

# Arts Integration Philosophy

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OPENING MINDS  
THROUGH THE  
ARTS

I came to OMA Arts Integration after twelve years of teaching first, second, third, and fifth grades. I have gained a broader understanding of the curriculum because of this invaluable experience.

My teaching has progressively become more arts oriented as I became increasingly more comfortable with arts concepts introduced and enriched through my annual professional development experiences in FASI (Fine Arts Summer Institute). It is difficult for me to separate the arts from other major content areas. Now, arts integration is as natural as breathing. Several years ago, I started to introduce my students to classical music throughout the day. I remember Lucas, a third grader, who asked me if I would please put on some music during math. I asked him what kind he wanted and he thought a moment before replying, "Well...when you play fast music, I do my math fast. And when you play slow music, I do my math slow." Music appreciation, indeed!

Content studies can be sterile without the arts. Including visual arts in my Social Studies curriculum transformed historical figures into real people. After experiencing chapter tests that my students could pass but could neither retain nor apply the concepts, I created tests in which students could choose 2-3 important sections of the text to represent and then explain in writing. The artwork needed to be historically accurate, and the writing needed to incorporate the historical information, the reason for their choice, and the real world application. Hence, the social studies test became three grades (social studies, writing, and fine arts). It was wonderful to watch the students' excitement and listen to the buzz as Social Studies came to life in our classroom.

Last year the first grade teachers requested a lesson that incorporated Presidents' Day and the 6 Traits of Writing for Organization and Sequence. They planned to use center activities and "read alouds" to teach the topic before coming to OMA. I asked the students to tell me the names of the two important people (Washington and Lincoln) they had learned about in class, and wrote them on chart paper. Then we listed every fact they knew about each person. After each correct answer, and there were many, the teacher shook a maraca she had found on the piano. Finally she said, "You know so much, I'm getting tired of shaking!" I took that list and asked them to find items from George Washington's childhood. Some students created quick little moving tableaux from which the rest of the first graders guessed the fact. We continued that same process representing facts from adulthood before his presidency, during and after his presidency. After each child had an opportunity to create a tableau while the others guessed, I connected the activity to their writing a story about Washington. Would it make sense to use information from his adulthood and then switch to

his childhood? Would it make sense to use information from his presidency and then move backwards before his presidency? We followed the same process to organize and sequence facts about Lincoln. The connections we made between our list of facts, the kinesthetic movement, and the class discussion resulted in a more sequential story the children wrote in their classroom later that week. Teacher collaboration in OMA is *essential* to the success of an individual lesson, for without that, there is no prior knowledge from which to connect an integrated lesson.

As an OMA Arts Integration Specialist, I select a simple idea that will be presented in the classroom and let my imagination flow until I have a creative way of incorporating music, theatre, movement, and/or visual arts in my OMA lesson. The internet sources are a wonderful tool to use as a springboard for developing lessons. When I started this job, I was told that it would be the best job I'd ever have. It certainly has been! No other position allows a teacher to take a topic taught in the regular classroom, and introduce it in a way that uses the other intelligences. Integrating the arts into my classroom has changed the way I perceive teaching a topic. It's like being given a curriculum without any materials and having free rein to make the decisions about how to reach and teach the whole child.

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