



## Choice-Based Art Edited by Nan Hathaway

Choice-Based Art classrooms are working studios where students learn through authentic art making. Control shifts from teacher to learner as students explore ideas and interests in art media of their choice. This concept supports multiple modes of learning to meet the diverse needs of our students. Learn more at [teachingforartisticbehavior.org](http://teachingforartisticbehavior.org).

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### STUDIO HABITS FOR MIDDLES AND LITTLES

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BY CATHERINE "KATE" NESMITH AND HOLLY BESS KINCAID

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**D**o you find it difficult to define how you're teaching art? We found ourselves discovering the Studio Habits of Mind (SHoM) around the same time, and were drawn to the simplicity of eight interconnected habits used by professional working artists.

The habits are: *Observe, Envision, Stretch & Explore, Engage & Persist, Express, Develop Craft, Understand Art Community, and Reflect*. We knew with a bit of adaptation, our little and middle-level artists could also benefit from thinking about and using the SHoM in our classroom art studios.

We teach in highly diverse school communities, and our students have many unique needs and skill sets. We wanted to ensure the experiences our students had in our art studio classrooms fostered individual growth, in a safe, encouraging environment. Adapting the SHoM definitions into language that suited our school communities forced us to carefully analyze our goals as art teachers, ensuring that even our youngest and most challenged students would be able to know and apply the ShoM.

**THE SHoM ARE THE RESULTS** of a multi-year research project from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. The project investigated how the arts are taught, what students learn, and how teachers design instruction for the arts, and resulted in the book *Studio Habits 2: The Real Benefits of an Art Education* (Hetland, Winner, Veenema & Sheridan, 2013). We found the book to be a helpful tool as we redefined the craft of teaching art for ourselves, our administrators, and our students.

For us, the SHoM highlight the importance of an art teacher's role in helping students identify what it means to be an artist, and the various ways a student can foster their own artistic understanding and growth. We like to think of these eight habits as an awareness we want to cultivate in our students throughout their art-making experiences in our classrooms, rather than as individual concepts to be introduced and taught.

The SHoM have given us language to use as we help our students make connections between techniques and ways of working with their personal art making and understanding of their place in the greater arts world. What follows are ways we have introduced the various SHoM to our K-8 students:

**(1) OBSERVE.** *Littles:* We spend time discussing and describing things as a group and sharing what we notice in fine art examples, personal artworks, illustrations. *Middles:*

Students learn to look carefully at fine art examples and write a "THINK":

**Tell** (what you see)

**How** do you know that?

**Interpret**

**Now**, what do you think?

**Know** the artist (biographical details)

This helps to practice developing a critical eye. As they are working on a piece, students are encouraged to look from a distance to identify necessary changes.

**(2) ENVISION.** *Littles:* Through various lessons, students explore ways to use their imagination and identify personal reasons for making art. *Middles:* Students develop plans for their projects, including a goal statement of a skill or material they'd like to improve upon.

**(3) STRETCH & EXPLORE.** *Littles:* Students have independent access to many "helper" tools in the art studio, including tracers, whiteboards for sketching, starter papers, and technique and material videos. *Middles:* Students complete small projects that introduce them to new media, and have a rich print and digital resource area in the classroom.

**(4) ENGAGE & PERSIST.** *Littles:* The "Art Smart Wall of Fame" is a way to celebrate the small efforts that lead to big achievements in the art studio! *Middles:* The "I Can" (a tin can we covered in googly eyes) is a funny, non-threatening way to encourage positive self-talk.

**(5) DEVELOP CRAFT.** *Littles:* Visual lists help students learn specific techniques. *Middles:* Demonstrations of various media are presented, with lots of high-quality examples from student-produced to fine art.

**(6) EXPRESS.** *Littles:* We discuss where artists source their ideas, and practice ourselves. *Middles:* Project prompts ask students to express specific ideas with choices in media.

**(7) REFLECT.** *Littles:* Students discuss art with their peers and write reflections on "Today I learned" posters. *Middles:* Self-reflection rubrics and artist statement frameworks help guide reflections.

**(8) UNDERSTANDING ARTS COMMUNITIES.** *Littles:* Students learn the studio is a shared space and they help contribute to the flow and function of the room. *Middles:* Models for caring for the materials, space, and one another are consistently reinforced as students explore global influences for their own art-making.

We hope you find these suggestions a helpful jumping off point for your own explorations in the SHoM! Our student-friendly SHoM definition posters are linked on our websites: [www.katenesmith.com](http://www.katenesmith.com) and [www.capitolofcreativity.weebly.com](http://www.capitolofcreativity.weebly.com). ■

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