



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CREATING ART WITH SENIOR CITIZENS

Art projects keep minds active, encourage creativity, and yield a finished result that senior citizens can display with pride. Senior art projects should be fun and engaging, yet uncomplicated. Seniors may create an art project to help them preserve their favorite memories or create a gift for themselves or others. Leading an art class for seniors is largely a matter of proper planning and organization. An art group is an ideal way for seniors to develop friendships and remain active. Seniors who have opportunities to socialize with others experience a good quality of life; an active lifestyle helps keep depression and loneliness at bay. These sessions can also be used as a means of continuing and life-long education for seniors who want to learn more about art and the artistic process.

Promoting the Art Lessons/Art Program

- Get the word out! Post notices on bulletin boards, hand out flyers, and individually invite those participants you think may be interested in the sessions to attend.
- For each lesson, you can give a very brief description of what will occur to spark interest. Note: sometimes giving too much information can “scare away” participants.
- Ask past participants to invite their friends.
- LISTEN to feedback from the participants as to what works and what doesn't and adjust your plans accordingly.
- Just prior to lesson time, knock on doors of those participants you know are planning to participate to remind them of the session.

- Provide an abundance of quality art supplies for Senior Citizen use. Broken crayons and colored pencils won't give your participants encouragement to create their art. Among the supplies you should have on hand and keep replenished are:
 - Colored Markers
 - Crayons
 - Colored Pencils, water colored pencils, and drawing pencils
 - Craypas
 - Sculpting clay and self-hardening clay
 - Rulers/straight edges, scissors, rolling pins, paper cutters
 - Pastels
 - Acrylic Paints
 - Oil Paints
 - Embellishments for art including beads, gems, glitter, crepe paper, ribbon, buttons, felt, stickers, raffia, wallpaper and paint samples, yarn, old jewelry, colored paper, colored pipe cleaners, fabric, feathers, sequins, trims, elastic string, cords,
 - Adhesives such as Elmer's glue, glue sticks, scotch tape, glue guns and Modge Podge
 - A variety of brushes for oil and acrylic, foam brushes and materials to clean the brushes
 - Wooden dowels, craft sticks, wooden blocks, stirring sticks
 - A variety of art sponges
 - Tissue paper and art tissue
 - A variety of paper, canvases, foam board, water color paper, foam core, Masonite board, Styrofoam, drawing paper, card stock, blank cards with envelopes, butcher paper, index cards and matting of various sizes
 - Disposable glasses, bowls and plates
 - Plastic totes to set up individual work stations
 - A multitude of print materials such as magazines, advertisements and newspapers to be used for collages and other purposes
 - Aprons for the participants to protect clothing
 - Cleaning supplies and materials to protect the floor and table surfaces
 - A storage area for all the art materials and a cart on wheels to transport art supplies to classrooms

Please see the accompanying article on this website “How to Set up an Art Cart” by Shelley Klammer (or visit: <http://www.expressiveartworkshops.com/how-to-start-your-own-art-program/how-to-set-up-an-art-cart/>) for more information. Also, visit <http://www.expressiveartworkshops.com/how-to-start-your-own-art-program/how-to-start-an-art-program-for-the-elderly/> for more information on how to run an art program for older adults written by Shelley Klammer.

Recommendations for Facilities/Set up

The site for your lessons should be roomy, well-lit with comfortable temperatures. You will need to set up a room with tables and chairs:

- with ample space for participants to spread out to create their art,
- which can accommodate participant needs, e.g. walkers, wheel chairs,
- which are arranged so that the facilitator and assistant(s) can move around the room easily to and interact with participants,
- which can be easily cleaned
- which is set up with all materials needed for the lesson as students enter

Note: Depending upon the lesson, you may want to protect tables and floor, etc. by covering them with drop cloths, newspaper, etc. Encourage participants to dress keeping in mind they may be working with materials that could stain their clothing. You may also want to provide the participants with old shirts or aprons to protect their clothing.

Suggestions for the Facilitator

- Prior to the class, you and your assistant(s) should create the art project on your own to “get a feel” for the art. This will allow you to see how long it takes to create the art and you will have something to bring to the class to be used as an example.
- Schedule a 2 to 2 1/2 hour block of time for the room to be used for the class to give you ample time for set up (1/2 hour), introductions, socializing, lesson and art creation (1 ½ hours) and wrap up/cleanup (1/2 hour). Note: it is important to set a time limit for the art class, allowing for socializing time, instruction, the creation the art and closure. For some participants, an hour may be enough for those who tire easily—tune in to your participants’ needs.

- Gather all materials needed in advance of the lesson; it would be helpful to have all the materials/supplies stored on a wheeled cart so you'll have everything on hand and can easily move it to the class site.
- Plan for extra participants—you don't want to run out of supplies, especially if participants wish to create more than one piece of art.
- Try to estimate the number of participants who will be attending the class but do not require preregistration. This will allow for "drop ins" but will also help you in planning your facility and supplies/material needs.

Projects – *(Note: First you, as the facilitator, need to determine if you are going to lead an "art class" which adds an educational component to the planned activities to help the participants learn some of the history and principles in creating art or if you will lean more towards crafts in your activities. You will need to hone in on the interests and needs of your audience and may want to consider opting for one class that goes more in-depth into life-long learning and exploring art and another that will include simpler but enjoyable activities creating arts and crafts without the educational component.)*

Determine a project, or projects, for the senior arts and crafts group and the educational levels you wish to achieve. Many seniors would enjoy knitting, crocheting or quilting class, while others may prefer ceramics, scrapbooking, jewelry-making, painting or drawing. Don't assume that seniors are incapable of creating and exploring challenging art/crafts or that they require childlike projects. Remember that some older seniors may prefer simple, colorful crafts such as beaded bracelets, leaf collage or simple handmade cards while others would prefer more challenging projects.

Suggestions for Interacting with the Senior Citizen "Artists"

- Be careful in selecting projects/lessons for your Senior Art group, taking into consideration interests and relevance to the participants as well as issues such as mobility, strength, flexibility and range of motion.
- Don't assume that seniors are incapable of challenging projects but also realize some participants may prefer simpler endeavors. Offer a wide variety of art experiences and try to incorporate learning in each lesson—learning about art and the artistic process.

- Consider physical restrictions. For examples, seniors with arthritis may need lightweight tools with large handles. Those with poor eyesight will appreciate large print and projects that are adjusted for their needs.
- Keep your “instruction” to a minimum. Explain the project step by step, demonstrate techniques if necessary, allow time for questions and discussion, get everyone started and then step back and let the students create. The rule of thumb: Keep it Short—Keep it Simple—Keep it Immediate.
- You can experiment with using media (e.g. power points) to introduce a lesson but you may find difficulties arise if the students are not comfortable with the technology. Also consider some participants may have vision issues which make it difficult to follow images on a screen or TV from a distance.
- Circulate around to answer questions and give assistance where needed or requested (e.g. answering questions, replenishing supplies).
- Be encouraging without micromanaging or offering too many suggestions.
- Understand that the art the participants create will find its own cohesiveness and the artistic process just needs to flow—it can’t be forced.

At the Conclusion of the Art Lesson/Project

- When the participants have finished creating their art, ask them to verbally share with the class: their creative process (what they were thinking while creating the art, choices they made, etc.), the message (if any) they wanted their art to convey, and their personal feelings about creating this art. This is a special part of the artistic process and also promotes wonderful interaction and a sense of community.
- You may want to provide refreshments for the group at this time, as refreshments not only promote socializing, but help to maintain energy. Select simple refreshments such as cookies or brownies (or snacks suitable for diabetics) with juice and coffee. It is best not offer refreshments while the art is being created to keep the artwork clean.
- If necessary allow the art to dry, harden, etc. overnight before handling it further. Otherwise, if the participant is finished with the art and there will be no display, send the art home with the “artist” at the conclusion of the class.

- If a participant has not finished with his/her work at the conclusion of the session, the work can be taken home to be finished on the “artist’s” own time. Encourage the participant to bring his/her finished work to the next session so it can be shared with the group at that time.
- To encourage the participants to continue to create art on their own time, you can send a “box” of supplies home with interested participants as an extension of the lesson just concluded.

Other Options for the Artwork Created:

- You can mount some pieces of art onto a white or black backing board (or cardstock) slightly larger than the art to give a finished look.
- If the participants are willing to have the art displayed, ask the participants to use index cards to write their names and ages (optional) on the cards as well as brief “artist statements”. Gently attach the index cards to the back of the art using masking tape.
- To prepare for the display, type up the artist statements and mount them on black backing to include with the art display. (For 3-dimensional art, include index card near the work.)
- Suggestions for places to display the art (rotated in and out each month) could include hallways, reception areas, the resident post office, elevators, dining room, etc. If there is no suitable place to display the art, consider purchasing a portable, two-sided display board.
- Consider having an “artist” reception when the artwork is unveiled.
- At the conclusion of the display, return the art to the students.
- Consider reproducing the art that has been created to make postcards or greeting cards, stationery, etc. This can be done individually, with the help of the facility staff.