

Dotty's Enchanted Art Table

To bring enchantment right into your family room, amply supply a table with art materials for use at any time.

Requirements to Preserve Your Sanity, Carpet, and Walls

1.
Table: Not precious, stable (card tables are rickety), and able to withstand hot glue, paint, and permanent markers. Can be covered with clear plastic. Tuck the plastic under the table and duct tape it in place so it doesn't move when kids are working. The height of the table depends on the age of the kids: low for young kids, regular height for older kids.
2.
Chairs: Appropriate to the table height, back support, not easily tipped, not precious (they will be decorated in color and glue).
3.
Floor: Set the table on top of an old rug or scrap of carpet/vinyl.
4.
Children: Hang men's button-down short-sleeved shirts (bought at a thrift store) on a coat rack or hooks on a wall near the table. These can be donned backward (buttons down the back) as smocks to protect clothes.
5.
Walls: If the table butts up against a wall, affix a long strip of butcher paper about a foot high.

A Glorious Array of Supplies

1.
Painting: Tempera, watercolors, acrylics, puff paints, finger paints, fat brushes, thin brushes, foam brushes, sponges cut into stamps for printing.
2.
Writing: Washable markers (Crayola makes inexpensive ones), oil pastels, Prismacolor colored pencils, charcoal, Flair black pens for outlining, highlighters, Sharpies in all colors (careful: these markers are permanent), chalk, drawing pencils, whiteboard markers (pro tip: put colored electrical tape on whiteboard markers to make it clear they are not meant for paper), regular number 2 pencils, gel pens for black paper.
3.
Surfaces: Colored and white paper, stationery with pretty borders, brown paper bags, butcher paper, sticky notes, notecards, cardboard, wrapping paper, aluminum foil, poster board, cardstock, envelopes, canvas, wooden blocks, river stones, a mirror, a whiteboard, glass votive candleholders, scraps of fabric, sand paper, coloring books, felt, black paper for gel pens, small journals and notebooks.

4.

Fasteners: Lots of glue sticks, Elmer's white glue, hot glue guns and crazy glue (used with supervision), fabric glue, stapler, brads, hole punch and rings, Scotch tape, double-sided tape, masking tape, clear packaging tape, duct tape, electrical tape in multiple colors.

5.

Accessories: Googly eyes, pipe cleaners, glitter (careful!), confetti (careful times two!), stickers, rubber stamps, stencils, yarn, string, embroidery floss, modeling clay, Sculpey baking clay, fabric scraps, catalogs, magazines, pompoms, rickrack, Popsicle sticks.

6.

Storage: Washed empty tin cans make great holders for paintbrushes and writing utensils. A shower caddy holds packages of googly eyes, pipe cleaners, glue sticks, and glitter. Hang a laundry line nearby with clothespins to display artwork and to get it *off* the table. A bulletin board mounted on a wall can serve a similar purpose (cover it in colorful wrapping paper to go with decor, if you'd like). Keep a shelf free on a bookcase to display projects that can't be hung. Use heavy-bottomed glasses (the short kind for cocktails) to hold water for cleaning paintbrushes between colors. These tip less often than tin cans. Modeling clay can be kept on small cookie sheets under the table and then lifted to the top when in use.

7.

Location: Put the table in your way—underfoot and near you. Tables in basements and bedrooms are lonely.

Time to play!

The magic of the table is that it's ready to use any time. Begin with a few supplies: perhaps the paints, markers, clean white paper, glue, and googly eyes. Add fresh items (each week or every few days). Rotate old, crusted materials off the table to be replaced by fresh, new ones.

Surprise your kids! Let kids awaken to a table of twigs, bark, moss, and acorns. They might discover you already at work making fairy houses. Will they join you? Find out. Bring home smooth stones from the creek and paint them to make paperweights or stack them and glue them together to create sculptures.

Add quill pens and ink wells—write by candlelight.

A table reset is appropriate once a month. A time may come when the table becomes "wallpaper" and no one notices it anymore. Clear it up and try a different idea in this book.

Modification: For crowded homes that can't support a dedicated art table, stock a cabinet with lots of hidey-holes, drawers, and cupboards near the kitchen table.

Continent of Learning

This activity helps you see your child's learning differently—to let go of the worry that your student is somehow not getting the *right* education. It also helps you capitalize on making connections between what your child is doing easily and happily, and how that interest relates to traditional school subjects—the ones needed for academic advancement.

Directions

Make a list of traditional school subjects. (A starter list is below.) Break it apart even further by categorizing the types of math (geometry, long division, accounting) or the eras of history (ancient, medieval, American, Far East) or the aspects of writing (grammar, spelling, formats, revision).

- Reading
- Writing
- Math
- History
- Science
- Philosophy
- Religion
- Foreign language
- Art
- Music
- Social science
- Physical education

List your child's current passions. For instance, like these:

- Piano
- Minecraft
- Disney Channel
- Fan fiction
- *Phineas and Ferb* (cartoon)
- Lemony Snicket (the novel series)
- Soccer
- Greek myths
- Board games
- Airplanes
- Zoo animals

If you believe your child doesn't have any interests, check yourself. You may be judging the interests as unworthy. Observe your child for a day. Even if the interest seems insignificant to you (watching the Disney Channel), put it on the list.

Next, tie the child's passion to subject areas as specifically as you can.

Follow These Steps

1.
Look at the primary subject and examine it for all its properties—vocabulary about the subject (reading, spelling, grammar), its history (origin, location, reason), its relationship *to* history (geopolitical context, religion, conflict or war), notable persons related to the subject (creator, inventor, participant, monarch, military personnel, practitioners, scholars), controversy (conflict), its role in society or religion or politics, and so on. Books and poems, artwork and plays, movies and television series—include them all.
2.
Match these properties to traditional school subjects (using your list).
3.
Now draw a bubble in the middle of a sheet of paper; write the child's interest inside the shape.
4.
Adjacent to the bubble, draw additional shapes.
5.
Enter one of the school subject names and bullet list how it relates to the child's key interest.
6.
Add additional “country shapes” in your Continent of Learning. Make an outer ring with more connections (see illustration).

Watch a Continent of Learning emerge! Save this drawing. We'll refer to it again throughout the book.

Example

Child's Central Interest: Piano

- Music: composition, theory, performance, musical styles and pieces
- History: classical composers and jazz musicians, the history of the piano
- Religion: compositions for religious services (hymns), relationship to the organ
- Science: physics of the keys and pedals; vibration and sound; writing music while deaf (Beethoven)
- Foreign language: Latin for musical language like “tempo” and “adagio”
- Sociology: various uses in society (church, bars, royal court)
- Math: scales, keys, transposing, composing, arranging, time signature, musical notation, rhythm
- Literature: *The Cat Who Loves Mozart* (Patricia Austin), *The Piano* (William Miller), musical literature (the pieces themselves)
- Film/theater: *The Piano*, *Amadeus*

See illustration: the piano is at the center and borders other subjects adjacent to it and to each other.

Piano

GEOGRAPHY:
• First piano spread to which countries
• compare instruments across countries

SOCIOLOGY:
• piano vs. organ (bar) music
• church vs. popular

INVENTIONS:
• Electronic keyboards
• Brands

RELATED:
organ
piano

STYLES OF MUSIC:
• folk
• pop
• rock
• opera
• bar

RELIGION:
• church/fugue
• Handel's
• Bach

MATH:
• composition time signature
• transposing
• # of key, pedals, strings
• chord structure

HISTORY:
• inventor
• genres of music
• of the instrument

CRITICAL:
• history of the instrument

SCIENCE:
• sound / vibration
• physics: keys/pedals
• biology - Beethoven deaf

FOREIGN LANGUAGE:
• Latin: opera

LITERATURE:
• musical notation
• reading music
• sheet music
• variety of pieces

FILM / NOVELS:
• "Amadeus" and "The Piano"
• Biographies of composers

TIMELINE:
• Famous pianists
• Famous composers
• Famous piano styles over time

Hygge: The Danish Practice of Coziness

The four Ports of Entry are best nurtured when we consider the properties of hominess and connection. In this, the Danes are experts, and their lifestyle has caught the global imagination.

In the last several years, articles and books about *hygge* (pronounced *HOO-gah*), the Danish word for “coziness,” have proliferated like wildflowers in spring. The Danes, subject to eighteen to twenty hours of darkness per day in winter, have perfected the art of making the home a place of light, warmth, connection, and well-being. They believe that productivity in the workplace and restfulness at home rely not on better technology or tools, but on how well each person is nurtured and welcomed into those spaces.

The health of the mind, body, heart, and spirit depends on creating a context that relieves stress and improves concentration and relaxation. *Hygge* fits the bill! Add one *hygge* feature to your lives today. It's not always the program that's the problem; sometimes it's just the context.

- **Light and color:** Danes burn thirteen pounds of candle wax per capita per year!¹⁰ Candles, small table lamps, twinkle lights, LED or battery-operated candles, and lanterns offer warm cozy lighting. In the fall, when it gets dark early, a pot of tea simmering on a tea warmer with a bright tea light within invites children to gather.
- **Fragrance and sound:** The aroma of baking cookies, the scent of pine in a centerpiece, musical scores from favorite films, soundscapes of nature—these create an invisible mood.
- **Food:** Half-moon orange slices with cinnamon, a square of chocolate, a cup of warm tea—the simple act of dipping a hand repeatedly into a bowl of almonds and dried apricots while working on math problems can make the difference! Good protein for the mind, good action for the body, good color for the eyes, yummy flavor for the heart.
- **Cuddling:** Soft throws, fuzzy socks, a mountain of pillows, those baggy pants you only wear at home, wool for knitting, sheepskins on the floor in front of the fireplace, chairs that envelop you—cuddle up! Snuggle a puppy or kitty cat.
- **The outdoors:** In addition to making the home a cuddly, nourishing, well-lit space, *hygge* includes a love of nature at any time of year. Bring some of it inside (pinecone arrangements, roaring fires, plants) and go out to it (hikes, walks, skating, visits to parks). Look for hearts in nature. I've found puddles, snow stacked up between tree limbs, and a cactus in the shape of hearts. Getting outside in all temperatures and seasons maintains your circadian rhythm, and keeps everyone from going stir-crazy in a long season of snow, rain, or heat.
- **Connection:** Being with loved ones is a top priority. Homeschooling allows us to spend the days with our favorite people (our kids). Connection is created when your little people see that you want their happiness—a happiness they would choose for themselves.

Quick Tips for Outdoor Trips

- Bring water, sunscreen, and snacks.
- Give each child a small backpack or ziplock bag for collecting natural items (so you don't have to carry all the rocks).
- Provide one or two field guides.
- Keep clipboards and sketchbooks in the car. Take photos to use for drawing later. After the hike, find a place to draw near the parking lot (so you don't have to lug supplies around).
- Hike for under an hour. "Leave while they're happy."
- Encourage water play—bring a change of clothes and towels.
- Carry a plastic bag to collect trash you create or find. "Pack it in? Pack it out."

Checklist for Meaning-Rich Materials

- You like it!
- The information is presented in a way that you can understand. You can comfortably explain it to your kids.
- The materials are attractive. (It matters!)
- The learning experience provokes curiosity, not only rote skill development. The lessons are multifaceted (incorporating mind and body, heart and spirit). Your children also like the program and buy into it.
- Materials apply to multiple subjects (across the curriculum).

Reflection Activity

Pause now. Either in your mind's eye or on a sheet of paper, take a few minutes to think or write about how you *felt* in your home growing up. Peace? Anxiety? Pressure? Unsafe? Supported? Think of a memory where you felt loved and understood. Now consider one where you felt overlooked or demeaned.

Describe to yourself what it was like to come home after being away. Did you look forward to it? Did you worry about the mood of the family upon reentry?

Consider each parent: Did you prefer one to the other? Why? Identify one or two memories that help you characterize your relationship with each of your parents.

Did you feel close to or threatened by your siblings?

Which event was the biggest hurdle in childhood? Which one was your greatest joy? Who noticed in both cases? How did they enhance or hurt those experiences?

What do you want your home life to feel and look like now?

Add any other thoughts as they come to you. Get it all down and let your mind and pen go where they want to.

It's okay. I'll wait.