

Exploring Design in the Classroom and Online



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In a broad sense, design is about improving the quality of life around us. As such, it can be a powerful means of promoting authentic learning in the art classroom. Students engaged in the act of designing must use both critical and creative-thinking skills to arrive at original solutions to problems. The following online resources offer helpful information, models, instructional strategies, and project ideas for exploring design in the classroom.

General Design Resources

Wikipedia (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Design) provides useful background information on the field of design, design philosophies, and the design process. There are also links to pages on various design disciplines, design techniques, and related topics. AIGA (www.aiga.org) is the oldest and largest professional design association. Their website includes a variety of information resources for designers and educators working in the field. For the latest design news, events, and exhibition reviews from around the world, check out Dexinger (www.dexigner.com).

Design Exhibitions

“SAFE: Design Takes on Risk” was a 2005 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art featuring more than 300 contemporary products and proto-

types designed to protect body and mind from dangerous or stressful circumstances, respond to emergencies, present information clearly, and provide a sense of comfort and security. The exhibition’s companion site (www.safetyissues.org/safe) includes images and information on many of the objects in the exhibit ranging from refugee shelters, protective sports gear, baby strollers, and more.

Choosing artifacts from the collection of the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, designers from IDEO, a leading innovation and design firm (www.ideo.com), curated a 2007 exhibition around the theme of “design thinking,” which featured objects such as flashlights from different eras, a child’s chair, and designs for portable lighting, all of which demonstrated innovative problem-solving. The companion website (ideo.cooperhewitt.org) includes images of objects in the exhibition along with commentary regarding the human motivations that influenced the designers, and the contexts in which the objects were created and used.

One way to use these exhibition resources in the classroom is as springboards for discussions about “good” design. When doing so, you might find it worthwhile to have students search for and look at examples of “bad” design (www.baddesigns.com).

Design Education Resources

London’s Design Museum provides a number of downloadable teaching resources on design matters through their website (www.designmuseum.org) in addition to an online archive of modern and contemporary design and exhibition resources. In 2006, with the support of Target, AIGA introduced a design poster and activity series in *Scholastic Instructor* magazine to promote design thinking in the K–12 classroom. You can download the four posters and accompanying activities at www.aiga.org/content.cfm/scholastic-posters. Also, on the Futures Channel (www.thefutureschannel.com) there are a number of short videos showing different designers at work and how design impacts all aspects of our daily lives.

Design Projects

Building on the popularity of logo design projects in the classroom, Google introduced Doodle 4 Google (www.google.com/doodle4google) last year, inviting K–12 students to reinvent Google’s homepage logo. While the contest is over, your students can view the winners on the Google website and still reinvent Google’s logo as a classroom project.

Lastly, the Land That Design Forgot (www.alifetimeofcolor.com/play/id1) is an interactive online activity from Sanford ArtEdventures where primary students redesign a playground so it’s safer and more attractive. As a follow-up to the online activity, you might have students apply what they learned to designing a new playground for their school. 🔄

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