueness and individualism while building and celebrating a sense of community. Encouraging children to explore the themes noted below through the study of major works of art and the creation of their own art perpetuates the global awareness necessary for successful citizenry in the 21st century.

- **All of us experience continuing life cycles.** These cycles include birth, growth, death, and perhaps - graduation, marriage, birth of children, and the death of parents and loved ones.
- **All of us need to bond with other people.** We are all members of groups and live in families and communities. These groups include tribes, clubs, institutions, cities, states, and countries. Visual symbols such as family crests and flags signify our membership in a particular group.
- **All of us are inseparably connected to the ecology of the planet Earth.** As living creatures we are linked to its fate. Artists through the ages have expressed concern for man's relationship with the natural world and his need for a comfortable living and working environment. Contemporary artists continue to explore human interdependence and environmental and ecological themes through a social and political context.
- **All of us develop and communicate through visual and oral symbols.** These symbols provide spoken and unspoken expressions of feelings and ideas. Significantly many of the same symbols reappear throughout time and in many cultures. Among these reappearing symbols are the egg, the cross, the triangle, the circle, the sun, the moon, the stars, radial designs, spiral designs, and designs reflecting the golden proportion.
- **All of us are producers and consumers and contribute to the society in which we live through the work we do.** We must work in order to live and we continually strive to invest our work with meaning. Art throughout history reflects man at work and a study of the masters may be used to introduce career consideration and investigation for children.
- **All of us seek meaning and purpose.** The search for meaning in the works of art of others and in the art that we create contributes to a global understanding of human need and emotion.
- **All of us respond to the aesthetic.** The arts allow us to respond to the most profound of human experience without written or spoken language. A study of history repeatedly affirms man's undeniable need to decorate or make special the most utilitarian of objects and to live in an environment that fulfills aesthetic as well as functional need. The arts need no interpreter; as a universal language they express ideas that cannot be put into words.
- **All of us have the capacity to recall the past and anticipate the future.** Through the arts we can study the past and use the information gleaned to make sensible decisions regarding the future.

Adopted from *Educating in a Multicultural World* by Ernest Boyer; as found in the Summer 1992 Newsletter for The American Forum for Global Education, and the Alliance for Education in Global and International Studies.