



by Vivien Santana Hughes

# raising an ARTISTIC KID

A stylized illustration of an artist's palette and brushes. The palette is white with several colored dots (brown, grey, black) and is positioned behind two brushes with dark bristles. The word 'ARTISTIC' is written in large, blue, block letters across the top, and 'KID' is written in large, blue, block letters across the bottom. The word 'raising an' is written in a smaller, black, sans-serif font above 'ARTISTIC'.

**Art classes can help  
your child tap into his  
creative streak**



**N**ine-year-old Jennifer Nash chews her lip as she carefully puts the finishing touches on her work of art: a pastel of a cockapoo. “It’s a present for my mom,” she says proudly. But what’s more important than how it looks—and it looks remarkably good—is how hard she worked on it, says Sher Warren, co-owner of KidsArt in Montrose. Making art helps kids acquire patience, learn to fix mistakes, concentrate in a quiet mode, complete a finished product and develop responsibility (in caring for their supplies)—“All skills that carry over into other things they do,” adds Warren.

Sally Warner, a professional artist and instructor, says “Art gives children choices and control—and the younger the child, the fewer decisions they get to make in their lives.” Warner, author of *Encouraging the Artist in Your Child (Even If You Can’t Draw)* (St. Martin’s Press), finds that developing your child’s creative streak—and they all have it to some extent—makes him feel more independent. And, she says, by empowering kids with all these positive traits they “may go less haywire when they’re older.”

An independent, responsible child with high self-esteem: just what every parent aspires to raise. So, art must be an integral part of most schools’ curriculums, right? Don’t count on it. Susie Lange of the California Department of Education finds that art is one of the first areas to get cut when the budget ax falls. “This year will be the worst, with 10 percent cuts forecast,” says Lange. “Art, music and physical education feel the impact first.” Virginia Lares, who teaches first and second grade in the Los Angeles Unified School District, knows this firsthand. “We hoard our own paint brushes, and if you get an easel, you don’t give it up.” Watercolor paints are hard to come by, she says, and many teachers spend their own money on that prized commodity: colored chalk.

Ultimately, the responsibility for exposing your child to art falls back to you. But parents don’t have to actually *teach* (my stick figures of Big Bird wouldn’t have inspired Rembrandt), just provide the paper and supplies. Most important, says Warner, is to plan out blocks of unstructured time with no distractions. “Parents must have the guts to turn off the TV,” she says. Next, gear the project to your child’s personality: “Take an overactive child and give him a coloring book of Amish quilt patterns and it just isn’t going to work.” There are no rules for choosing a medium—if your child really wants to experiment with clay, don’t make her draw first. Finally, let your child decide when the project is done and then let the cleanup begin right away.

Art supplies should always be available at home, but when your child is ready to learn realistic drawing or other new skills, formal art classes can provide that enrichment. Many offer a free first visit to assess your little artist’s readiness for that particular curriculum.

But don’t worry about your child’s artistic giftedness: “Anyone can learn to draw competently,” says Warren of KidsArt. “It’s all about being interested and wanting to learn.”