

Artist Statements

Use this tool to build children's capacity for communicating complex ideas (e.g., metaphors, analogies, etc.) through the written word.

Step 1

After children use materials to explore a complex or *"big" question* (e.g., "How can you use watercolor to explore the relationship between intention and impact?"), ask children to create a written statement to accompany their work.

Step 2

Clearly state the intention of the artist statement. For example, you might invite children to write *artist statements* in order to:

- synthesize the big ideas explored through the materials
- reflect on the process of using materials to support their thinking and feeling
- explain theories that are represented in the materials

Step 3

Ask questions to support children's thinking about one of the *artist statements* described in Step 2. For example:

synthesize the big ideas explored through the materials

- How did the materials help you to explore ____ ?
- What new ideas do you have about the topic?
- Reflect on this prompt: I used to think ____, but (after working with the material) now I think ____ .
- What feelings does your piece represent?
- What more did you discover when you let your mind wander?

reflect on the process of using materials to support their thinking and feeling

- Describe the piece and what it represents (parts and/or whole).
(This is an opportunity to explore metaphor.)
- How did it feel to work with this material?
- How did you use line, color, and/or shape to explore ____ ?
- What do others need to know about your process? your product?
- What role does emotion play in your piece?

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Step 3: continued

explain theories that are represented in the materials

- How did your thinking about ____ grow?
- How did your theory/theories change?
- What did you discover as you explored ____ (idea or question) with ____ (material)?
- How can you help someone better understand your thinking or intentions about what you created and why?
- What surprised you? What challenged you?

Step 4

Give children quiet time to write.

Step 5

Ask children to share what they wrote. This could take the form of a “turn and talk,” a “[Gallery Walk](#),” or a learning celebration with peers or other guests.

Step 6

Ask children to reflect on the experience.

- What new ideas emerged as you wrote your artist’s statement?
- How does writing about working with materials help your thinking grow?
- How does writing help you understand your own work better?

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Children strengthen their ideas by reflecting on their creations in writing.

Artist statements are process- as well as product-focused. They are helpful for communicating metaphors, analogies, or other complex ideas discovered through the exploration of materials. Working with materials can support the development of new ideas and language, which, in turn, can support the development of new images. Providing time to explore this reciprocal relationship between images and words supports a rich process of meaning-making.



Suggested Time Frame

15-90 minutes, depending on children's developmental level, and whether the statements are intended to be "quick writes" or more formal.

When and How

Ask children to write an artist statement after they have used materials to explore an abstract or open-ended question, or when you think children's (or others') understanding will be deepened if they reflect on the meaning of their creations in writing. The writing can be formal or informal. *Artist statements* can be written in notebooks or on index cards, either directly following the learning experience or on the next day. It is often helpful for children to write with their creations nearby. If the "art" is temporary or unavailable, offer a photograph to which children can refer.

Tips and Variations

- *Artist statements* are helpful for documenting children's thinking and for assessment purposes.
- Prioritize the meaning children are trying to articulate. Once children have developed their message, they can move on to edits for more formal publication, if desired.
- You can approach *artist statements* with your class as a genre study by finding and discussing *artist statements* in an art museum or an art or photography book. Ask children, "What did you notice about what the artists wrote? How did that help you better understand their thinking and their work?"

