

Teaching Creative Work Habits

What workforce skills look like when students are making something.

CREATING • STANDARDS 1-3

Motivation & Engagement • Creativity • Problem Solving

PERFORMING, PRESENTING, PRODUCING • STANDARDS 4-6

Communication • Collaboration

RESPONDING • STANDARDS 7-9

Self-awareness • Resiliency

CONNECTING • STANDARDS 10-11

Empathy • Critical Thinking

HOW TO USE THESE CARDS

Pull one card before you start planning. The question on the front shows you instantly whether you're actually teaching that skill or just assuming the kids are getting it.

If you're in a PLC or department meeting, hand out one card per person and take 10 minutes to talk. Passing out nine cards means you instantly trigger nine different, useful conversations from the exact same deck.

Remember, the Artful Thinking routine on each card is meant to make a skill visible, not to teach it from scratch. Students are already using these skills when they make art. These routines simply give your whole room a shared language to name what's happening.

A NOTE ON COMPLETENESS

These nine skills are based on the Arts Education Partnership's work connecting arts education to durable skills, but treat this list as a starting point. In reality, these skills overlap across different stages of the creative process. You will likely find connections in your own classroom that are even stronger than the ones we highlighted here. When you do, add them to the deck!

Motivation and Engagement

When students draw on their own memories and interests, they discover a genuine purpose for their learning.

Ask Yourself:

In my current unit, where do the students decide what's worth pursuing? Where am I deciding that for them?

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN YOUR CLASSROOM

Students produce original artistic ideas from their own observations, then set a goal for the work before any technique instruction begins.

K-5: In reading, students choose the moment from a story they want to bring to life before you introduce the artistic medium.

6-12: In science or social studies, students draft an artistic intent statement about a concept they are exploring, refining their vision throughout the creative process.

ARTFUL THINKING ROUTINE

Think, Puzzle, Explore

WHY IT WORKS HERE

When students come up with their own questions about the work, shifting the focus from your goals to theirs.



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Creativity

Students generate multiple paths or answers, eventually selecting one and defending their reasoning.

Ask Yourself:

When students finish an assignment in my class, do their final products look the same?

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN YOUR CLASSROOM

Students brainstorm several ways to represent a core concept, experiment with at least two approaches, and justify the choice they selected.

K-5: In science, students explore three distinct ways to physically model the water cycle through movement, ultimately selecting the most effective performance.

6-12: In math, students design competing visual layouts for a single data set, then advocate for the most compelling option to develop further.

ARTFUL THINKING ROUTINE

Creative Questions

WHY IT WORKS HERE

By transforming ordinary questions into imaginative prompts, students build the powerful habit of generating creative options instead of just retrieving static answers.



Problem Solving

When faced with an unexpected challenge, students pivot in the moment rather than stopping to ask for the next step.

Ask Yourself:

What happens in my room when a student's creative plan falls apart halfway through the project?

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN YOUR CLASSROOM

As they build or rehearse, students learn to navigate sudden constraints and problem-solve to achieve their original vision.

K-5: In social studies, students debate a historical roles to debate a conflict, discover an alternative solution, and analyze how that solution might have rewritten history.

6-12: In ELA, students perform a story's plot using "shrinking time" constraints (dropping from one minute down to seven seconds) forcing them to strip away the noise and isolate the core narrative elements.

ARTFUL THINKING ROUTINE

The Elaboration Game

WHY IT WORKS HERE

By isolating a single element, analyzing it closely, and speculating on its impact, students mirror the exact process a professional creator uses to break a massive problem down into a workable task.



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Communication

Students tailor their ideas for a specific audience and learn to evaluate whether their message truly hit the mark.

Ask Yourself:

Do your students ever share their work and ideas with an audience outside of me?

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN YOUR CLASSROOM

When showcasing their work, students make intentional presentation choices designed around exactly what their audience needs to understand the material.

K-5: In math, students explain a single problem-solving strategy in two different ways, then poll their peers to see which explanation landed more clearly.

6-12: In ELA, students actively revise their presentations to match the specific expectations, age group, or background of their intended audience.

ARTFUL THINKING ROUTINE

Looking: 10 x 2

WHY IT WORKS HERE

By challenging students to generate 10 descriptive words, and then 10 more, you push them past surface-level ideas into the precise vocabulary that drives clear communication.



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Collaboration

Students have a collective goal that is impossible to achieve alone, forcing them to rely on each other to succeed.

Ask Yourself:

In my group work, could a single highly-motivated student finish the entire task on their own?

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN YOUR CLASSROOM

Students design a collaborative ensemble project based on their current unit, creating a structure where every contribution is vital and the entire piece falls apart if one person drops their part.

K-5: In ELA, small groups collaborate to construct a physical tableau of a scene, requiring every single student to anchor a vital role in the frozen image.

6-12: In history, students step into specialized production roles to build a joint documentary, holding one another accountable to shared project deadlines.

ARTFUL THINKING ROUTINE

Beginning, Middle, End

WHY IT WORKS HERE

When groups must negotiate a unified narrative out of conflicting perspectives, they experience true collaboration, rather than the simple division of labor that often replaces it.



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Self-awareness

Students learn to clearly articulate their personal strengths, pinpoint where they are stuck, and identify exactly what they would change next time.

Ask Yourself:

Can my students describe their own progress and growth without relying on a letter grade to define it?

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN YOUR CLASSROOM

As they bring academic concepts to life, students connect their personal styles to specific artistic choices, reflecting along the way on what is working and what isn't working yet.

K-5: In science, students point to the element of their weather illustration they are proudest of and justify why using both scientific and artistic vocabulary.

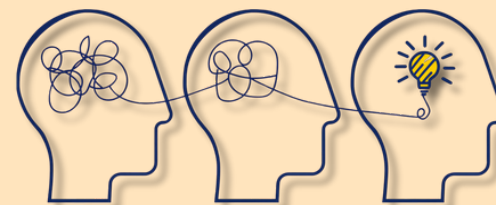
6-12: In math, students maintain a process journal through a complex problem-solving sequence, eventually creating artwork that teaches the concept to a peer.

ARTFUL THINKING ROUTINE

**I Used to Think...
Now I Think...**

WHY IT WORKS HERE

This routine transforms student reflection from a silent, private thought into a shared, visible practice by prompting students to trace the shifts in their thinking.



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Resiliency

Students receive constructive feedback on projects they are deeply invested in, learning to stay receptive to new perspectives.

Ask Yourself:

How do I respond when a student struggles to accept feedback, and what does that reaction signal to the rest of the room?

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN YOUR CLASSROOM

Students give and receive peer critique on works-in progress, then revise, refining their content while navigating the vulnerable side of sharing personal work.

K-5: In math, students commit to testing out at least one peer suggestion on their geometry-based designs before deciding whether or not to keep it.

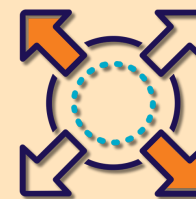
6-12: In history, students listen to feedback on their historical monologues, taking notes without defending their choices, and address those insights in their next draft.

ARTFUL THINKING ROUTINE

Connect, Extend, Challenge

WHY IT WORKS HERE

By explicitly inviting students to call out what is still confusing or unresolved, this step normalizes the struggle and lowers the social stakes of admitting difficulty in front of peers.



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Empathy

Students immerse themselves in a perspective outside of their own, holding that viewpoint long enough to truly understand it.

Ask Yourself:

Whose voice and perspective are missing from the materials my students are studying right now?

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN YOUR CLASSROOM

Students investigate what that creator knew, questioned, and valued by engaging with art created by someone from a completely different background.

K-5: In social studies, students step into the shoes of a historical or community figure, adopting their voice to articulate their realities.

6-12: In ELA, students analyze literature written by an author from a different culture, reflecting on the personal assumptions they brought to it.

ARTFUL THINKING ROUTINE

Perceive, Know About, Care

WHY IT WORKS HERE

When students speak from within a viewpoint rather than simply observing it from the outside, they move past just discussing empathy and actually begin practicing it.



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Critical Thinking

Students form a clear claim about a concept and ground it in actual evidence they can point to.

Ask Yourself:

When my students share an opinion about content, do I prompt them to explain what evidence they are basing it on?

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN YOUR CLASSROOM

Students analyze how a work reflects its societal, cultural, or historical context, then support their interpretation with specific evidence from the work itself.

K-5: In science, students say what they think is happening in a photograph of an ecosystem and point to the details that communicate that.

6-12: In social studies, students argue an interpretation of a primary source artwork and identify what evidence would change their mind.

ARTFUL THINKING ROUTINE

Claim, Support, Question

WHY IT WORKS HERE

By cleanly separating the initial claim from the supporting evidence, this routine makes it immediately clear when a student is using logic and when they are simply guessing.



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