



Nurturing Creative Kids

Hobbies Engage and Grow Healthy Kids

by Marlaina Donato

Unplugging with creative and fun activities fosters skills that can last a lifetime. Studies published by the National Endowment for the Arts Office of Research & Analysis show that participating in performing and visual arts enhances children's social skills and emotional processing, builds confidence and improves academic aptitude.

"Not every child needs to play a team sport. Team experiences such as working with peers toward a goal, learning to win and lose gracefully and to get along with others can also be learned through the arts," explains Antonella D'Aloia, a developmental and expressive art teacher with The Whole Child, in Upton, Massachusetts. "Both crafts and expressive artistic creation have huge benefits because they're usually seen as nonthreatening activities, especially for kids with anxiety or on the autism spectrum. Art offers a safe place in which they can hone new responses to difficult feelings."

Earth-Based Self-Expression

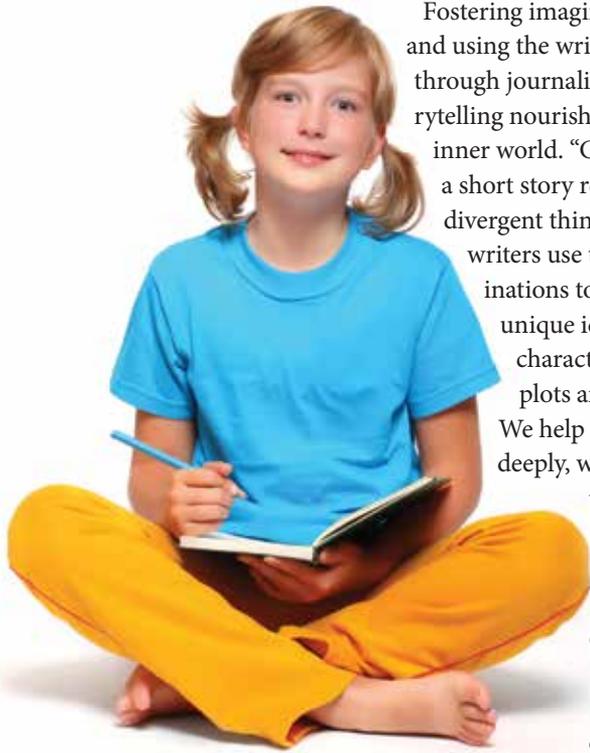
Weaving, scrapbooking, making friendship bracelets and other art projects involving organic or re-usable materials can demonstrate sustainability while teaching children how to follow directions, cultivate patience and strategize. Healthy cooking classes are a creatively engaging avenue for youths to learn about connections between a healthy Earth and maintaining personal health. Expressing themselves through the visual arts, drama and dance promotes problem-solving and innovation, as does joining a science or Lego club.

"It doesn't have to cost a lot of money to try new things," stresses D'Aloia. "Go to local school concerts, plays and art exhibits. Look for public art in your area. Local libraries often offer great activities for kids."

Mindful Investments

Instilling mindfulness in children can be both fruitful and far-reaching. "Origami—the Japanese art of paper folding without cuts or glue—is a quintessential hobby for centeredness. The act of folding paper is so engrossing that one is very present and in the moment," says Kathleen Sheridan, origami master and founder of Origami and You, in St. Paul, Minnesota. "Origami

stimulates both sides of the brain and helps to build self-esteem. Most of all, it's fun, portable and inexpensive.”



Fostering imagination and using the written word through journaling or storytelling nourishes a child's inner world. “Creating a short story requires divergent thinking; young writers use their imaginations to generate unique ideas for characters, settings, plots and conflicts. We help them think deeply, write authentically and respect the perspectives of others, while learning to create and share their own stories and experiences,” explains Kimberly O'Connor, young writers program director at Lighthouse Writers Workshops, in Denver, Colorado.

“Expressing the exact shape of an iris or the sound of a cricket, for example, requires intense curiosity and attention, two qualities that can serve children and teens indefinitely,” she explains. Such skills can help students anywhere—in the classroom, on the sports field and later, when they begin to search for and find jobs.

According to Stanford University research published in the *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, learning an instrument helps to improve children's reading skills, especially those struggling with dyslexia and other learning challenges. Researchers at the German Institute for Economic Research *revealed that learning music amplifies* cognitive and non-cognitive skills twice as much as engaging in sports, dance or theater arts.

The Wellbeing Project, in Great Britain, has inspired activities such as sewing to benefit well-being. According to research published in the *Journal of Public Health*, quilting boosts cognitive ability, emotional equilibrium and creativity.

Introducing life skills and hobbies that nourish selfhood can be one of our greatest gifts to the next generation. D'Aloia remarks, “Helping our children to express who they are, rather than who we expect them to be, is the most powerful thing we can do.”

Marlaina Donato is a multimedia artist and freelance writer who authors books related to the fields of alternative health and spirituality. Connect at MarlainaDonato.com.

Links to More Discoveries

- Crafting a Green World: The Home for Green Crafts and Materials, CraftingAGreenWorld.com
- YouTube all-level instructional videos from OrigamiSpirit.com, Tinyurl.com/OrigamiInstruction
- YouTube intermediate-level origami videos from Jeremy Shafer, Tinyurl.com/JeremyShaferOrigami
- From juggling to calligraphy, broad-spectrum activity ideas, Tinyurl.com/50Non-SportsActivities
- Scrapbooking for kids, Tinyurl.com/HowToDoScrapbooking
- Benefits of journaling, Tinyurl.com/WhyJournal
- Eco-friendly fabric companies for sewing projects, Tinyurl.com/EcoFabricSources
- Vintage sewing patterns online database, Tinyurl.com/VintageSewingPatterns

