



# HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO TEACH ART WHEN NO ONE TAUGHT ME?!

by

Michelle Geffken

*Yes, You Can!* Publications.  
Real life encouragement from a real life mom

[Yes, You Can Publications.com](http://Yes, You Can Publications.com)

# Do I Have to Teach Art?

## You Are Not Alone

From my experience as a homeschooling mom of six, I certainly understand the frustration you feel facing a subject you think you can't teach.

I've been there too.

To better help parents with the specific area of art, a few years ago I surveyed over 1500 homeschoolers about their experiences teaching art in the home. Overwhelmingly the most voiced frustration was, "How am I supposed to teach my children art when no one taught me?"

If that's your response, or if, like the many survey respondents, you:

- don't know where to begin
- have children who're bored with art
- have a talented child you'd love to help
- or are even wondering why you have to teach art at all

... remember that there are thousands of other homeschool moms out there feeling just like you.

And that there's one mom here working hard on your behalf who would love to help you. **Yes, you can teach art!**

## Will You Teach Your Child to Read?

When we began homeschooling, most of us had never been trained to teach reading. However it was not an option to conclude, "I don't know how to teach reading therefore I just won't teach that subject!"

No! We did whatever it took to learn how to teach reading because it's a non-negotiable skill. It just has to be done.

Just so with art. If you want creative expression to be fostered in your home, you can find a way. Yes, even you!



## Why Teach Art?!

Have you noticed that when a school budget gets cut it's usually the arts that get axed first? Unlike reading, art is deemed dispensable.

Yet researchers in a year-long study of art in Boston schools found that art teaches a specific set of thinking skills rarely addressed by other subjects.

Visual spatial abilities, reflection, the willingness to experiment and learn from mistakes are all fostered by the teaching of art along with persistence, expression, reflective self-evaluation, observing and innovation.

Just the skill of envisioning, has "payoffs far beyond the art world," notes a Boston Globe article about the study.

"Envisioning is important ... and art classes are where this skill is most directly and intensively taught."

**Einstein said that he thought in images. The historian has to imagine events and motivations from the past, the novelist an entire setting. Chemists need to envision molecular structures and rotate them. The inventor ... must dream up ideas to be turned into real solutions.**

*– [The Boston Globe](#), September 2, 2007*

As a homeschooler you control the budget. Art need not take a huge chunk of your homeschool funds or time to produce this kind of rich learning in your home. With some encouragement and even with limited means, you too can include art in your children's home education and gain the benefits highlighted by this study.

**[Here's a quick video](#) on why art education is needed all the more in a faltering economy.**

## So Which Is the Best Curriculum?!

The first step towards implementing art education has to be purchasing the perfect curriculum, right?

Wrong.

Yes, there are some fine art products available for the homeschool market. But there is no *one best* curriculum nor is it the first place to invest your time and money.

However excellent the curriculum, the temptation is to use it as a prop. We buy the latest product, hoping it will take care of everything.

But it's unrealistic to expect those materials, however well written, to meet the needs and answer the questions of every child. If you lean too heavily on a product to prop you up, you find yourself in mid-air when the curriculum cannot meet the need.

**It's what you do when the curriculum doesn't work that matters.**

Yes, enjoy some of those great homeschool art products, but don't be afraid to face art as a subject that *you* can and need to learn yourself.

Try out as many of the pointers below as you can and watch how you grow in ability to truly educate your children.

Keep step with other homeschoolers traveling the same path.

Find a mentor and a place to ask questions, which is what you'll find at [Yes, You Can Teach Art.](#)

You'll soon feel equipped to help your children with any subject and skillfully ignite the fire of learning in your home.



# 10 Quick Helps to Ignite Art Success in YOUR Home!

## 1) Teach Encouragement

Teach a 'can do' attitude. Have an attitude yourself of looking for and expecting answers and don't give up until you've found them. Need inspiration? [Google Nick Vujicic.](#)

## 2) Teach a Willingness to Make Mistakes

This is such an important message for our children to hear and it's so easy to reinforce through the medium of art.

Mona Brookes in [Drawing With Children](#) gives a useful example of a child remedying a 'mistake:' a misshapen tree in a drawing of an elephant. She shows how the child successfully resolves this by turning the tree into a second elephant instead.

Take a tearful, frustrated child under your wing and show them that perhaps a better picture can result from having to change their plans.

It's also helpful for children to hear that a real artist saves very few of his designs and that much of it ends up in the trash! Practicing and not giving up are great life lessons.

**Creativity is allowing yourself to make mistakes.  
Art is knowing which ones to keep.**

*- Scott Adams, Dilbert Cartoonist*

## 3) Teach a Sense of Design

We live in a visual age. Our children need to not only have some cultural literacy about images and basic art history, but they also benefit from understanding elements of good design. From home life to text layout, you never know where they'll need to build on this foundation in their life ahead.

You can learn this together by reading [good books about design](#) such as Tomie dePaola's [Simple Pictures Are Best](#) or Mark Gonyea's, [A Book About Design: Complicated Doesn't Make It Good](#).

Once you've gleaned ideas from books such as these, practice applying them to real life. Talk about the design of everything from newspaper front pages and billboards to book covers and packaging. Play 'I Spy' with different design elements. You can do it anywhere!

#### 4) Build a Home Library of Art Titles



... Books about the different ways art is produced, about art history or even [fiction with an art theme](#).

Enjoy as many well designed, beautiful children's books as you can, whether from your local library, used book sale, or a bargain website such as [bookcloseouts.com](#). Request books as gifts too.

Borrowing is good but it's important to own special books that don't have to be returned. Ownership cultivates deep learning of the ideas not just the book.

Set up a shelf or basket just for art titles. Make beautiful books part of the day. About artists, by artists, for artists.

When you see delight in your child, feed that interest with an abundance of books. Are they interested in origami? Calligraphy? Stick drawing? There are [titles out there waiting for you](#).

#### 5) Integrate Art with Other Subjects

You have an advantage over the classroom teacher who must divide subjects into artificial periods of time.

Art relates to so many other school subjects that you can easily fold art into your day without having to always set aside an art 'class.'

As you study history, read about that era's buildings, art, sculpture or writing. Explore art through geography, science, math and more. You can embellish maps, [learn the science of light](#), [keep a nature journal](#), or learn [the 'why' behind tessellation and the art of Escher](#). Again, your secret weapon is a library card.

## 6) Teach Your Children to Draw Realistically

Better yet, learn along with them. Practice seeing design, pattern, and shapes or the basic language of drawing that Mona Brookes teaches in [\*Drawing with Children\*](#) and [\*Drawing With Teens\*](#)

You'll startle your eyes awake by trying to draw what you actually see. I firmly believe that anyone can learn to draw. I've taught confirmed skeptics and watched their delight and surprise at their own well drawn pictures.

Other than Mona Brookes' titles, [try the following:](#)

- Bruce McIntyre, [\*The Drawing Textbook\*](#)
- Mark Kistler's, [\*Imagination Station\*](#) and [\*Draw Squad\*](#)
- For young children check out some [Ed Emberley](#) titles.
- For older children and adults, [\*Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain\*](#)

## 7) Start a Family Art Notebook



Weave art into the specific interests of your unique family with this helpful and effective tool.

Simply assemble a three ring binder or other notebook of your choice. Add sheet protectors if you have them, for an inviting, professional appearance.

Over time collect:

- local newspaper cuttings or news of nearby art exhibits
- maps of your local art museum
- freebies you download online
- examples of your children's best work
- pages about a favorite artist

Look for the Spirit-led provision for the specific needs of your children. After all, you know them better than anyone, even the best curriculum writers.

Keep the notebook out where your children can browse it easily. Encourage them to find things to add to it too. The slow accumulation of information is more likely to produce fruit than a quick project, long laid aside and forgotten.

Share your ideas for a family art notebook: [leave a comment here!](#)

## 8) Start an Art Postcard Collection

Buy cards from museums or Dover Publications' inexpensive books of postcards and store them in a photo box or a basket.

Make a visual timeline of cards. Buy a double set of the same cards and play snap or your favorite memory game.

[\*Mommy, It's a Renoir!\*](#) also called *How to Use Child-size Masterpieces for Art Appreciation*, has an abundance of specific ideas about how to use an art card collection.

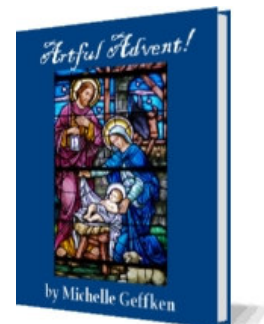
Keep the postcard box and the family art notebook readily available. A lot more learning and pondering may be going on than you think as your children browse and enjoy their family's unique art resources.

## 9) Teach Art Seasonally

Rather than teaching art year round, if that seems too much, enjoy incorporating art into one season. For example, in Fall:

- do some leaf rubbings
- sculpt a wind blown tree out of clay
- learn about the color wheel with warm leaf colors
- read Jim Arnosky's [Sketching Outdoors in Autumn](#) and try his ideas

Or, take a glorious time of year such as Advent and infuse it with art using [Artful Advent!](#) – a resource that puts all ten of these ideas into practice in a practical way.



## 10) Set Goals for Your Best Art Year Ever

Lay aside your fear of not 'covering everything.' Resolve to let your children make a mess this year ... at least every so often (!) and answer these questions:

- Ask yourself: If there was one art project I could enjoy with my children this year, what would it be?

---

---

---

---

- Ask your children: If there was one art project you could do this year, something you've always wanted to do, what would it be?

---

---

---

---

- What's keeping you from doing those art projects?

---

---

---

---



**Nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could only do a little.**

*– Edmund Burke*

## **Why Teaching Art is Not a Burden**

As a schoolgirl in England, I was told at the age of 13 that I was rapidly going blind.

I can vividly remember waiting outside on a bench for an appointment with my eye specialist. I watched a puddleful of splashing English sparrows as I waited and began to hungrily take in every detail, thinking, “this might be the last time I see sparrows splashing in a puddle in spring. Next year I’m going to be blind.”

I would love to read the medical notes. To the surprise of the doctors, my eyes began to recover, causing my parents who had been praying for my healing to become Christians.

That trial not only brought life to my family but also left me with an unquenchable gratefulness for my sight and a joy at seeing, creating art, taking pictures and drinking in the beauty of God’s creation that I’m passionately determined to pass on to others.

The job of teaching your children art is not a burden and it’s not a problem.

It’s a privilege. And it’s one that begins with the simple act of being able to see.



Yes, You Can! Publications founder, Michelle Geffken was born in Australia, grew up in the UK and now lives in the States with her American husband and six children who have all been homeschooled from birth.

***Do you need more art help? Sign up [here](#) for a FREE monthly newsletter. Or [here](#) for more frequent messages from the Yes, You Can Teach Art blog.***