

Arts & creativity in three- and four-year-olds

Preschoolers gradually develop a sense of ownership and pride in the objects they create. Their creations become more complex and detailed. As they develop an understanding of representations (that a picture or model can represent a real object), they become more intentional about creating realistic drawings, sculptures, buildings, etc. Preschoolers begin to understand that other people can have different perspectives, opinions, thoughts, and feelings than they do.

Creating representations

What children are doing:

Preschoolers become more interested in what they can make with materials. They have a better understanding of how a drawing or model can represent a real thing and are more intentional about creating art that looks like something, and are paying more attention to details.

What caregivers can provide:

- Well-stocked collections of art materials available and accessible daily.
- Examples of paintings, drawings, book illustrations, etc. that depict a wide range of realism in representations.

What caregivers can say and do:

- Allow children to save their artwork and continue working on it over time.
- Encourage more detailed representations by helping a child focus on one part of the object, noting the color, shape, etc.
- Display and talk with children about examples of artists' and illustrators' representations. Ask questions that encourage children to think about different ways of representing objects.



Developing persistence and problem-solving skills

What children are doing:

Creating involves a lot of trial and error and some disappointment. Children vary in their ability to tolerate situations that don't turn out the way they expected. Children will need some support in developing persistence and problem-solving attitudes.

What caregivers can provide:

- Books with photos of specific objects that the children are interested in or exploring at the moment.
- Real examples of objects. Let children examine them closely. This type of observing and drawing is a key element of scientific investigation.

What caregivers can say and do:

- When children become frustrated about getting a representation just right, find a picture to refer to or brainstorm how to get a sculpture to stand up. Convey the message that creating is about trying something new or different, seeing what happens, enjoying when it turns out well, and trying something else when it doesn't.

Recognizing and creating patterns

What children are doing:

The concepts of design and pattern show up in older preschoolers' artwork. The use of line, color, and form are interesting and appealing to children. Some elements of design incorporate mathematical concepts that preschoolers can grasp as they get older, such as symmetry (where two sides are mirror images of each other) and repeating patterns.

What caregivers can provide:

- Stamp set, ink pads, shape stencils, rulers, drafting templates, and other tools.
- Paints, large paper, and objects for printing.

What caregivers can say and do:

- Talk with children about repeating patterns and designs in the environment.
- Use transition times to play simple verbal games where you chant a pattern ("Blue, blue, green... blue, blue, green...blue, blue, what comes next?").

Appreciating art

What children are doing:

Older preschoolers are developing opinions and feelings about their own creations and beginning to look more closely at and think about other's artwork. Understanding that someone else's idea is worthwhile, even if it's different than yours, and that those personal preferences should be respected is part of social development for fours. Convey the message that different isn't wrong or bad...it's just different, and that each of them has the freedom to create art that he or she likes, even if someone else doesn't like it.

What caregivers can provide:

- Opportunities to examine a variety of art or illustration styles. Study several favorite children's book illustrators, closely examining individual illustrations.
- Set apart an area to display children's favorite creation made that day or week.



What caregivers can say and do:

- Talk with individual children about their own preferences, choices, and feelings during and after the creative process.
- Chart children's preferences and record their comments for the study of illustrators. Talk positively about having so many different viewpoints.
- Invite children to offer thoughts about one another's work, asking similar questions: "What do you like about it? What does it make you think of?"

Keep in mind... Creativity can be integrated throughout the curriculum. Create classroom books using children's illustrations. Invite children to help design and decorate a puppet theater or traffic signs for use with the trikes outdoors. Suggest to block builders that they draw their design on paper, either before or after building. Add books with pictures of beautiful and interesting architecture to the block area and support children as they recreate and modify the designs. The more opportunities and encouragement children are given to be artistically creative, the more confident, inventive, and skilled they become.