The Stages of
DRAWING DEVELOPMENT
Reference Guide

What’s Inside

1 Drawing Development Timeline

2 PDF for each drawing stage outlining:
   • Common characteristics
   • An example drawing
   • Classroom tips
   • A big takeaway

“For children, art is a way of learning and not something to be learned.”

- VIKTOR LOWENFELD
**DRAWING STAGES**

1. **Scribbling Stage**  
   (2-4 years)  
   random scribbling,  
   purposeful scribbling,  
   naming scribbles

2. **Preschematic Stage**  
   (4-7 years)  
   attempt at representation,  
   tadpole man, floating  
   objects, drawings tell stories,  
   nonrealistic colors

3. **Schematic Stage**  
   (7-9 years)  
   use symbols for people and objects,  
   development of baseline, emphasize  
   important features, show multiple  
   perspectives at once, x-ray drawings

4. **Pre-Realism (Gang) Stage**  
   (9-11 years)  
   lose rigid symbols, detailed  
   drawings, sky down to horizon,  
   attempt to show depth

5. **Pseudo-Naturalistic**  
   (Realism) Stage  
   (11-13 years)  
   human figure more natural,  
   attempt at perspective,  
   interest in cartooning,  
   awareness of depth

6. **Decision-Making Stage**  
   (14+ years)  
   mastery of skills and media,  
   use perspective correctly,  
   make purposeful choices to  
   add emphasis, feeling, and  
   personal interpretation

**without instruction, students stop here**
SCRIBBLING STAGE
2-4 YEARS

CHARACTERISTICS
- random scribbling
- purposeful scribbling
- naming scribbles

In the Classroom
- Let students experiment.
- Scribbling with an adult nearby is rewarding. Sit near working students.
- As students start to name scribbles, listen, but do not correct or judge.
- Provide materials that are easy to control. Ideas include:
  - thick tempera
  - unwrapped crayons
  - washable markers
  - chalk
- Refrain from asking students to copy shapes or draw specific items. Trying to copy is frustrating and confusing to students.

THE BIG Takeaway
Scribbling is fun!
Let them scribble!
PRESCHEMATIC STAGE
4-7 YEARS

• Students love to talk about their work. Have students share with partners or in small groups, rather than one large group. This way, all students have a chance to share.

• Craft lessons around their everyday lives with prompts like:
  - The first snowfall
  - Imagine you’re somewhere new and exciting
  - I went to the store

• Develop observation skills by pointing things out: fall colors, interesting rocks, details on clothing, etc.

• Don’t force or encourage students to draw above the stage they’re in.

In the Classroom

CHARACTERISTICS

• attempt at representation and recognizable forms
• tadpole man
• floating objects
• drawings tell stories
• non-realistic colors

THE BIG Takeaway

Help students explore personal experiences.
SCHEMATIC STAGE
7-9 YEARS

• Students are rapidly gaining perceptual skills. Help them discover the details in the world around them. Teach them to look carefully and observe.

• Don’t worry too much about the baseline, skyline, or corner sun. Including those features makes perfect sense to students. They are not developmentally ready to draw differently.

• Resist correcting students’ drawings; this can inhibit the development of their individual styles.

• Relate projects to everyday life.

THE BIG Takeaway

Embrace the corner sun. It will pass.
PRE-REALISM STAGE
9-11 YEARS

- Students at this age are frustrated by the fact that they can perceive things that they cannot yet transfer to drawing. Demonstrations are helpful.
- Students are obsessed with realism.
- Instead of trying to redirect them, give them opportunities to practice realistic drawing.

CHARACTERISTICS
- loss of rigid symbols
- detailed drawings
- still somewhat symbolic
- sky down to horizon
- attempt at depth
- can’t grasp shading
- cares what peers think

In the Classroom
- Be mindful not to force students to share their work in a group setting.
- Students understand that art is expressive. Encourage them to express themselves in their work.
- Students can’t yet grasp perspective. Wait to teach it!

THE BIG Takeaway
It’s a mental crisis, people. MENTAL. CRISIS.
PSEUDO-NATURALISTIC STAGE
11-13 YEARS

In the Classroom

• Students continue to feel frustrated and are apprehensive to share their work.

• Support students’ individuality and allow them to explore emotions in art. Projects about student identity and interests will be winners.

• As students are transitioning from child to adult, self-portraits can be stressful and difficult.

• You can try and teach perspective now, although not all students will be ready.

• Students will be eager to explore new, challenging materials.

CHARACTERISTICS

• attempt at perspective
• human figure more natural
• interest in cartooning
• awareness of depth
• attempt at perspective
• critical of their own work

THE BIG Takeaway
Center class on student identity and interests.
DECISION-MAKING STAGE
14+ YEARS

In the Classroom

• Remember, most students will not be working artists. Show how they can use art in their everyday lives.
• Integrate art history, design thinking, criticism, and analysis into studio classes to give a well-rounded experience.
• Allow student voice to shine through their work. When possible, allow students choice in projects, media, and timelines.
• Painting can be especially worthwhile for high school students.
• Be aware that kinesthetic learners will draw differently than visual learners.

CHARACTERISTICS

• choose to master skills and media
• can use perspective correctly
• make purposeful choices to add emphasis, feeling, and personal interpretation to artwork

THE BIG Takeaway

Art class isn’t only for talented students.
"We know that learning to draw, like learning to read, is not dependent on something called "talent," and that, given proper instruction, every person is able to learn the skill."

- BETTY EDWARDS

REFERENCES

