

# Guide to Teaching the Early Grades



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# Introduction

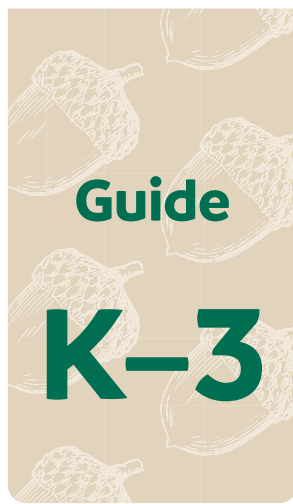
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Homeschooling is a journey for the parent as much as for the child. The main requirement is a willingness to learn together (and maybe a dose of courage!). However, many parents approach homeschooling with very little, if any, teaching experience. Some parents can feel uncertain about what to do and may worry that if they don't do something "right," their child will suffer. After decades of working with homeschooling families, we can assure you that if you are willing to learn and keep your love for your child as the focus of your intentions, you are almost certain to succeed.

The art of teaching is a noble art and one to which many people dedicate their lives. Even if you have never taught other children, you have been teaching your children since they were born. Your parenting instincts can help guide you in your teaching. Because you know your child best, you will be able to use your innate sensitivity to your child's needs to help you shape and customize your learning activities.

*Oak Meadow Guide to Teaching the Early Grades* is designed to give you some important information about the learning process and the art of teaching. We've drawn on the vast and varied experience of Oak Meadow's teachers in creating this guide, and we hope it provides you the support you need to become a confident, effective home teacher. You are encouraged to read this book before you begin teaching and to refer to it often throughout your homeschooling years. As you become more experienced as a teacher, you will be able to more fully use and expand on the information here. You will find Oak Meadow's *The Heart of Learning* to be another essential resource in your development as a teacher.

Above all, remember to enjoy this incredible time with your children. Learning is an exciting process of discovery for both teacher and student. By sharing a natural curiosity and love of learning with your children, you will have a rich and wondrous educational journey.



# Learning Processes

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Learning is a process, and facilitating this process is what the art of teaching is all about. There are many activities we can offer children that support a rich learning experience. These activities don't have to be elaborate, though—even the simplest activity can be used in a learning process. It is the amount of life you bring to the activity that determines the depth of experience you will have together.

As teachers, we may not always feel filled with life and energy, and in those cases we must consider what kinds of activities actually have the ability to draw us into a deeper experience, even when we're not feeling up to it. Some activities seem, by their very nature, to thwart the very possibility of deeper experience. Others seem to have the power to inspire and delight while bringing us into a fuller sense of our potential.

## Elements of Successful Learning Processes

How can we determine which activities will support the learning process best? There are several elements that are common to activities that provide opportunities for deeper expression. Some activities have all of these elements, while others have only one or two. An activity does not necessarily have to have all three of these elements, but for an activity to offer real opportunities for deeper expression, it must have at least one of these elements present:

### The Activity Is Rhythmical

This should be understood in a broad sense, and does not mean the activity must have drums beating in the background, or involve singing, clapping, or dancing (although it might!). Rhythm has to do with the repetition of a particular motion numerous times, eventually resulting in a finished activity. This includes such activities as knitting, sewing, weaving, form drawing, singing rounds, and folk dancing. Reciting the times tables can be a rhythmic activity, as can reading poetry aloud, if it has a clear, repetitive meter and rhyming scheme. The repetition of a particular action creates an opportunity for focus that is not available in other, more erratic activities where the mind is constantly making decisions. It provides the mind and body with an activity that is steady, consistent, and nonthreatening (because it is familiar). Once we are able to relax our minds in this way, we can open to the experience of process.

## The Activity Is Creative

This includes such activities as clay sculpting, woodworking, painting, and drawing, as well as any activity that allows you to use the imagination to create something. In creative activities, there is a flexible medium present that allows the child to give form to an inner impulse. These activities encourage strong connection between your child's physical being and the inner creative nature and innate abilities. The particular medium used in the creative process influences the nature of the experience. In general, materials that are softer and more malleable are preferred over anything harsh or brittle, and it is usually preferable to choose a natural material over a synthetic one. For example, if you are doing a sculpting project, clay would be better than commercial Play-Doh. If you are drawing, crayons generally encourage a freer form of expression than markers. Natural colors are more conducive to a reflective experience than "day-glo" colors, and wood has a richer feel than plastic.

## The Activity Embodies Archetypes

We'll talk in greater detail about archetypes in the storytelling section of this guide, but essentially, the basic concept is that all physical forms and activities are reflections of deeper realities. If an activity incorporates or embodies archetypes, that activity has the power to help those who are involved (children and adults) to transcend their limiting emotional and mental patterns. This lets them begin to experience the deeper movements of life, opening them up to expressing their natural capacity for intelligence and loving concern for others. Although archetypal symbols can appear in many activities, the activity in which this can occur most clearly and strongly is storytelling.

These are some of the fundamental elements that comprise effective, beneficial learning processes, and should be considered before you begin an activity.

# Facilitating the Learning Process

As you prepare to enter into a specific learning process with your child, we suggest reflecting on the following areas so that you can feel confident in your approach. These guidelines are based on the experiences of many teachers over many years. If you feel unsure about what you are doing, they can be a helpful tool for getting started. However, as you progress in your understanding of the elements involved, you will begin to rely less on formal guidelines and more on your own perceptions.

If things do not go according to plan, don't worry! Just stop doing whatever it is you are doing, relax, reestablish the relationship between you and your child, and then decide whether you want to continue with the process, or move on to something else. As you reflect later on the experience, review in your mind the sequence of events and see where you might have done something differently. Then, let it go and get ready for the next day's learning processes.

Here are the guidelines for entering into an effective, satisfying learning process:

## Clear Your Time and Space

In order to be able to enter fully into the experience of a learning process, we must first develop our capacity to focus. This is not as simple as it might seem. In the course of our daily affairs, there are many elements that arise that demand our attention. Minimizing interruptions can help you remain focused on the learning process at hand. As you increase your ability to focus, you will become better able to maintain your focus in the midst of your activities.

The following points can be very helpful in clearing a time and space for you to engage in the learning process:

- a. Keep a daily to-do list. This relieves your mind of the pressure of remembering “all those things I must do.” Once you schedule all that needs to be accomplished in the day or week, then you are more able to focus on what you are doing now.
- b. Put away your phone and other electronic devices while you are engaged in teaching. This is absolutely essential, especially in a busy household. You must be very clear that, for the duration of the process, you will not be available to anyone but your child.
- c. Put a note on your door: “Do Not Disturb Until (time).” Inform your friends and neighbors that you are busy during certain hours. It helps to do this at the same time every day so that people get used to the idea and plan to visit or call at other times.
- d. Make sure that the space you are using is clean and orderly. A confused space makes a confused mind.
- e. Gather together all the materials that you will need ahead of time. Lay out all of the materials in an organized way so that you are certain you haven’t forgotten anything.
- f. Once the environment has been prepared, take a minute to relax and center yourself on the work ahead. When you are centered and poised, sit down together with your child to begin the learning process.

## Take into Account Younger Siblings

If you have younger children, explain to them that you have some important work to do, and that you and your older child cannot be interrupted during this time. At the same time, offer them a special activity of their own to do while you are teaching.

Be very clear, in your own mind, about the importance of this focused time with your child. If you have an infant, you will obviously have to schedule things around the baby’s nap time or when you can have someone available to help you.

Young children are quite capable of adapting to a routine and will be more willing to give you the necessary time if you are consistent in your time. For example, if your children can expect that they will eat breakfast and go for a walk most days, and then return home to draw or play with certain toys while you and your older child “do school,” the young ones will understand and cooperate with this routine. Teaching young children that there are times you shouldn’t be disturbed has to be done with loving



patience. It may take a week or more to get your younger children used to spending time alone without calling for your attention, but the time spent cultivating this will be well worth it.

### **Nurture the Teacher/Student Relationship**

The most important aspect of any learning process is the relationship that you have with the other person. Your primary focus as a teacher should be staying alert to the needs of the student. As you develop your capacity to focus and respond to their needs in the midst of the learning process, you will not need any guidelines, techniques, or approaches. You will naturally unfold your own unique approach, and will learn how to respond more sensitively to the needs of the student in each moment. At that point, your only work will be to remain focused so that you can respond to these needs.

Each time you and your child begin work, take a few moments to reconnect. This may mean talking briefly about something that is familiar, or looking at something interesting in the immediate environment. This is the expansive phase of the process, before you focus on the work at hand, so just keep it light and undemanding.

### **Start with Something Simple and Familiar**

A good way to begin a new learning process is to review things that were covered in the last session. This helps establish a common ground and brings to mind the foundation on which the new material rests. The review is a chance to appreciate the child's progress in learning. The expansive, comfortable, confident feeling still infuses this stage of the process.

### **Make a Transition into the Unfamiliar**

This is the beginning of the next phase of the learning process and can be the most difficult for teachers. It begins when you feel that you and the other person have established a good relationship, and after you have experienced the "simple and familiar" stage for several minutes. The shift from the previous stage to this one occurs gradually, so there are no absolute rules that determine when this happens, but if you are watching closely you can usually detect an opening that allows you to move smoothly into this stage.

When the child feels confident with the material being reviewed, they will feel present and involved in what is occurring. When the child first moves into the unfamiliar territory of material that has not been fully grasped, it is common for their presence to momentarily wane; you will sense an uncertainty. This is the opportunity for learning.

### **Engaging the Learning Process**

When working on familiar skills that are still being developed, always take the time to notice ways in which your child has succeeded. If, for instance, your child is playing a song on the recorder, and they falter in the middle and become uncertain, just encourage your child to continue. Afterward, congratulate your child on how well the tune was played, but mention that there was just one part that was not quite right. Even if there were seven parts not right, just mention one. After that point has been

worked on, you can easily go to another, and another, but to say that there were seven parts that were wrong can have an overwhelming effect. Point out the error that was made, and model the correct method for your child.

This applies to any subject, and any activity. If your child is doing long division, and gets stuck and uncertain partway through, help them keep going, and then afterward look at one element that will help the process flow more smoothly the next time. If your child is reading aloud, use your own confident presence to encourage them to continue, even if some words are stumbled over. Afterward, comment on the lovely expressive tone or diction, and then look at the tricky word and find ways to decode it, and others like it. If your child is recording data on a chart for science and seems confused by the procedure, simply give support as needed, focusing first on what your child is doing right, and then looking at how to clarify an element that is making the task seem too difficult.

At this point, the most important element is your attitude. Pointing out and correcting an error should not be done with a critical voice. Instead, proceed as if sharing interesting information about something you're doing together. After you have given instruction, work with the material a few times until your child seems to be clear about it, or begins to lose interest in doing it correctly. At that point, it is probably time to move on.

Remember, you're not doing this to force your child to learn—you're in this to share the enjoyment of the learning process. If the process stops being enjoyable, learning has probably stopped taking place. Let it go and come back to it another day.

### **Introduce New Material**

After you have played with skills development in the context of familiar material, and if things are still progressing in a positive way, then you can begin to share new material.

Introduce the new material as clearly as possible, but don't be concerned about whether your child is immediately interested in it. Just present it as something that might be fun to learn or do. If your child's interest is caught, then break it up into parts to keep the learning manageable. When all of the pieces of the new material are learned, join them together one by one, showing how they are connected.

Some children prefer to learn new material as one whole unit, so feel free to respond to the needs of your child. After working with the new material (in whole or in parts) for a bit, you can put it aside for the day. Your child will continue to absorb the material throughout the day and even while sleeping. When you review the material in a day or so, you can add a new piece.

### **Reflect on the Learning Process**

After the learning process is finished or at the end of the day, sit down by yourself and review the events that occurred. If you had trouble during the process, review in your mind what happened and try to see where things went wrong. Perhaps you could find ways to incorporate rhythmic, creative, or archetypal elements to help bring the learning process to life. Depending on your child, you may want

to discuss what went wrong and how it might have happened differently. Above all, don't blame anyone, especially yourself. Just learn from your experiences, let it go, and get ready for the next day's learning experience.

There have been wonderful new explorations and discoveries into different styles of learning in children. Learning styles are discussed in depth in Oak Meadow's *The Heart of Learning*, and we encourage you to consider the different ways children learn as it may inform your individual approach to learning processes. If you are interested in additional resources about learning processes and learning styles, some wonderful references for the study of the development of young children are *Magical Child*, *The Crack in the Cosmic Egg*, and *Evolution's End*, all by Joseph Chilton-Pearce. He does an excellent job describing developmental phases of young children with an emphasis on preserving the wonder and innocence of childhood.

## Learning through Imaginative Play

A child's imagination can provide endless opportunities for learning and enjoyment. Usually all it takes is to provide your child with a few basic tools and simple materials, and you will find that they begin exploring imaginatively without additional effort on your part.

If your child is having trouble getting started playing, it is fine to casually remember a story you shared or a topic of interest that you have been learning about. By creating an image of something familiar, you are giving your child a spark to begin their own imaginative process. Soon your child will begin to build play around the familiar image, but there is no end to where the imagination can go from there. (For more on imaginative play, see *The Heart of Learning*.)

### Creative Play

Creative play often becomes an extension of the focused lesson time. It is a rich and rewarding way for children to integrate their knowledge and experiences. Creative play requires very few props. In fact, it seems that the more "stuff" a child has surrounding them, the more likely we are to hear cries of, "I'm bored! I don't have anything to do!" Too much stuff can make individual toys inaccessible.

Taking some time to organize what is available to your child, and rotating toys so that there is a manageable selection, can enhance your child's creative play. Have a "50 percent reduction" day and store half of everything. Do you have five puzzles out? Put away two or three for now. Do you have a dozen stuffed animals in an overflowing basket? Choose six to keep and six to take a break ("take a vacation"). Clearing out and bringing order to the physical spaces of play and learning can have a positive, refreshing influence on children and parents alike.

Creative activities should be included in each day simply for pure entertainment and enjoyment (their built-in educational value is just a bonus!):

- Drawing
- Painting

- Craft projects
- Making music
- Singing
- Dancing
- Plays and puppet shows
- Woodworking
- Cooking
- Obstacle courses
- Scavenger hunts
- Treasure hunts
- Fort building (indoors or outside)
- Outdoor explorations of all kinds

## Sand and Water Play

Sand and water play are incredibly satisfying sensory experiences that encourage hours of creative fun.

Sand play offers many wonderful opportunities to budding scientists. You only need a pile of sand and some natural materials such as branches, leaves, small sticks, stones, acorns or other seed pods, grass, etc. Variations for playing with sand may include using containers of different sizes and shapes, small play figures (such as animals), and a small pail of water. Your child can make mountains, rivers, and little landscapes.

A “drip castle” can be made by mixing a soggy mixture of water and sand, scooping small handfuls of it up, and then allowing it to drop down into a pile, adding bit by bit up into an unusual “castle.” The water dries out fairly quickly, keeping the sand usable.

If you don’t have a sandbox, we strongly recommend building one. It can provide hours of beneficial imaginative play, and it is relatively easy to make.

**To make a sandbox:** Four 1" x 12" x 6' boards work well. Nail the four boards together (end to end) into the shape of a square, and place them on the ground. If you want, you can dig a small trench (about 3"–4" deep would be sufficient) the same size as the square and fit the boards into it. This will keep it from losing its shape and will also help to keep the sand from slipping under the boards. You may also want to brace the corners. When it is in place, fill the enclosed area with several bags of clean sand, which is available at most building supply stores.

If you live in an apartment or for some other reason aren’t able to make a permanent outdoor sandbox, you can still make a smaller, portable version using a plastic tray of the type that is used for kitty litter.

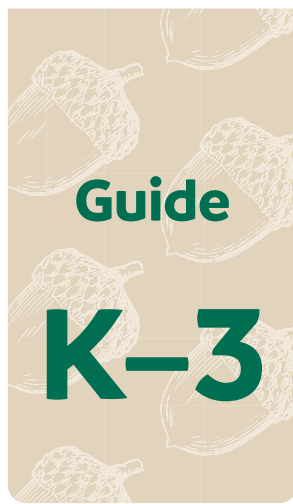
These are sold in grocery stores or pet shops. There are also commercially available plastic sandboxes with lids that can be used to prevent animals from getting into the sand.

Another sensory experience that is beneficial for young children is water play. This is a very simple activity, but it provides hours of enjoyment. It is best done outdoors and requires very little preparation. If you live in a cold climate, this could be done in the bathtub or at the sink.

Dress your child (and yourself) in old clothes, or a bathing suit, if weather permits. Gather together an assortment of containers. These can be pots, pans, bottles, old dish soap squirt bottles, buckets, cups, etc.—anything that can hold water (but nothing glass, as that can easily break). The wider the variety of containers, the better it is. Include several different sizes of spoons and scoops (old laundry soap scoops work well), and consider poking different sizes of holes in a few of the plastic containers.

Then, set up an old table outdoors and put all of the containers on the table. Next, fill the largest container with water, and start the whole process moving by filling one of the smaller containers with water and pouring from that container into another. Then, fill another container and pour into another. Continue filling various containers one at a time. There is nothing complex happening, yet children can spend hours, completely absorbed, pouring water from one container to another. Children have a fascination with water, and they just love to play with it and in it.

To avoid having to clean up after all this, go to a local thrift store and buy a lot of used containers just for this purpose, or save plastic containers that you purchase food in. Put them all in a big bucket and never use them for anything else. That way, when the play is over, all you have to do is put the containers in the bucket, store it away somewhere, and put your child in the tub to clean up and finish the experience.



# The Art of Storytelling

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In the Oak Meadow approach to learning, storytelling has great significance. Some parents and teachers might view storytelling as something that may help the child to feel more secure or bring a few moments of happiness, but do not see stories as a powerful educational tool. At Oak Meadow, we believe that storytelling is one of the most important skills that a teacher can develop. What is it about storytelling that is so important?

Storytelling is something that children of all ages love, and it can lead to some wonderful experiences together for both children and adults. Through storytelling, parents and teachers can create a magical space, where children and adults can experience deeper realities and communicate in ways they rarely do otherwise.

Children will love almost any story that is told to them, simply because the very act of having someone tell you a story gives you a feeling of security and contentment that is rarely found in any other experience. This is because a story creates a “safe space,” psychologically and emotionally. While the story is going on, the child enters into a state of timelessness, created by the knowledge that, while this story is happening, nothing else is going on. In addition, if the adult who is telling the story is someone the child knows and loves, the child enters into a state of trust, in which they become completely receptive to the experience that is occurring. These two elements of trust and timelessness are qualities that are conducive to a deeper experience, and when you add to that the uplifting experience provided by a story that has genuine humor or deeper meaning, the total experience is quite extraordinary, both for the child and the adult telling the story.

The basic skill of a storyteller is the ability to draw others into the experience of what is being told. In telling stories to younger children, we often read from a book or tell the story from memory, and sometimes we even create stories that have never been told before. Whatever the source of the story may be, it is usually not based on concrete physical facts, but is drawn from myths, legends, or archetypal themes. However, this lack of physical basis in no way detracts from the importance of the story, for the greatest truths known to humanity are often hidden in such stories, and so they are far more important and more real, especially to young children, than the stories based on hard facts or mundane reality.

Older children also enjoy stories immensely, and their need to experience stories is as deep as it is for younger children. With adolescents, the teacher can utilize the benefits of storytelling most effectively by telling stories that use the basic facts of the subject as guidelines, and imbuing them with life. In

this way, the facts virtually “come alive” through the being of the storyteller, and children begin to experience the life of the subject, not just the form. As such, a creative teacher will use the facts of a situation as background scenery in a fascinating story, and draw the children into a real experience of the subject that will have meaning to them.

Most people have read stories aloud from a book, which is an excellent place to start. You can also develop your storytelling skills by creating original stories, which gives you yet another powerful tool to help children transform themselves.

## Choosing Stories

In choosing stories for children, it is helpful to consider the child’s age and the purpose of the story. There are many wonderful stories to be told, but a thrilling story for a twelve-year-old is usually too complex for a seven-year-old to follow and enjoy. Stories for younger children usually have a very simple plot, uncomplicated characters, and move along rather quickly. As the age of the child increases, the plots generally become more complex, the characters display more subtleties, and more attention is given to detail to bring a greater depth and richness to the overall story.

When we tell stories from memory, we have more freedom to adjust the story than when we read it aloud from a book. So, when telling a story from memory, if the story is a little too complex for a younger child to understand, it can often be adapted by leaving out some of the details. Conversely, a very simple story can be made more enjoyable for older children by adding details to the plot and subtleties to the characters.

When choosing a story, you’ll want to consider the purpose of the story. We tell stories for varying reasons: to help lighten a melancholy mood, to share a laugh together, to convey a deep truth, to learn about a particular time period or explore a particular theme, or maybe just to help a scattered child become focused. Whatever the purpose may be, by considering beforehand the elements in the story, you will be better able to choose one that meets the needs of the situation.

Above all, remember and respect your child’s needs and sensibilities. It is very important, in choosing a story, to respect this safe space that has been created, and not to violate the receptive, trusting attitude of the child by choosing or creating a story that will leave the child with unresolved or upsetting feelings. This doesn’t mean that we can’t choose or create stories that contain elements of discord or conflict because these certainly are part of the human condition, and any story would be quite boring without them. However, we have to make sure that these elements are resolved in some way before the story is finished. This way, the child comes out of the story feeling whole and restored. It is especially important for young children to see reflected in their literature an abiding sense that good conquers evil and love is stronger than hate. These underlying themes will feed your child’s perception that the world is a good place to live, and nurture a desire to create good in the world.

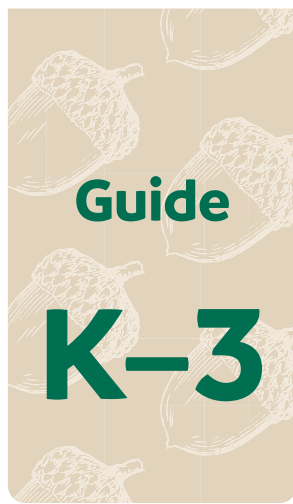


## Telling the Story

Once you have decided which story to tell, there are several elements that will help you create the magic of the story, which is what gives the story its potency and its transforming capabilities.

- First, be fully present. Try to put aside the worries and distractions of the day while you are experiencing the story with your child. This is important for both of you, so that you can have your own moment of escape with your child. Children can sense when your mind is elsewhere and will react with less interest. The main thing about a story that really attracts children is the sense of power that builds as a story is being read or told. Being fully present helps you convey and maintain this literary tension.
- Second, use your voice expressively. Change the tone of your voice as the story seems to call for it, reflecting the differences in the characters and the qualities they represent. A monotone delivery can make even the best story seem dull. Of course, you don't have to adopt a completely different voice for each character! Just try to vary your tone of voice, and use inflection to indicate the different lines that are being spoken. Express the character's surprise, sadness, anger, confusion, teasing, etc. This makes the story characters feel more real and more relevant. You might think of it as performing the story as a radio or movie voice-over actor might do. Changing the tone of your voice in this way brings a greater range of feeling to the overall story, which helps to strengthen the potency of the mood that is created.
- Third, vary the pace of the story. Even if we change our tone of voice, the story can become stagnant unless we vary the pace. Use the events of the story as a guide to the pace, slowing down during the more dramatic, important times, speeding up to heighten the sense of excitement during those periods of the story, and using a more steady pace during the other parts. In this way, the story begins to come alive with life and action. These changes in pace also help children keep their awareness focused on the story because a change of pace draws attention to what is occurring at that moment, and keeps the listener connected with the movement of the story.
- Fourth, support your voice. This means you will consciously project yourself through your voice, so that the voice becomes a vehicle for what you want to accomplish through the story you are telling. This doesn't mean you have to speak loudly, like an actor in a theater, but that the quality of your voice comes across as strong and well-supported. In order to do this, you must first become aware of the location of your voice, that is, the place in which you can feel your voice resonating or vibrating in your body. This can be anywhere from the top of your head to your diaphragm. Unless you have done a lot of public speaking or singing, you will probably find your voice coming from somewhere in your head, often from the sinus cavities, which gives the voice a "nasal" quality. Generally, our voices do not tend to naturally arise from a great depth within us; we must learn how to develop our voices to do this with intention. By bringing your voice more deeply into your body, it can bring a greater fullness to your spoken words.





# Art Instruction

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Artistic expression is a very important part of the Oak Meadow curriculum because we believe it is an important element of the human experience. The primary media used throughout the curriculum are beeswax crayons, watercolor paints, modeling beeswax, and clay. Crayon drawing is used extensively as children create their own main lesson books. Watercolor painting offers a unique expression of flowing color and form, and it helps to develop an understanding of the subjective value of colors. Modeling with beeswax and clay gives children the opportunity to create three-dimensional forms with their hands, pairing artistry and imagination with practicality.

Any activity can be approached in a considered, focused manner (consciously) or haphazardly (unconsciously). Art is no exception. If an artistic activity is approached consciously, it can open opportunities for the expression of the rich inner world within the individual.

In many educational situations, children are not given much (if any!) guidance in the early stages of artistic activity. Children are often left on their own to learn to draw, paint, and sculpt, and after they pass through the early years of gleeful, unselfconscious abandon, begin to doubt their artistic abilities within a few short years. It's not uncommon to hear a child in third or fourth grade say, "I can't draw," a sentiment echoed wholeheartedly by the majority of adults.

However, once these children (or adults) set aside their doubts and approach artistic activities with open and willing head, heart, and hands, most discover that they can learn to draw and benefit from creating art as much as any accomplished artist. By consciously helping your child learn to draw, paint, and sculpt in the early years, you are opening doors to a world of creative opportunities.

## Crayon Drawing

As imitation is the child's primary means of learning in the early grades, the best way you can teach your child to draw is to participate fully in drawing. If you have a chalkboard (and good quality chalk in a wide selection of colors) or your own main lesson book, you can demonstrate drawing technique for your child, who will initially copy your work. This lets your child learn in a natural, organic way, by copying what you do, rather than approaching it from an intellectual viewpoint of angles, lines, colors, shading, etc. Formal art instruction will come in fourth grade, but for now, it is most beneficial for your child to simply imitate your actions.

The illustrations that you will be doing for your child to copy are simple, basic forms. These forms encourage a child's early experiences in artistic expression and can be easily created by any parent willing to try. Sophisticated talent is not necessary, and in many cases can be a detriment as children will not find themselves able to copy a professional level drawing.

In the early stages of development, children tend not to focus on forms as sharply as an adult, but rather see the world more as an interplay of changing colors, shapes, and inner feelings. Thus, the appropriate artistic forms for imitation by a child just learning to draw are not detailed figures or line drawings (or stick figures), but full shapes composed of rich natural colors without intricate details. As the child's objective awareness of the world grows, the shapes will gradually become more detailed, reflecting this change in awareness. But a child shouldn't be pressured into expressing detail too early, for it has the effect of bringing forth the mental faculties too early, which can result in a premature development of the critical nature, causing unhappiness in parent and child alike.

You will note that in the lessons, children are often asked to draw illustrations of a story they have heard and to include specific story details in the story. This should not be confused with a detailed picture. A story detail might be Little Red Riding Hood's red hood or her basket. These story details can be drawn in a very simple form, without the need for artistic details, such as a tie for the hood or a blue checkered napkin in the basket. This type of detail will show up in a child's drawings when they are ready; until then, simply focus on encouraging the inclusion of story details, not artistic detail.

## Tips on Teaching a Child to Draw

As you begin to experiment with drawing and with teaching your child to draw, you will find the illustrations in the lessons to be helpful. You are encouraged to copy them, if you'd like, until you feel more confident in your own drawing skills. These illustrations are designed to help children express themselves through the use of rich colors and full figures, drawing "from the inside out," rather than outlining a form and coloring it in.

We highly recommend using beeswax block crayons for drawings, and beeswax stick crayons for writing in the first and second grades, switching to colored pencils for writing in third grade. The block crayons provide a particularly forgiving experience for children learning to draw. They do take some getting used to, however, and we recommend you taking some time to explore how to use the different edges to create shapes or drag the crayon across the page to lay down a large swath of color for, say, the sky or ground.

Block crayons make it easy to form shapes from the inside out, and allow a child to use softer, more muted lines rather than the bold lines often made by stick crayons. Coloring an oval shape that becomes a person's body, with a smaller oval on top for the head, and long thin ovals for limbs, all colored using the wide strokes of a block crayon, helps children see and feel the human form emerge organically. The shapes feel fully formed when drawing in this manner, as though they have substance and are not just a flat drawing on a page.

As a practical guide to understanding the means of creating full, rich drawings, we offer the following suggestions:

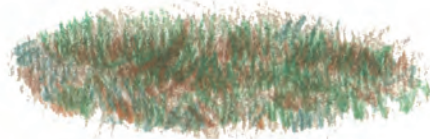
- 1. Model and encourage your child to draw shapes from the inside out, instead of outlining.** If a child has spent many years outlining shapes and coloring them in (or using coloring books with bold outlined shapes), it may be challenging to help your child learn a new technique, but with a little persistence and patience, you will both be happier with the results. An outline creates a rigid line, which is immovable, so if the line isn't "right" when it is first drawn, it cannot be adjusted to conform to the image the child is trying to create. This can be a source of great frustration to a child learning to draw.

Generally, not even an accomplished artist would create an image by first outlining with a bold line. An artist generally creates images using a sequence of lightly drawn lines, drawing the general shape of the form over and over, until the lines gradually merge and darken as the intended image becomes more accurate.

If you wish to draw a tree, therefore, don't start by doing this:



Instead, develop the tree as a movement of color rising from the ground, just as a tree would naturally grow.



**First, the earth**



**Next, the root**



Then, the trunk

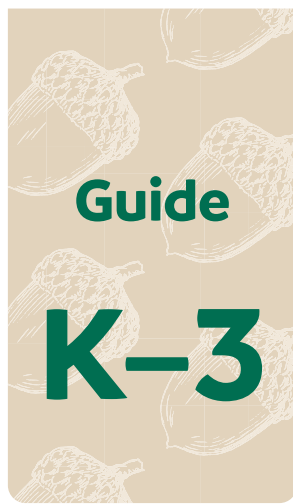
Then, the branches



Finally, the leaves

In this way a child is able to adjust the image as it develops, instead of being bound by the first line drawn. The result feels much more organic and authentic.

2. **“Feel your way along.” Encourage your child with these words as they draw.** In our example of the tree, this would mean imagining that you are standing in front of the tree and feeling each part of the tree—the roots coming out of the ground, the trunk rising up, the limbs branching off,



# Guidelines for Handcrafting

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Handcrafts, such as knitting and crocheting, are exceptional activities for integrating thoughts, feelings, and actions. They can be tremendously harmonizing and satisfying.

Handcrafting requires us to enter into repetitious activity in a smooth rhythmical manner. It is important to continue on even when you have made a mistake. If you know how to correct your mistake and can do so, by all means do, but if you don't have the expertise at this time, don't stop or start over, simply continue working. Getting into the habit of making purposeful progress on a project will help deepen your awareness, focus, and rhythmical nature.

There is a connection between the outer form that you create and your inner state. Of course, this is true of all activities, but there are some activities that reflect this connection more clearly and accurately than others. Watch carefully the form that your crocheting and knitting take, particularly whether it is loose, very tight, whether your stitches are consistent, etc. At the same time, watch your inner states—your feelings, your thoughts, and your awareness of what you are doing. Did your own focus wander, or were you feeling tense while you knit? Use the feedback of the outer form of your knitting project to help you tune into your inner state and bring it into more balance.

As children learn handcrafting, this connection between the outer and inner state still applies, but we would never want to consciously force their attention on it. As parents and teachers, however, we can use this valuable information to help us work more effectively with our children.

## Using Color in a Purposeful Way

It can be helpful to put some thought into the colors you select when handcrafting. The choice of color is usually an aesthetic one but we can become aware of how working with different colors affects us. Working intently with a certain color, particularly if that color is very strong and clear, can have a pronounced effect on your emotional and mental state. When handcrafting, we are often working with a single color for quite some time, as the project may take weeks to complete. By choosing certain colors, we can nurture the mind, body, and spirit. The effect of colors is an entire study in itself so we can't really go into it in much depth, but there are just a few principles that may help as you prepare to begin a new project.

Consider the qualitative value of the colors themselves. What feeling does each of the colors convey? Obviously, this is a very subjective experience. Some people find red to be uplifting and stimulating,

for instance, and others find it puts them on edge. A lot of it has to do with your own temperament and needs: a fiery individual may feel an affinity for red because it reflects their own inner state, or may crave the soothing tones of blue and green to help balance this inner fire. And of course, this fiery individual could very well benefit from working with red at certain times and blue at other times. As always, a balanced life is the goal; using color gives us just one more way to achieve that.

So how does this help us in choosing colors for handcrafting projects? In general, colors are divided into groups: “warm” shades—reds, yellows, and oranges—are stimulating, and “cool” shades—blues, purples, and greens—are more soothing. Likewise, we can often see a general tendency in our own children (and in ourselves) toward either excitability or calm. Your own explorations with color will help you gain experience in determining how your child reacts to the different cool and warm colors.

As mentioned earlier, there are two ways to think about using color. The first is to select the opposite color from what we are feeling, to provide a balance to our inner state. For example, if we are feeling very excited, we might want to surround ourselves with the cool shades; this might help to calm us down. The second way to use color is as a reflection of our inner states, with the expectation that by having our inner state validated and nurtured by color, we will naturally want to embrace the opposite state in order to come into better balance. This opposite color will spontaneously arise within us. Think of it this way: if we are feeling angry or excitable and we surround ourselves with a bright red, we may soon reach inside ourselves to find a place of calm, to balance out all the excitement.

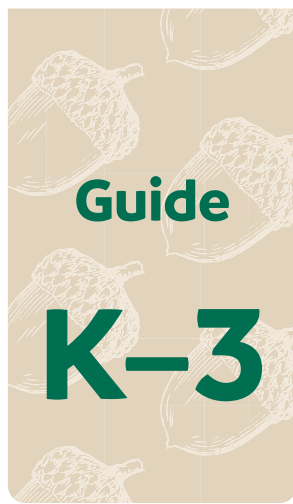
You can feel this phenomenon in an experiential way because our eyes naturally switch to a complementary color. To find the “opposite” (or complement) of a certain color, try this: Put the color you want to test on a white piece of paper and stare only at the color for about 30 seconds. Then, take the color away and stare at the white paper. You will see a color appear before your eyes, superimposed on the white paper, the exact opposite of the color you were just staring at. There are specific physiological reasons why this occurs (having to do with fatigue in the retina and rods and cones in the eye), but it reflects the color opposites found on a color wheel. This information can help us in our explorations of color. If you want to experiment with encouraging an inner experience of the opposite of a particular color (the second method for using color mentioned above), then the second color that you see when doing this experiment—the “nonphysical” color—is the color that will arise within you from using the original color.

Which approach is best for your child? There is no one right answer, of course, and you will probably find, through experimentation, that both seem to work at various times. However, by giving thoughtful attention to these principles, color can become a valuable tool in the learning process.

## Finger Knitting

Finger knitting is an excellent activity for kindergarteners, and a great precursor to learning to knit. It is easy to learn and a child can make a long chain of finger knitting in a single session—very satisfying!





**Guide**

**K-3**

# Music Instruction

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Music is an extraordinarily powerful element and has far-reaching effects in our lives. In many public and private schools, music is considered to be one of those subjects, such as arts and crafts, that is “nice” for children to have, but certainly shouldn’t take too much time away from the “more important” academic subjects. This is unfortunate both for students and teachers. When children are introduced to music in a balanced manner, they will be able to use its great power to effect positive change in their lives. Music can become a powerful ally in teaching and learning, and an invaluable source of enjoyment, inner harmony, and self-expression for all students.

The most effective way that we have found to unfold the musical capabilities in young children is through imitation. If a home teacher tries, in a formal manner, to hold “music class,” a child will often rebel against this. However, if that home teacher plays or sing songs for the feeling of joy or peace that they bring, this attitude will spread to the children present.

We encourage you to bring music into your home and your child’s life in a variety of experiential ways, and enjoy together the harmony it brings.

## Singing

Singing is one of the most important talents that a teacher can have. By developing this ability and gradually adding to the assortment of songs that are known by heart, it becomes an invaluable asset in working with children of all ages, and even with adults.

### Choosing Songs for Children

When choosing songs for children, one must be very careful, for children absorb the wholeness of a song and do not discriminate as to the worthiness of that which is being absorbed. If a parent sings a popular song with a depth of feeling, the child is likely to imitate all of the subtleties inherent in the song, even if the parent is unconscious of them. If the song is full of feelings of despair, loneliness, or sexual longing, the child might later give voice to those expressive feelings, regardless of how adult they might be, complete with shocking innuendo. For this reason, it is best to select songs as consciously as possible, and only choose those that convey feelings that will be a source of strength to the child in their growth.

There are several factors to consider when choosing songs to effectively meet your child's needs. Songs for children, as with all songs, fall into several categories, and each type of song can be used for a specific kind of situation. For example, there are songs that open the heart, songs that activate the will, and songs that bring about a greater mental alertness. Some songs may help to calm a child who is anxious or angry, while other songs may help a bored child express a greater direction and purpose, while yet another song may help to uplift a child who is unhappy. As you use music in your parenting and teaching life, you will gradually begin to develop a feeling for which songs would be helpful in different situations. It helps to have many songs in your repertoire to choose from at any given time. The right song introduced at just the right moment can completely transform a child, or a group of children, and can turn impending disaster into an expression of joy in just a few moments.

However, in a very broad sense, it is helpful, in singing with children, to recognize the basic "polarity" of all songs, which is this: a song tends to either shift the focus of awareness outward or inward. Singing a song that shifts the awareness outward tends to make us feel lighter, more active, and increases our awareness of others. Singing a song that shifts the awareness inward tends to make us more thoughtful, introspective, and aware of ourselves. Both are necessary, of course, and one is not better than the other. It's just a matter of where you are and where you want to go. After you have sung countless songs countless times, you won't think about whether a song helps children go inward or outward, you'll just know instinctively what song to use for a particular situation.

## Guiding Music Time Activities

In many situations, singing is a joint venture, without any particular motive, and it often includes lively action and movement. Singing (and moving!) is something that the parent/teacher and the children are doing together simply because they love doing it! There is a sense of cooperation and harmony as the musical experience is shared. However, sometimes, for a wide variety of reasons, the children are not cooperative and harmonious, and the energy in a room can become chaotic. When this happens, it is the teacher's responsibility to do something about it because that is part of what being a teacher is all about.

This is not always what teachers like to be doing because we all, teachers and parents, want to just relax and have everything go smoothly, so that we don't have to bring up something deeper from within us. It is helpful to remember that, in deciding to become a teacher, we have accepted the responsibility of helping others become more of what they are within, and this means that we have to become more of what we are within. Of course, it takes effort to bring a greater awareness and sensitivity to everything we do, and to help others do the same.

There are many ways to do this. Rather than attempting to force children to behave a certain way, try to work with the energy that is present, not against it. This is sometimes not easy at first, but with experience it will become more natural. To do this successfully, you must balance two polarities within yourself while you are in the midst of the activity. Outwardly, you must be moving with the children's energy, accepting them fully. However, inwardly you must be poised in the awareness of where they need to go to become more aware and sensitive, and use every opportunity to move them in that