



For children in Catholic education, where the language of faith is so principally spoken through signs and symbols and visual imagery, **Art** is the perfect tool for both education and formation. Through art, children have a powerful venue for self-expression and for giving form to their child's-eye view for life's complexities. Art gives shape to wonder. The following reflection on the value of Art education is from highlights of Mary Regina Morrell's article in the spring 2008 issue of *Momentum* (former director of the Office of Religious Education in the Department of Education of the Dioceses of Metuchen).

**Why Art Education?** Art means *work*, Art means *language*, and Art means *values*. *Work* is one of the noblest expressions of the human spirit, and art is the visible evidence of work carried to the highest possible level. We draw before we write. Art is a *language* of visual images that everyone *must* learn to read. The most profound among the three is the element of *values*. You cannot touch art without touching values. As Catholic educators engaged in the process of educating and forming children spiritually as well as academically, any tool that will enable students to analyze the visual culture critically and that influences them while also empowering them to mold their own social environment is a tool of great worth.

When we consider the value of art and art education within the realm of Catholic education, faced with the inherent wonder and religious sense that abides within the heart of children, Pope John Paul's 1999 encouragement to artists serves as a meaningful reflection:

***“Through his artistic creativity man appears more than ever in the image of God, and he accomplishes this task above all in shaping the wondrous material of his own humanity and then exercising creative domain over the universe which surrounds him. With loving regard, the divine artist passes on to the human artist a spark of his own surpassing wisdom, calling to him to share in his creative power.”***



In teaching Art education I hope to enhance students' abilities to be creative, expressive and observant. The students began the year with learning observational skills through drawing. We began with learning to observe and to trust our eyes and hands to work together in Blind Contour Drawing. The students drew contours of a still-life (pumpkin, or flowers) and classmates, while looking only at the subject and not at the paper. No peeking! We used markers so there would be no "erasing" when they finally looked at their drawings. They learned to really look at what they were drawing.

The next session moved into Gesture Drawing a still-life (basket, pitcher, or flag) using colored pencils and/or crayons. This again focused on observational skills and creativity. Students were allowed 5-10 seconds before asked to switch to another color; layering colors in quick gestures of their subject. We also reflected on our earlier contour drawings. This was fast and expressive; they really enjoyed this.

The following session moved us outside to do Plein Air Drawings of trees. This time the students used pencils and paper on clipboards as they observed and drew their self selected trees; first from a distance and then from a closer perspective. They were given time to really study the trees of their choice and experiment with their drawings.

Negative and Positive Spaces with leaves as the subject matter; using oil pastels on small rectangular colored paper format, was the next art project. The students selected from many different leaves and explored the placement and design of their drawings. They reflected on past lessons in contour and gesture drawing while experimenting with color and a very "greasy" medium.

Painting, collage, sculpture, and many other art projects will follow. Each art session will build on observational, expressive and creative skills and experiences, while enhancing other aspects of the students' learning and growth. Art projects will also include the Character Education bulletin boards, banners for the Advent Program and Masses, and different community requests and contests.