

**HUMANITIES  
IN THE  
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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She has been writing for the past twenty years and in that time has produced 13 books as well as about 200 articles, and stories for children in children's magazines. Recent educational publications include two fastbacks for Phi Delta Kappa: *Teaching Reading in the Secondary Schools*, and *Serving Adolescent Reading Interests through Young Adult Literature*.

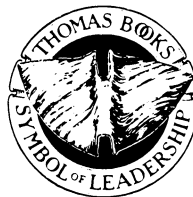
# HUMANITIES IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

A Handbook for Teachers

*By*

LUCY FUCHS, PH.D.

*Saint Leo College*



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*This is for all my students at Saint Leo College whose  
enthusiasm and support have made this book possible.*



## PREFACE

**H**umanities, as the name tells us, is about us, human beings, especially the way we express ourselves in language and literature, art, music, and drama. Universities typically have schools or departments of humanities; high schools teach humanities under various guises. Elementary schools touch on them through their children's literature, art, and music. But often, although there are some notable exceptions, the humanities are developed only weakly at all three levels, especially at the elementary level. They are perhaps the most neglected part of our educational program. This is true in all areas except literature, both in elementary and high school.

If the elementary school is lucky, music and art teachers are available to take each class for one half hour a week. If not, the teacher is expected to somehow slip in a little art or music. Unfortunately, too often when time is short, art and music are the first to be omitted.

High schools are often even worse. If a student does not take art or music, he or she may never have any instruction in them at all. Thus it is possible for students to have completed their entire elementary and secondary education without ever becoming acquainted with even the most famous artists or musicians. Such students may go to an art museum and be unable to relate to what is being expressed. Or more likely they will never go. They may never go either to a concert of classical music because they have always thought that such music was tiresome, slow, and sleepy. They would be surprised at the power and depth of the music, if they ever heard it.

The emphasis today is on science and math, technology and computers, particularly in the areas which are testable at an international level. We are being told that our students do not measure up on those tests, so we must improve both teaching and testing, or perhaps teaching for testing, on those subjects.

This emphasis, broadcast loudly by the media and by politicians, may well cause us to lose sight of the importance of the humanities.

Yet we need humanities as never before. The world has grown smaller and as it shrinks before our eyes, we need to learn the things that help us love and appreciate ourselves and our fellow human beings.

Humanities can be both a mirror and a window for us. We begin to understand ourselves in literature. We see our life in its depths and heights in our art and music. Through drama we enter into the lives of others. Through language we engage one another.

It becomes essential then to give children in the elementary school an introduction to the humanities. Immediately, the conscientious teacher objects:

“I would love to teach humanities, but my schedule is already too full with reading, writing, math, science, and social studies. I cannot possibly fit anything else in.”

No, my response would be, you cannot. And you should not, if you are planning to add something. What needs to be done and what will have much greater significance, will be an incorporation of the humanities into the school program. It will not be an extra class; it will be an enrichment of what is already taught.

The purpose of this book then is to present the humanities in a manner in which they can be incorporated.

The book consists of the following:

1. The content of the humanities and a broad division of the humanities into primitive, classic, and modern.
2. Specific suggestions offered for various levels of students for each of these areas, including music to listen to, to sing, to play along with; art to study and create; drama and movement to try out; books to read.
3. Suggested ways to incorporate these elements into the subjects being taught.
4. Resources including books, companies, catalogues, materials which are presently available.



## INTRODUCTION

**P**icture this elementary school classroom: The walls are hung with prints of famous paintings which the children look at and admire. When they read classroom and library books, they examine the pictures with curiosity and excitement. When they produce their own art work, they consider what other artists have done and attempt similar or contrasting work.

Classes begin with short selections of classical music appropriate to the subject matter. After lunch the children calm down with quiet music. They help select music for background music during art work or quiet working sessions. They know their teacher's favorites and their own.

These children read and discuss famous children's stories with their teacher and enjoy their favorite parts. They like the "huffing and puffing" of the Big Bad Wolf, and they love the names of the rabbits in Peter Rabbit: Flopsy, Mopsy, Cottontail, and Peter. With a name that is different, they know immediately that Peter is going to get in trouble.

They like to act out stories that they have read and when they see a play, they become part of it. When Peter Pan asks if they believe in fairies, they shout loudly that they do. They shiver with pretended fear at evil creatures and laugh with humorous ones.

These children are comfortable with their great heritage; it is not something reserved for special days or special teachers.

This is the vision of teaching that this book purports. Emphasis is not only on what is being taught in the classroom, but how it is taught. The classroom becomes a place where the humanities, in all their aspects, are daily being experienced. Teaching the humanities is not merely a matter of having children recognize a passage of music from Mozart or a landscape from Monet. It is rather a matter of awakening in young minds at least something of what Mozart and Monet experienced.

This approach makes of teaching an adventure, a pleasurable excursion into a world that is constantly opening up new vistas. Each experience with art or music or literature or drama by a teacher and students

yields new insights for both. Perhaps you, the teacher, will only weakly understand Tchaikovsky or Kandinsky until you experience them through the ears and eyes of eight-year-old children.

Elementary teachers are in a unique position to awaken young minds to great art and music. Persons who become teachers, in spite of many differences in other circumstances of their lives, usually have two characteristics in common: there is a part of them that is still a child, and they love learning.

With these two characteristics, elementary teachers can significantly influence their students. They can relate to them where they are (because in a way they are still there), and they can share with them what they have learned with great joy in their own education and what they are still learning.

It is a truism that what is learned in childhood is never forgotten. Many adults today can still recite poems they learned in kindergarten and songs they sang in the early grades. But beyond the immediate recall of such items is perhaps a deeper memory through associations. Every child has pleasant and unpleasant experiences in childhood and none of these are experienced in isolation. One need only think of the joy that the Christmas holiday brings to many children. Forever afterwards, the smell of a pine or fir tree, the odors of cookies baking, the crisp snowy nights, the twinkling lights on houses in themselves seem to make one feel happy. Similarly, if trips to dentists were unpleasant or downright painful experiences, even the street on the way to the dentist calls forth dark forboding feelings.

Thus it is of extreme importance that all early experiences with the humanities be pleasant ones. A teacher will be careful not to expect too much too soon from children. Children in the first grade do not need to know the circle of fifths to enjoy good music, nor do they need to know how to classify painters into Cubists or Post-Impressionists, although, indeed, some children may enjoy using these words.

The ideal classroom for the humanities is one in which art, music, literature, and drama are always there, relished, enjoyed, and even the cause of fun. They are so well incorporated into the curriculum that the children are learning without knowing that they are learning. Yet day by day the children experience and grow through their contact with the heritage that is theirs. And the teachers too, year by year, find their lives enriched by this contact.

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**HUMANITIES  
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# Chapter I

## THE HUMANITIES IN THE ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM

### TEACHING ART

Some schools are fortunate enough to have art teachers who teach art once or twice a week to all the students. Others may have an art consultant who works at a county or district level and provides help to the teachers. But, unfortunately, far too often, art is not valued as it should be and when budget cuts are made, it is one of the first items to go. Then the regular classroom teacher is expected to provide any art lessons that are taught.

Even when there is an art teacher, the ordinary daily work of the classroom requires art work, again under the direction of classroom teachers.

Frequently these teachers, unless they have had extensive training, feel insecure in teaching art. Included in the skills to be taught are drawing and sketching, painting with oils or acrylics, etching, and sculpture. Since many teachers do not feel comfortable with these skills, they may simply tell students to draw or paint a picture with no instructions given at all (that way they believe they are allowing students complete creative freedom). Others prefer to do craft projects with students. These can be quite useful and provide learning experiences, but they are only a small part of what can be done with art.

When it comes to art appreciation, some teachers are even less comfortable. They are perhaps afraid to say what they like and appreciate. One reason is that they would be hard-put to explain why they like something. Another is that they believe that somewhere out there is an elite group of experts who decide what is good art and what is not, and if they think differently they are perhaps displaying their ignorance. Secretly they know they do not like certain paintings which have been called great, but they do not wish to inflict that on children.

Yet they need to remember that art is not really a subject; it is a way of

life. It is not just drawing, painting, and looking at famous pictures; it is a way of seeing, thinking, and valuing. Additionally, the classroom teacher has the unique perspective in teaching all the subjects that makes it possible to better understand art. Since art works of all ages reflect those ages, bringing in various art helps to elucidate the times. People not only produce art; art enables them to see their own life.

It is the great art of the ages that can be used to develop art skills.

It may encourage teachers to know that there is no group of all-knowing art connoisseurs. There are experts who often disagree among themselves. Yet, the more one looks at what is considered great art, the more one is able to recognize what it is that others appreciate, even if one does not share the opinion.

Sometimes one can admire the technical skills the artist displays. At other times, one will be impressed by the evident emotion or the stark contrast or the cynical tone.

The two aspects, art appreciation and producing art, work hand in hand in the classroom.

### **Suggestions for Using Art in the Classroom**

1. Make your classroom into an art gallery. Prints of famous paintings can be displayed around the room, a few at a time. They should be changed according to the season and what is being studied at the time. Seeing such paintings again and again will create interest and familiarity and perhaps, even fondness.

2. Direct the students' attention to art works in terms of theme: What is the artist trying to show? Is the picture a portrait? Is it a still life? Is it a landscape or seascape? Is it an incident in someone's life? Is it an historical event? Then how is it portrayed? Look at the lines, color, light, form, texture, space, balance, harmony, pattern, contrast, centering of picture, and symbols. Are the colors bright or dark, brilliant or softened? Are there strong contrasts in the picture? Is it a "busy" picture or an uncrowded one? Is it painted to be realistic or is this an interpretation? What do you feel as you look at the picture? Does it draw you to see it again and again? Does it remind you of things in your own life? One can also ask about the techniques the painter used. Did he apply the paint with a small or large brush or did he seem to merely smear the paints on with a palette knife?



3. Have students make pictures that are similar to the art work being displayed. There is some value in having students attempt to copy pictures; nothing puts them into the shoes of the artists as much as that does. But it is perhaps preferable to select some technique, some part, some color, some shape that the artist used and have students make things similar from it. For example, when students are studying Matisse, they may wish to think in terms of broad, bright colors in large blocks. When they look at abstracts of Picasso, they may think about taking a photograph and cutting it apart and putting it together in another form. When they are looking at mosaics, they may make mosaics from little pieces of paper. Sometimes by using color from magazine advertisements they will find rich colors for use in mosaics.

4. The above techniques are useful for moving from art appreciation to art skills. The opposite flow can be done too. Have students draw lines in all directions, starting for example, with straight lines. Ultimately, all drawing is simply lines. Then they can curve lines, or draw parallel lines, or try to show perspective, or outline shapes or forms. Their drawings need not be purposive: all art begins with experimentation and trying things out, playing with ideas.

Or they may try looking at objects and drawing them, looking only at the lines, not thinking about what they know about the objects.

They should experiment with color and shapes, putting together objects that make a pleasing combination.

5. After playing with lines and colors and forms, students can turn to the work of the artists and see what the great artists did. The more art that students attempt themselves, the more they are likely to see in the work of others.

6. There are many available books which may help students and teachers learn art skills. (See Resources) These can be followed quite usefully in addition to looking at work of well-known artists.

7. One should not neglect the work of new or present day artists for learning art skills. One of the best sources of such art skills comes from the work of artists who illustrate children's books. Frequently the pictures in these books are the kind that can be imitated. Some are big, bright, and bold with color. Others are collages, made by pasting together pieces of construction paper, tissue paper, wall paper, and other kinds of paper. Some use cut out forms and moving parts.