



# The Egg

## Meets California Arts Standards

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**T**eaching to arts standards is an important development in arts education, and as standards become more attainable, we all expect that K–12 arts programs will continue to improve. I have found that if students understand the general standard categories that guide my program, it enriches their experience and they have a better idea of why projects are approached the way they are. However, the language of the standards can sometimes be confusing even to teachers, so it's no surprise that students have a hard time fully under-

standing what they mean.

This lesson is one I've developed to introduce the California Arts Standards in a very basic, visual way to my beginning art students, and could easily be adapted to the National Standards or any other state standards.

As an introduction, I allow students to tell me what they expect to learn in the class. Most responses have to do with either artistic perception or creative expression, so I explain that they will learn these things within the context of those standards.

### Examining an Egg

I give a plain egg to each group and ask them to touch it and look at it carefully. I ask them to tell me about the egg but to forget all the "practical" things we know about eggs, such as how they taste, what we use them for, how much they cost, etc. Instead, they are just to focus on how the egg looks.

### Artistic Expression

Most students volunteer statements like, "it's white, but not bright white," "it's oval-shaped, but not quite symmetrical," or "it's smooth but not shiny, and the surface is





seamless." I congratulate them for practicing the first standard, artistic perception; without even being taught how, they processed, analyzed and responded to sensory information through the language and skills unique to the visual arts.

### Creative Expression

Next, I show some still-life photographs and drawings of eggs made by students in other classes. They notice that through dramatic lighting, cropping, or drawing skill, these artists have turned a simple egg into something that grabs their attention. I explain that they will be doing similar drawings when they learn to use shading to make flat shapes look three-dimensional. Most students expect to learn this kind of thing in an art class, of course, and are not surprised that this is an art standard: creative expression. They will acquire and apply artistic process and skills, using a variety of media to create original works of art.

### Historical and Cultural Context

We then turn our attention to a slide of a Ukrainian dyed egg. As I point out the Ukraine on a world map, I explain that this is an ancient Ukrainian craft, and we briefly decode some of the symbols used on the

eggs. I tell them that the craft was practiced before Christianity, but symbols were later adapted to reflect Christian ideas. After this brief discussion, students have to agree that this knowledge helps them appreciate these beautiful art pieces even more, and understand why it's important that we include context when talking about art, which is our third standard: historical and cultural context.

### Aesthetic Valuing

Next, I pass out plastic Easter eggs, and ask students to make some judgments when comparing this plastic egg to their real egg. Which is more beautiful? Why? Some students use words like "tacky" to describe the plastic egg, or say the real egg is more beautiful because it has no seam, and seems more perfect. They have just

practiced aesthetic valuing, which is responding to, analyzing, and making judgments about works in the visual arts. I ask them how their judgments would be different if they were only five years old, which is a good opportunity to discuss the fact that, while there is general agreement in the art world about what makes an artwork successful, aesthetic judgments can be affected by personal beliefs, cultural traditions, etc.

### Interdisciplinary Connections

Finally, I ask students to recite the poem "Humpty Dumpty" aloud with me. Who was Humpty Dumpty? Students familiar with Mother Goose inevitably reply that Humpty Dumpty was an egg. I tell them that Humpty Dumpty was actually the name of a cannon used during the English Civil War, and was mounted on top of a church tower. This tower was blown off, sending the "Humpty," tumbling to the ground, unrepairable by any of the king's infantry. Using the theme of looking at an egg as an artwork, we have just made surprising connections, relationships, and applications to other subject areas: in this case, literature (Mother Goose) and history (English Civil War).

This lesson, along with the standards posted on the wall, gives a good frame of reference for future lessons. For example, when we are making judgments during a critique I might ask what "egg" represents the standard we are practicing. 🍳

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### NATIONAL STANDARD

*Students differentiate among a variety of historical and cultural contexts in terms of characteristics and purposes of works of art.*