At the Art of it All

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

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Abstract

The purpose of my project was to design and create four books that would share art with readers from all backgrounds – art and non-art. I researched the impact of art in education and found out how integral and effective it can be on developing young minds. The focus of my books is on the style of artists chosen because of the influence they had on their field. The design and content of the books was kept simple in order to keep the focus on the art.
Acknowledgements

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*** I would also like to thank my high school art teachers, Mrs. Melanie Huffman and Mrs. Jane Cleary, for letting me explore art in my own way.

*** My love of art would not have happened without my natural artistic talents, so I am saying giving a big thanks to my mom, Colleen, and grandpa Bill for giving me the good genes!
I believe art is one of the greatest tools with which a child can learn. As an essential part of early education, art can open doors in the mind and leave them ajar for a lifetime. As an art major, I wanted to research my opinion about art education and prove that it stems from fact not my personal bias. Furthermore, I wanted to create a project that would offer the world of art to people who are not art majors and not art aficionados. Using my graphic design background, I created a series of books which shares the art and impact made by four artists. The books are about each particular artist's style with the information being presented so that all readers can read, understand and enjoy.

Art in education has a profound affect on a child's lifelong learning capabilities and progress. In my research, I found several key ways art could help to strengthen academic environments. To begin, participation in art helps kids express themselves. The various media of art cater to the more imaginative side and allow for experiences found from no other source. “There is a certain honesty and confidence that children bring with them to art that allows them to regularly make new discoveries and breakthroughs,” commented Susan Striker in her book Young at Art (2). Art has no boundaries and offers a cognitive use of emotion, therefore, allowing decisions to be made with personal judgment rather than established rules. Involvement in art can also lead to inspiration in other academic areas as well. The Americans for the Arts (AFTA) website reports that young people who participate in the arts are four times as likely to win an award for writing an essay or poem. Furthermore, art enhances problem-solving abilities and critical thinking skills. “Art presents children with problems that can be solved an infinite number of correct ways,” offers Striker (3). With no right or wrong answers, students find encouragement in the “solving” they do with art and end up with more confidence in themselves and their abilities. A study on the AFTA site reported that students with high art instruction
earned higher scores on tests measuring critical thinking than students receiving low art instruction. Strengthened problem-solving and critical thinking can lead to more academic involvement and achievement, adding to overall school success. In fact, according to the AFT site, a young person is four times as likely to be recognized for an academic achievement if they regularly partake in the arts. Finally, being active in art offers a child an alternative method of learning. Art can reach those who may have never been reached before. It can help trouble youth by offering an alternative to damaging behavior. It can help a poorly performing student find an outlet at which to excel. Art can also offer a challenge to good students who are under-stimulated in their regular academic routine.

When I created my books, I took into account what I have learned about art in the academic world. In my experience, learning about how and why an artist created a piece is more interesting than learning where the artist was born, raised and attended school. It helped me make the decision to create books about artists and their methods rather than books that spout out generic biographic information. I want to teach with these books, but I think that even more so I want to inspire with these books. With this in mind, I chose artists who made an impact on the world of art. I ended up selecting four who I felt offered a wide variety of original artwork and had offered ideas to the art world that made a lasting impression. The four, Paul Cezanne, Edgar Degas, Pablo Picasso, and Vincent van Gogh, covered a healthy range of time, methods, and ideas. Each offered their own unique view of the world and translation of that view into art. They are all considered masters and innovators in their own right. For example, Picasso was one the artists who originated the style of cubism, which took art in different directions with its use of collage and abstraction. Additionally, their individual application of media is equally distinctive. Degas used pastels, while van Gogh used oil paint. Both established their own way of applying
layers upon layer of color in rich and dynamic fashions. The text of the books mainly offers explanations of the styles from each artist. Finally, in each book, I placed a piece of artwork I created while under the guidance of that particular artist. I offered a rationale for my choices so as to show my opinion that one has the ability to learn from styles not just facts. They are essentially examples of an artist finding inspiration from the styles of four different artists.

The creation of my books generally comes down to keeping it simple, a personal, functional and aesthetic choice. First I developed the idea of “fractioning” each painting into mini-masterpieces. The tiny boxes of the white cover pages create five new works from a single work. The boxes make viewers look at the details and study them for what they are apart from the complete piece. I wanted observers to look closer at the artwork and see the art in the parts within the whole. When it came to actually choosing the specific pieces I put into the book, I chose some because they were famous and others because they were not. I wanted a range of “knowns” and “lesser-knows” which offered a diverse array of each artist’s style. Admittedly, I opted for pieces with more color. They brought more life to the book! Another color decision I made was to keep the palette, outside of the artwork, very limited. The palette was narrowed to only black and white. I felt this made the color of the work pop even more. This helped to establish the art as the focus of the books with the text being secondary. Finally, my decisions concerning the size and binding of the book mainly stemmed from my desire for the books to be compact and easy to read. The slim shape and wire binding allows the book to be held in the palm of your hand and with the pages being easily flipped over the top when read. I figured if I made it easy, they might just read the entire series!

Art is an integral part of education. It broadens horizons and helps young minds grow. Being an active part of the art world can enrich lives by helping any person become an artist
expressing visions and solutions in whatever media or manner they see fit. In my opinion, a person should engage themselves in art for their entire life, for the benefits will never cease. In attempting to do my part to offer art to all, I designed and created a series of books that would help to make this possible by offering a glimpse into what four great artists had to give to the world.
Works Cited


Other Sources


