

# *Child Development in Art*

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## **Pre-School Ages 2-4**

While all children grow and develop at different rates, researchers have noted that basic similarities exist in the art of most young children, even across cultures. The art of children of similar ages can be a mirror of both their physical and cognitive development.

In early childhood, usually by age 2, children begin exploring mark-making through random scribbling. As they develop more control and experiment with art tools such as pencils and crayons, the marks they make become intentional. Gradually, uncontrolled scribbles begin to show repetition and overlap made by moving a tool in one direction, rather than back and forth.

By age four, most children can name or identify the marks they make, demonstrating the symbolic thinking that underlies all human imagery.

## **Kindergarten: Ages 5-6**

By ages 5-6, most children are familiar with a limited range of symbols that represent the world around them, such as a circle for a face or a rectangle for a car. They can use the images they make to tell stories. The use of simple repeated shapes reflect an increasing dexterity and small motor control in using tools like paint brushes and markers.

Children of this age typically choose to work in bright colors, and cite emotional reasons for their choices, associating colors as personal favorites or typifying a particular feeling.

People, usually caregivers like parents or teachers, who are the emotional center of the young child's world, are a favorite subject of children at this age.

## **First Grade, Ages 6-7**

As a child grows into the middle childhood years, their world broadens to include many things beyond home and school. This is reflected in their artwork with an increasingly broad range of subjects represented. Fine motor skills and control of art tools continue to develop. Children are able to add more details to their artwork, and depict their subjects with more complexity and an imaginative use of line, color, and shape.

Although groundlines are starting to appear, there is still no developed concept of space or how objects exist in relationship to other objects in the picture. Although things often hang in space with little attention to relative placement, children at this age have a natural sense of design and composition that make their works visually vibrant and complete.

## Second Grade: Ages 7-8

By second grade, children are generally conversant in one or more art mediums, and use them for a variety of purposes. The stories illustrated at this age include more visual elaboration, reflective of increasing small motor skill development and control.

There is a beginning interest in drawing things in spatially correct proportions; particularly the human figure, and first attempts to draw from observation rather than imagination.

By this age children are involved in the complexity of line and color in order to illustrate their vision, and begin to lose the spontaneity of color and form characteristic of their work at younger ages.

## Third Grade: Ages 8-9

Third grade marks a transition point from the imaginative work of early childhood to a more detailed and realistic approach to art. Artwork at this age will often include both realistic and imaginative elements, rendered more elaborately than ever before.

Many children at this age will continue to create works that reflect little concept of naturalistic space, while others will show great sensitivity in rendering what they observe around them with some accuracy.

By now, children will have experience and some competence with a variety of art media. They can intentionally choose one best suited to a growing variety of intents or purposes in creating their work.

## Fourth Grade: Ages 9-10

The increasing attention span and expanded world view of the fourth grader gives them an enlarged range of subjects and an increasing concern for accurately depicting what they see. Many have achieved a high level of control over one or more art mediums. Working with the human figure becomes problematic for the fourth grader who wants to draw realistically. Other subjects that are easier to master may become central to the fourth grader iconography, such as cartoons, animal figures and stylized alphabets. As peer approval begins to become more important to fourth graders, they sometimes work to develop expertise in drawing and painting certain subjects multiple times in stylized ways that are approved by peers.

## Fifth Grade: Ages 10-11

By the time children are in fifth grade, most are highly concerned with creating realistic artworks. At this level of development, children have the longer attention span, hand/eye coordination, and experience with a variety of art media to develop as realistic artists. With appropriate instruction, children will learn to closely observe proportional relationships, and include horizon lines and spatial devices such as overlap and perspective to achieve realistic effects. These are important criteria for an artwork to be seen as successful at this age by both the fifth grader and his/her peers.

Many children become discouraged and lose interest in developing their art skills at this age if their work does not match their standard for realism, or if they have no other training or exposure to other ways of evaluating the success of their work. Guided instruction is crucial to maintaining the child's sense of competence and skill as an artist at this stage of development.