



Mary Anne Duggan is a teacher mentor specialist for the Scottsdale Unified School District and the mother of Taylor, 12, and Sean, 10.

Artistic offerings

"Will you draw this dinosaur for me? I can't do it."

Words like these made my teacher-ears wriggle in pain. It has been a few years since I had my own classroom but I still remember the struggle students had crossing the divide between "I can" and "I'll give it a try." That same struggle exists for teachers—and all adults.

Then Scottsdale School District art teacher (now middle-school teacher extraordinaire) Gayle Howell introduced my students to a new concept: critical vs. practical dialogue. The idea, taken from Burt Dodson's *Keys to Drawing*, is that, in any creative act, an artist uses one of two types of dialogue when faced with a challenge. "Critical dialogue" halts the creative process; its opposite, "practical dialogue," propels it forward.

Critical dialogue can take the form of "This turtle looks stupid," or "I don't know how to write about my summer vacation." Practical dialogue produces thoughts like "What shape is a turtle?" or "What were five things I saw on my vacation?"

When I consider the positive academic and social implications of this single art concept, I am appalled that some people see the arts as expendable in a child's education. Thankfully, children's authors are taking up the torch by providing books that foster art appreciation.

An excellent early introduction to the masters can be found in *A Child's Book of Art* by Lucy Micklethwait. This book couples reproductions of classic paintings with basic concepts from a child's world. A section entitled "At Home" includes works like Van Gogh's "Bedroom at Arles." A section featuring colors shows Kandinsky's "Succession." And what better way to show the seasons than Monet's "Spring?"

Micklethwait complements *A Child's Book of Art* with other books geared toward toddler and preschool art aficionados: *Spot a Dog*, *Spot a Cat* and the *I Spy* series, which features titles like *I*

Spy an Alphabet in Art, *I Spy Two Eyes: Numbers in Art* and *I Spy a Lion: Animals in Art*. More books on art for the very young can be found in the *How Artists See* series by Colleen Carroll. Titles include *How Artists See Cities* and *How Artists See Weather*. Other topics addressed in the series are play, work and

woven with loads of factual data about each artist. Venezia alternates reproductions of the artist's work with comics depicting the artist's life. And, in Van Gogh's story, the lopped-off-ear episode is dealt with skillfully and appropriately for young readers.

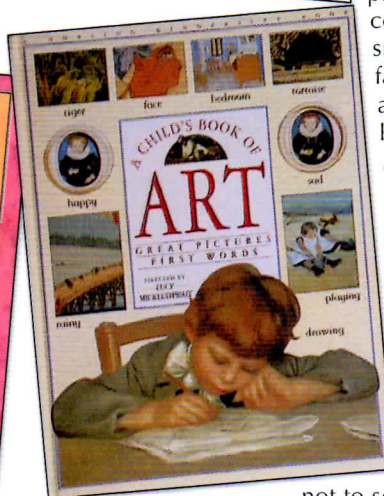
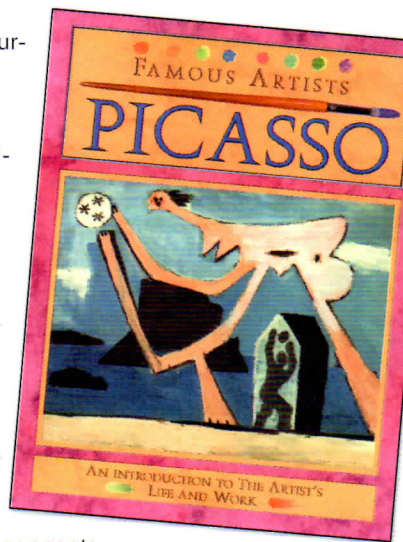
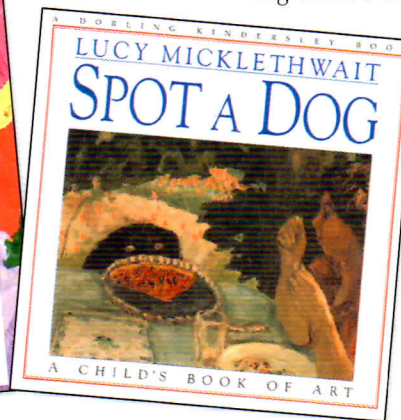
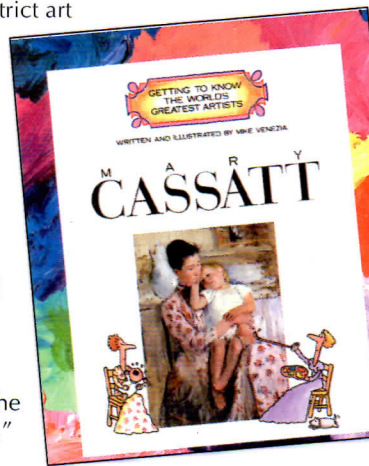
Middle elementary students can turn to Antony Mason's *Famous Artists* books, which resemble Venezia's offering but are not humorous and contain more facts about each artist's growth and particular style. These visual delights feature Cezanne, Miro and Michelangelo, among others.

Biographer Kathleen Krull delights older children with *Lives of the Artists: Masterpieces, Messes (And What the Neighbors Thought)*. Illustrator Kathryn Hewitt provides caricatures that complement Krull's short, snappy biographies of 19 famous visual artists. (Krull and Hewitt also paired to bring readers *Lives of the Musicians* and *Lives of the Writers*.)

Krull focuses on the eccentricities and foibles of her subjects, reminding me of another technique Gayle Howell taught me (and my students, of course). When students made mistakes on particular pieces of art, she would tell them

not to scrap the picture or sculpture altogether but to "re-create" it. This was hard for my students at first but, after learning how to re-create, they experienced an even greater sense of accomplishment. Re-creating taught them to persevere despite difficulties.

As I prepare to return to teaching young children next month, I am trying to keep my inner dialogue "practical" and to remember that I will be "re-creating" with each day. Teaching, of course, is an art. Children know that life is art, or at least they make it look that way. 🖐️



artists themselves. As with Micklethwait's books, Carroll pairs famous paintings with simple text.

Students in the early elementary years will enjoy any book in the *Getting to Know the World's Greatest Artists* series. The titles, each written and illustrated by Mike Venezia, cover a diverse group of artists, from Matisse to Calder, Rembrandt and Degas. What sets Venezia's books apart is the humor inter-