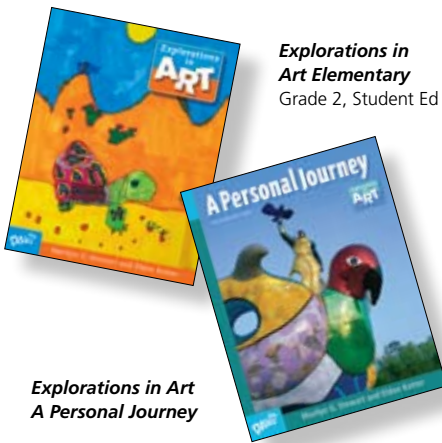




# THEMES in ART EDUCATION

## WHY???

Teachers can bring new teaching strategies and ideas into art classrooms by focusing on significance and meaning in artworks. In order to engage students in placing images in context and communicating their own voice and circumstance, a theme-based approach is recommended.



*Explorations in Art Elementary*  
Grade 2, Student Ed

*Explorations in Art*  
*A Personal Journey*



*Rethinking Curriculum in Art*

### Theme Based Learning in Explorations in Art

Unit themes such as Unity and Identity or Storytelling and Nature underscore the relevance of art in students lives and reveal the important roles art plays in culture around the world. Elements and principals, skills and techniques, and forms and media are learned not as isolated concepts, but as tools that help students interpret ideas of artists and express their own ideas through art.

### Enduring ideas are themes that reflect big questions about the human experience

*Dr. Marilyn Stewart* is a co-author of *Explorations in Art K-8*, she is also the series editor for the Art Education in Practice Series by Davis Publications. In *Rethinking Curriculum in Art*, from the Art Education in Practice Series, Dr. Stewart suggests that enduring ideas are foundational for curriculum in art. She states that they exceed any one subject matter or discipline and can make connections to many disciplines. Dr. Stewart goes on to say that she refers to enduring ideas but recognizes that the same concept may be exercised under other terminology such as themes, issues and key ideas. She defines

enduring ideas as themes, topics or issues that reflect big questions about the human experience and have been investigated over time. They are broad, umbrella-like ideas that guide students in understanding what it means to be human, to live alongside others and in the natural world. Human beings around the world and throughout time have expressed common activities, inclinations and ideas through art. There are connections between those commonalities and the great themes and enduring ideas that make art meaningful.

[See inside for more information](#) ►





## Explorations in Art in K-8

Help students explore great and enduring themes in artworks from around the world and throughout time to connect to their personal experience and to create original and meaningful artworks.

## Human experiences are great and enduring themes



As the President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, **Dr. Ernest Boyer (1928-1995)** wrote and

researched extensively about teaching in a culturally diverse world. He identified eight common experiences in the lives of human

beings around the world and throughout time. These commonalities are reflected by artists in their expressions throughout time and in every culture to recognize the uniqueness of individualism and to celebrate a sense of universality in community. Revealed in these common human experiences are the great and enduring

themes that give meaning to art, inspire communication through art and touch our emotions in responding to art. They help us to feel and understand our own unique experience and to connect to the hearts and minds of other human beings in different times and places and in our own environment through art.

## Universal Human Commonalities

Though the Universal Human Commonalities are often presented in different order and are often paraphrased, they are essentially the following:

We all...

**Experience the life cycles** – All people share the universal experience of birth, growth, and death.

**Work** – Work is universal. All people produce and consume.

**Use symbols** – All people use symbols to express feelings and ideas.

**Know time and place** – All people have the miraculous capacity to recall the past and anticipate the future.

**Search for a larger purpose** – All people attempt to give meaning and spiritual direction to our lives.

**Have an aesthetic response** – All people respond to the aesthetic.

**Seek social bonding** – All people are members of groups and institutions that consequently shape their lives.

**Have a connection to nature** – All people are connected to the ecology of nature.



# HOW???

To illustrate the connection between enduring ideas or themes in art and the human commonalities let us look at one commonality as a theme that is present in the new art textbook series *Explorations in Art K-8*.

## Symbols as themes

We all use symbols. All people use symbols to express feelings and ideas.



## Explorations in Art

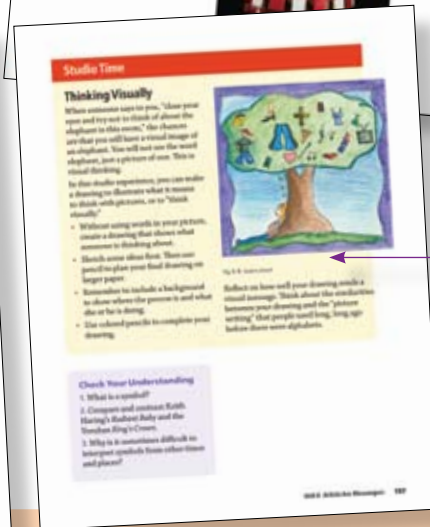
GRADE 2

Unit 4 Picture Stories—Images and Ideas  
Lesson 23 Shapes and Symbols, Story Collage, pp. 110–111

## Explorations in Art

GRADE 4

Unit 2 Sharing Stories—Art and Communication,  
Lesson 10 Communicating with Symbols,  
Playful Messages, Something's Fishy  
pp.44–45



## Explorations in Art, A Personal Journey

GRADE 6

Unit 6 Artists are Messengers, Recognizing Messages, Thinking Visually  
pp. 154 and pp. 157

Notice how all of these lessons are vertically aligned and how they progress in sophistication as appropriate for the grade level. Each lesson offers a different aspect of how people use symbols to express feelings and ideas.

It would be very meaningful for student to then connect the use of symbols in poetry, politics, science and math. Visual symbols communicate as effectively as words or numbers. That is the beauty and relevance of the visual arts when taught in a theme-based approach using enduring ideas and issues.

## Suggested Enduring Ideas

Each of the human commonalities provides a rich topic for inquiry, learning and creating. Other suggestions for Enduring Ideas are: **Identity, Survival, Conflict, Spirituality, Fantasy, Power, Rites of Passage, Change, Ritual, Celebration, Heroes, and Ancestry.**



### Notes:

A large, light-orange rounded rectangular area containing 15 horizontal lines for writing notes.

#### CREDITS

By Sharon Warwick, National Art Consultant, Davis Publications. Adapted from "Educating in a Multicultural World," a speech by Ernest Boyer; as found in the Summer 1992 Newsletter for The American forum for Global Education and the Alliance for Education in Global and International Studies.

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Marilyn G. Stewart and Sidney R. Walker, *Rethinking the Curriculum in Art*, Worcester, MA: Davis Publications, ©2005