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ART *THE* *EXPERIENCE*

BY WILLET RYDER, Ed.D.

Dedication

*To Elé and Tama Ryder for their
encouragement and Louise Smith
Ryder for her inspiration*

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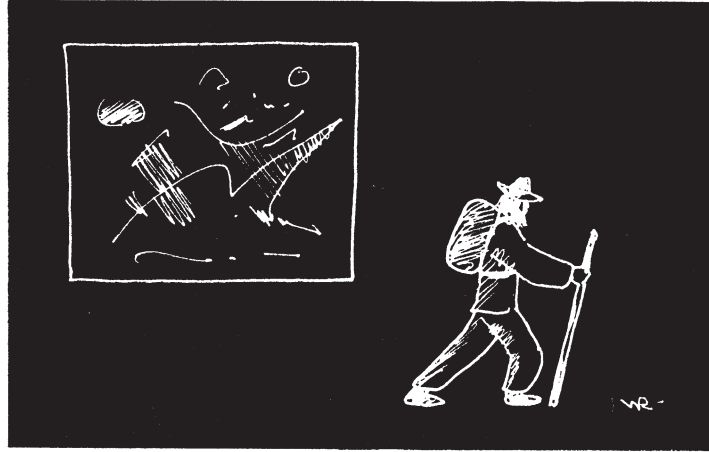
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Part One

Exploring the Self—

Learning Who You Are



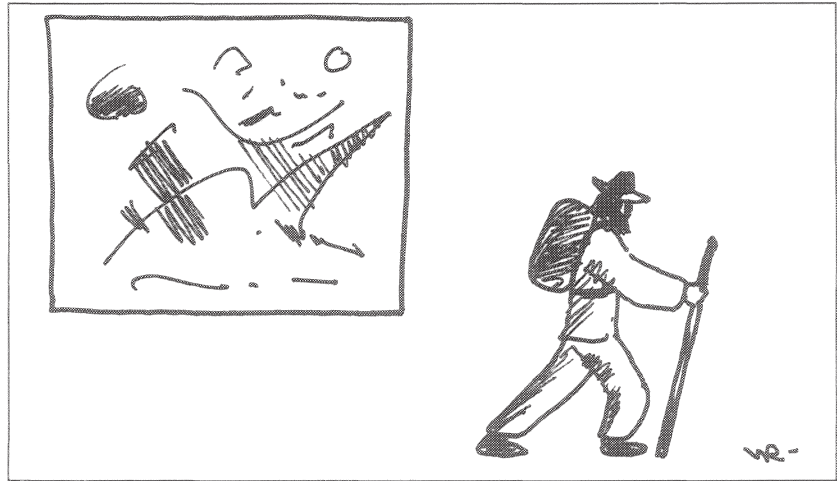
The quest to gain a more thorough knowledge of who we are and what we're about is the primary goal of the education process. It is, in fact, the basic place to begin our explorations in art, for by looking more closely into ourselves, we can gain valuable insights into what makes us the unique beings that we are. At the same time, by pursuing such self-investigation, we can also become more sensitized to some of the vital issues and concerns of others.

In this group of art activities, we will be recording visual information about ourselves. We will be describing our feelings to one another and showing who we are through visual means. We will be telling about those people who influence our lives and about the dreams and goals that we experience and to which we aspire. We will be looking at the ethnic groups to which we belong and learning to develop pride in our heritage.

As we consider these ideas and create our own art, we will be on our way to discovering some wonderful individual treasures. So bring out the art materials and get ready to begin the trip. The map you'll be following on this special journey is written in you!

Communicating Feelings

Developing Emotional Insights



Purpose: *To convey a personal feeling in visual form*



Materials:

An assortment of wood and fabric scraps, drawing and construction paper (12" x 18"), cardboard, plasticine, white glue, scissors, tempera paints, brushes, pencils, crayons, markers, newspaper.

Description: *Each of us experiences a wide variety of feelings on a daily basis. One of the greatest qualities of human life is that we all have feelings and that we can share these feelings with others. By attempting to depict an important personal feeling in visual form, one is asked to reflect on that feeling and ponder how to show it to others. This activity invites the students to do just that.*

- 1** Begin this activity by holding a short discussion on feelings and why they are important. Make a list of feelings that the students have suggested.
- 2** Ask each student to recall one of his/her personal feelings and make a drawing, painting, collage, or sculpture about it.
- 3** Be certain to stress that the visual expression of a feeling can be done in whatever style the individual wishes. It can be abstract, realistic, expressionistic, symbolic, simple, or complicated. It is up to each student to decide how to depict this feeling to others.
- 4** At this point, make a variety of art materials available to the students. Place boxes or bins of different art materials on a table at the front of the room, and let the students make individual selections.
- 5** Allow the students to work for as long as possible without interruption.

6 After cleaning up, hold a “sharing session.” Such a session is of great importance, since it affords each student the opportunity to show and explain his/her art. It is also acceptable if a student does not wish to show or discuss his/her work.

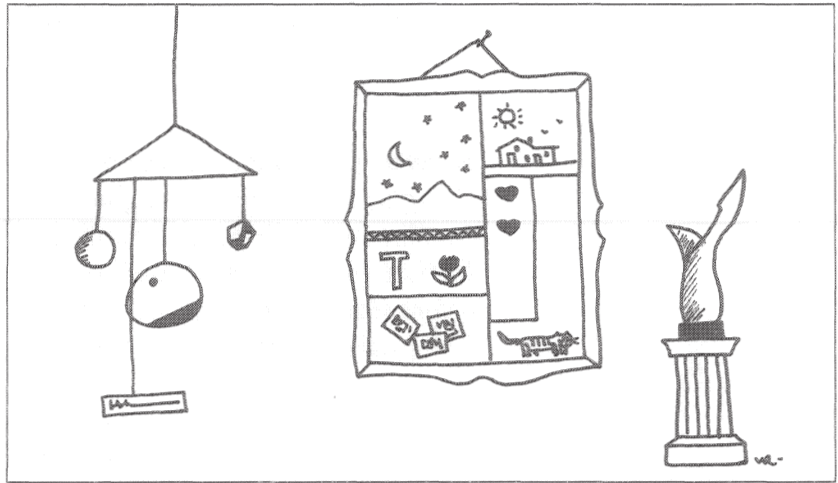
Notes: *Creating an artwork about a personal feeling is a thoughtful and fascinating activity that can aid each student in gaining greater self-knowledge. I have found that initially many students will sit and think for quite some time before starting to work. Perhaps this is a natural reaction to being asked to do such an artwork!*

Once the students have started to work, please try not to interfere. I have found that if students need help, they will ask for it. Since this is a very personal activity, the less interference the better. I am constantly amazed at the wide variety of art that is stimulated by such an activity. In addition to the exciting visual work, the teacher can learn a great deal by hearing the explanations given by the students.



Creative Autobiographies

Celebrating Who You Are



Purpose: To create a unique work of art that relates important information about your life



Materials: Manila, white drawing, and colored construction paper (12" x 18"), cardboard, plasticine, wood and fabric scraps, hangers and yarn, pencils, crayons, markers, tempera paints, brushes, scissors, newspaper.

Description: Who are you? What are you about? What kinds of things do you like? These are some of the questions on which this activity focuses. The main idea is for each student to present important aspects or characteristics of him/herself in a visual work. The work can be in the form of a collage, montage, drawing, painting, sculpture, construction, or mobile. It can be very tiny or very large. The crucial thing is that it must be thoughtful, and it must attempt to describe the individual in some way.

1 Launch this activity with your class by discussing the meaning of "autobiographies" and the important questions listed above. Explain that in this activity, each child will be asked to make a unique piece of art that tells about her/himself. These works can be done in any style or materials that the students wish to use.

2 Next, invite the students to reflect on themselves and to begin formulating how they plan to explain themselves visually to the class.

3 When each student is ready, ask him/her to select the materials that he/she wishes to use. Have all the materials available on a table in one section of the room, and be sure you have an ample supply. Since many kinds of materials may be needed by the students, it is a good idea to have a number of cardboard storage boxes filled with a variety of items.

4 Be available to encourage the students, answer questions, and give advice about individual problems as they arise.

5 When all the works are complete, hold a sharing session and exhibition. I am confident that you will find this activity to be enlightening for both the students and the teacher.

Notes: *I was first introduced to this activity in one of Victor D'Amico's art education classes about twenty years ago. Over the years, I have used it to start my art classes—whether they be composed of children or adults—for the activity provides an excellent method for students to get better acquainted with themselves and others.*

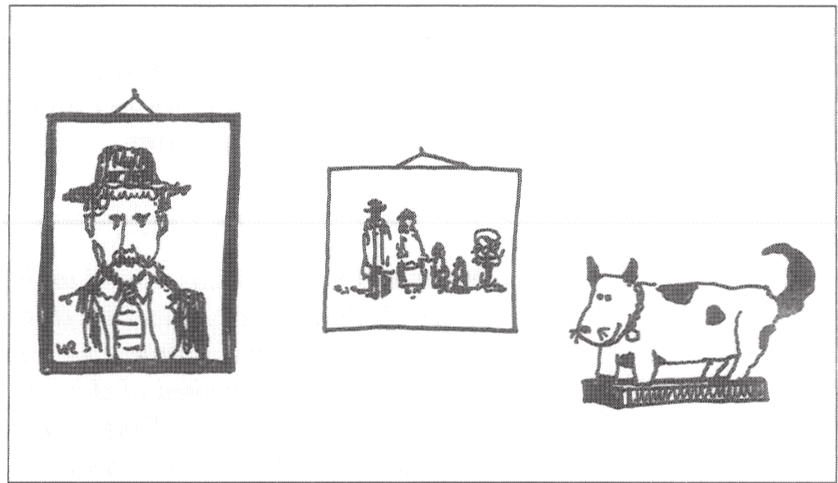
Looking back over many autobiographical sessions, I find that two creations stick out in my mind. The first of these was a sweater-like garment of yarn, which the student created and wore to class. Pinned to this garment, at various intervals, were about thirty 3" x 5" cards with descriptive words, such as "cheerful," lettered on them. These words expressed the many personality attributes of the student.

The second example was very small and very clever. It consisted of an egg shell that had been cleaned out and carefully cut in half. Stuffed inside the shell was a bunch of colored confetti-like paper with typed messages describing the person. The student explained her project to the class by stating that she was like an egg. Although she was quiet, reserved, and mysterious on the outside, she was filled with all kinds of colorful qualities on the inside!



Depicting Others

Creating Art About Other People



Purpose: *To draw, paint, or sculpt an important person one knows*

Description: *People are social beings, and most of us come into contact with a variety of other folks on a daily basis. Family members and close friends are probably the most popular subjects for this activity. However, clergy, teachers, and doctors may also pop up.*



Materials:
Various sizes of white and manila drawing paper, plasticine, Styrofoam and fabric scraps, pipe cleaners, white glue, scissors, watercolors, tempera paints, brushes, pencils, markers, crayons, plastic cups, water, newspaper.

1 This activity should begin with a discussion about the important people we know. Students can make their own lists, or you can write a large list on the chalkboard as the students make their suggestions.

2 Explain to the class that throughout the ages artists have often used other people as the basis for their artwork. You might obtain a general survey book on art history and select some examples that illustrate this fact. Large art prints or slides would be ideal. It is very important to let the students know that there is no “right” way to draw, paint, or sculpt someone. (Several examples from art history should illustrate this point!)

3 Next, ask each student to select one very special person in his/her life and begin to make an artwork about this person. Make available a wide range of art materials for this purpose.

- 4** Allow the students as much time as possible so they can think and work carefully.
- 5** After students complete their art, hold a “sharing session.” This will provide them with an opportunity to talk about and share their artwork.

Notes: *Although the artwork is important and interesting to see, I believe that the “thinking” is the most significant part of this activity. By focusing on an important person in his/her life, each student will begin to realize why that other person is so special. Such an activity can increase one’s understanding of the vital role that others play in our lives.*

