CHECKLIST & ART CURRICULUM FOR GRADES K-6

Lessons that work!
Art Curriculums evolve. They are never perfect from the start. My best advice is to enjoy the process of developing your art program and pivot when things don’t work. Which tends to happen quite often. At least for me!

Determining which art activities are appropriate for each grade level can be challenging. When should Kinders begin painting with watercolors? Or what’s the best age to introduce print-making?

The one thing I know for sure is that determining project suitability gets easier. A little experience in the art room and how well you know a particular class will help you decide which projects will be the most successful.

Here are 7 grade level checklists to determine the suitability of a project for a grade level or class plus a sample art curriculum with links and lesson ideas:
KINDergarten

Click for DSS kindergarten lesson plans

- Cutting/tearing & gluing paper shapes
- Tracing/cutting shapes
- Painting with tempera paint & mixing primary colors to create secondary colors (towards last half of the year)
- Draw or paint lines and patterns using big arm movements
- Non-representational drawings or paintings (painting squiggles, curvy lines, etc)
- Oil pastel resist with liquid watercolor (oil pastels are better than crayons)
- Directed line drawings of subjects with simple shapes (flowers, birds, butterflies, fish, etc)
- Clay or play-doh projects that involve forming a ball (pinch pots)
- Creating texture with paint via painted paper using texture tools
### Sample Curriculum Using The Members' Club Lesson Plans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1    | **Line Drawing:** | Start the year with a simple line drawing with markers. Project can extend into cutting and pasting the drawing onto paper. You’ll be able to see how well children can listen and where their fine motor skills are at.  
Try: [Pattern Sea Turtle Resist](#) or [Shape Bird Watercolor & Drawing](#) or [Oil Pastel Resist Bird](#)  
Draw on regular paper with a black marker and color with crayons OR follow the watercolor technique. The focus is drawing LINES. |
| 2    | **Paper Cutting:** | Practice cutting paper while learning shapes. Cutting and pasting early in the year will help the children build fine-motor skills quickly. Resist the urge to help them too much!  
Try: [Kandinsky Concentric Circles](#) and [Matisse Organic Shape Collage](#)  
Both of these lessons will get children used to scissors and learn the difference between organic shapes and geometric shapes. Younger children (less than 6) will benefit from using circle tracers. |
| 3    | **Painted Paper:** | After two fine-motor skill lessons, this free-painting lesson will allow children to play again. As an added benefit, you’ll have extra painted paper for projects throughout the year. If you feel confident with paint, start the first or second week of class with painted paper. The kids will love it!  
Try: [Ladybug & Duckling Paper Art](#) (for 4-5 year olds) or [Lois Ehlert’s Birds](#) (successful for abilities) or [Brown Bear, What Do You See?](#)  
The trick with these lessons is to create the painted paper to share then use templates to develop skills. |
| 4    | **Drawing & Creating with Shapes:** | I’m always surprised at how well Kinders will follow along with a directed line drawing especially when shapes are involved. These lessons reinforce math concepts so they are always a great choice.  
Try: [Easy Watercolor Castle](#) or [Shape Bird Houses](#) or [Paper Sailboats Mixed-Media](#) |
FIRST GRADE  Click for DSS first grade lesson plans

☐ Cutting & gluing paper shapes (collage art)
☐ Mixing secondary colors from primary
☐ Painting with tempera paint (liquid and puck)
☐ Representational drawings or sculptures
☐ Still-life paintings
☐ Oil pastel resist with liquid watercolor
☐ Symmetry
☐ Directed Line drawings of recognizable subjects (animals, insects, birds, structures,
### DIRECTED LINE DRAWING & PAINTING:
Just like with Kinders, starting the year off with a directed line drawing is not only easy for the teacher (little prep) but it gives you a good sense of the class dynamics. I like a line drawing that is not just about lines and patterns, but one that combines a famous artist or other themes.

Try: [Dancing Cow Watercolor](#) or [How to Draw a Ferry Boat](#) or [Easy Picasso Cubist Portrait](#)

### PAPER CUT ART:
Cutting and pasting is such an important skill for little ones. It sets the stage for more advanced projects later on. Pick a subject that is fairly easy to recognize and then use paper to create the art.

Try: [Fish Eyes Collage](#) or [Paper Giraffes](#)

### COLOR THEORY:
I wouldn’t get too technical about color theory with first graders yet, but try a project that allows children to create secondary colors from primary colors.

Try: [Matisse Apples on Table](#) or [Picasso Cubist Bird or Fish (Value: Tints)](#) or [Colorwheel Clowns (DSS)](##)

### PAINTED PAPER COLLAGE:
You can do a painted paper project any time during this year, but if you need an Autumn theme lesson, these are my favorites:

Try: [Autumn Art Collage](#) or [Woven Fun Fish](#) (to add more standards try this lesson to incorporate weaving)
SECOND GRADE  Click for DSS second grade lesson plans

☐ Use templates to kick-start more detailed projects
☐ Mixing secondary colors from primary
☐ Chalk pastel
☐ Fantasy art (castles, dragons, fairy tales, etc)
☐ Representational drawings or sculptures
☐ Weaving with paper
☐ Positive and negative paper shapes
☐ Creating value (tints & shades) with paint
☐ Slab clay projects
### Lines, Color & Patterns
Creating lines with markers teaches a child how to deal with mistakes. The addition of coloring in the form with paint or colored markers extends the standards requirements.

Try: [Russian Matryoshka Dolls](#) or [American Indian Tipi](#)

### Color Theory:
Although children have been taught about primary and secondary colors, 2nd grade is when they really get it (at least from my experience). Do a lesson that really isolates the understanding that secondary colors are created by mixing primary colors.

Try: [Scarecrow Colorwheel Painting](#) or [Primary and Secondary Fish Paintings](#)

### Torn & Cut Paper:
Dive into an art project that checks off many of your art standards: repetition and balance in nature, the elements of art in nature, tearing and cutting skills. Second graders love to work with their hands and this type of project is perfect.

Try: [Paper Zebra Collage](#) or [Torn Paper Owls](#) (DSS)

### Perspective with Paint
Up to now, children have been exploring paint and color but take it a step further by introducing perspective.

Try: [African Mud Huts (Here, Near & Far)](#) or [Scarecrow Art Project](#) or [Snowy Forest Collage](#)
THIRD GRADE

- Moving beyond directed drawing into observational
- Coloring with markers
- Creating value with markers (cross-hatching)
- Chalk art
- Weaving with yarn
- Warm and cool colors
- Pan watercolor paints
- Print-making (monoprints, relief printing)
- Form-based clay projects

Click for DSS third grade lesson plans
### I. LINE, COLOR & PATTERNS:
Any lesson that uses color and line is a great way to begin the year with third graders. Moving a step beyond a simple line drawing, challenge your 3rd graders with a project that allows them to explore pattern and colors.

Try: [Easy Klimt Figure](#) or [Romero Britto Pop Art Line Drawings](#) or [Princess & the Pea Drawing](#) or [Maasai Figure Drawings](#)

### 2. VALUE COLOR THEORY
Almost all art lessons involve color, but select projects that have the added benefit of understanding line, value and repetition. You can never do too many of these projects. They are the foundation pieces of all art programs.

Try: [Maud Lewis Folk Art](#) or [Value Jellyfish Art](#) or [Terrific Toucans](#)

### 3. SPACE:
I’m not talking about outer space here but rather an element of art. Any landscape lesson is great for teaching space (here, near and far) but for third grade I love lesson that incorporate the idea indirectly.

Try: [Arches national Monument](#) or [Adobe Chalk Mexican Landscape](#) or [Draw & Paint a Country Barn](#)

### 4. TEXTURE:
Creating painted paper is one of the joys of art class. Children experiment with color and texture in the most fun way. But there are other ways to incorporate texture as well. here are a few to try:

[Klimt’s Golden Cat](#) or [Rainforest Collage](#) or [Van Gogh Texture Landscape](#) or [Van Gogh Starry Night](#)
Fourth Grade

FOURTH GRADE Click for DSS fourth grade lesson plans

☐ Drawing with pencil
☐ Creating value with colored pencils
☐ Proficient in watercolor and tempera paint
☐ Representational drawings or sculptures
☐ Beginning perspective
☐ Mixed-media techniques
☐ Slab & form clay projects
### COLORED PENCIL DRAWINGS:
I prefer not to use colored pencils with kids until 4th grade. The tip is generally fine so more precise coloring skills are required. Once kids have good small motor skills, using colored pencils is rewarding. As you get to know your group of 4th graders, easy prep projects like the ones below offer you a chance to focus on the kids, not the supplies.

Try: [How to Draw a Castle](#) or [Warhol Soup Cans](#)

### OIL PASTELS & WATERCOLOR PAINT:
Start the year with a basic line drawing in oil pastels and use watercolor paints to finish. This classic medium combo is familiar to 4th graders and many will add great details to their work. It serves as a refresher to working with watercolors: wet-on-wet, salting, texture and washes.

Try: [Watercolor Chameleon](#) or [Dinosaur Stomp Watercolor](#)

### COLLAGE ART
Like third graders, fourth graders love collage but are capable of much more detail. I like to use the technique of painting a background and layering a cut-out drawing on top. This enables most 4th graders to create a finished looking piece with areas of interest.

Try: [Surfacing Whale](#) or [Jacques Cousteau Underwater Explorer](#)
FIFTH GRADE

- Drawing from observation
- Creating contrast with complementary colors
- Pencil > black marker > watercolor sequence
- Architecture drawings and paintings
- Radial art
- Origami
- 1-point perspective
- Abstract art
- Using colors to express emotions
- Printmaking
- Slab vessels, detailed form-based clay projects, collaborative clay murals

Click for DSS fifth grade lesson plans
### Paper Cutting
Paper cutting is a great way to begin the year. 5th graders have a good knowledge of basic drawing so far and using scissors and paper to create a composition offers a unique challenge. You’ll be able to identify where your group of kids are at by the level of detail they create, the accuracy of the cutting and the sophistication of the shapes.

Try: [Matisse-Inspired Name Panels](#) or [Matisse Dancers](#)

### Drawing
After completing the paper projects, move into a drawing exercise. Children at this age love to show off their detailed drawing skills so pick lesson that play off their interest for imagination.

Try: [Imaginary Lands (Cartography)](#) or [Futuristic City Line Art](#)

### Free-Expression Painting
Using your paint of choice (acrylic or tempera), set-up a still-life or select a subject that allows for a broad interpretation. I like drawing with a light colored chalk (big enough to encourage large shapes but mistakes can be wiped away or painted over)

Try: [Contemporary Still-Life](#) or [Van Gogh Irises](#)

### Watercolor Drawing & Painting
Watercolor paintings in 5th grade generally take longer than any other grade because the drawings become more detailed. Because of this, use a waterproof marker for the drawing to achieve a higher level of detail. If you want a faster project, stick with a resist technique.

Try: [Watercolor Chameleon (advanced)](#) or [Colonial Homes](#) or [Watercolor Resist Tropical Fish](#)
Sixth Grade

SIXTH GRADE  Click for DSS sixth grade lesson plans

☐ Detailed realistic portraits
☐ Drawing from observation
☐ Pencil > black marker > watercolor sequence
☐ Creating contrast with complementary colors
☐ Ancient civilization art
☐ Animation
☐ 2-point perspective
☐ Acrylic painting with tints, shades and intensities
☐ Multi-step mixed media collages or artwork
☐ Oil pastel resist with liquid watercolor
☐ Directed Line drawings of recognizable subjects (animals, insects, birds, structures, etc)
☐ Slab vessels, detailed form-based clay projects, collaborative clay murals
## COLOR
Experimenting with color theory is often overlooked at this age. We assume kids know everything about mixing paints, but this isn’t the case. This color mixing lesson proves that there is a whole lot more learning waiting to happen.

Try: [Mix Your Own Colors Experiment](#)

## VALUE
After the color-mixing lesson, children are ready to explore tints and shades. Landscapes are also a great way to teach value. Using atmospheric perspective, child can paint layers of landscape with tints and shades.

Try: [Emily Carr Mixed-Medium Forests](#) or [Charcoal Elephants & Rhinos](#)

## MARKER & WATERCOLOR
Detailed line drawings continue with 6th graders. The trick to painting details in drawings with watercolors is to make sure the subject of the drawing allows for space. In other words, the kids need to draw larger shapes in order for the painting to be satisfying and not frustrating. Good subjects are buildings, fish, flowers, etc.

Try: [Clipper Ships](#) (A DSS favorite!) or [Mixed-Media Fish Paintings](#)

## MATH & ART
If your students are able to follow instructions well (not all 6th grade classes can) try an art project that introduces measurements to draw a piece of architecture.

Try: [How to Draw a Barn](#) (advanced project)

If your students need something less structured, try this: [St. Basil’s Cathedral](#)
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