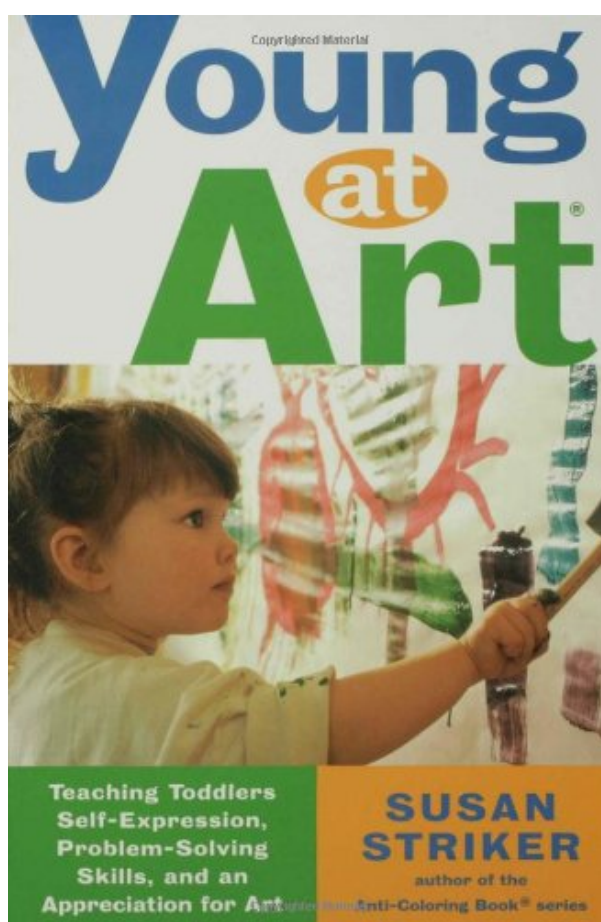
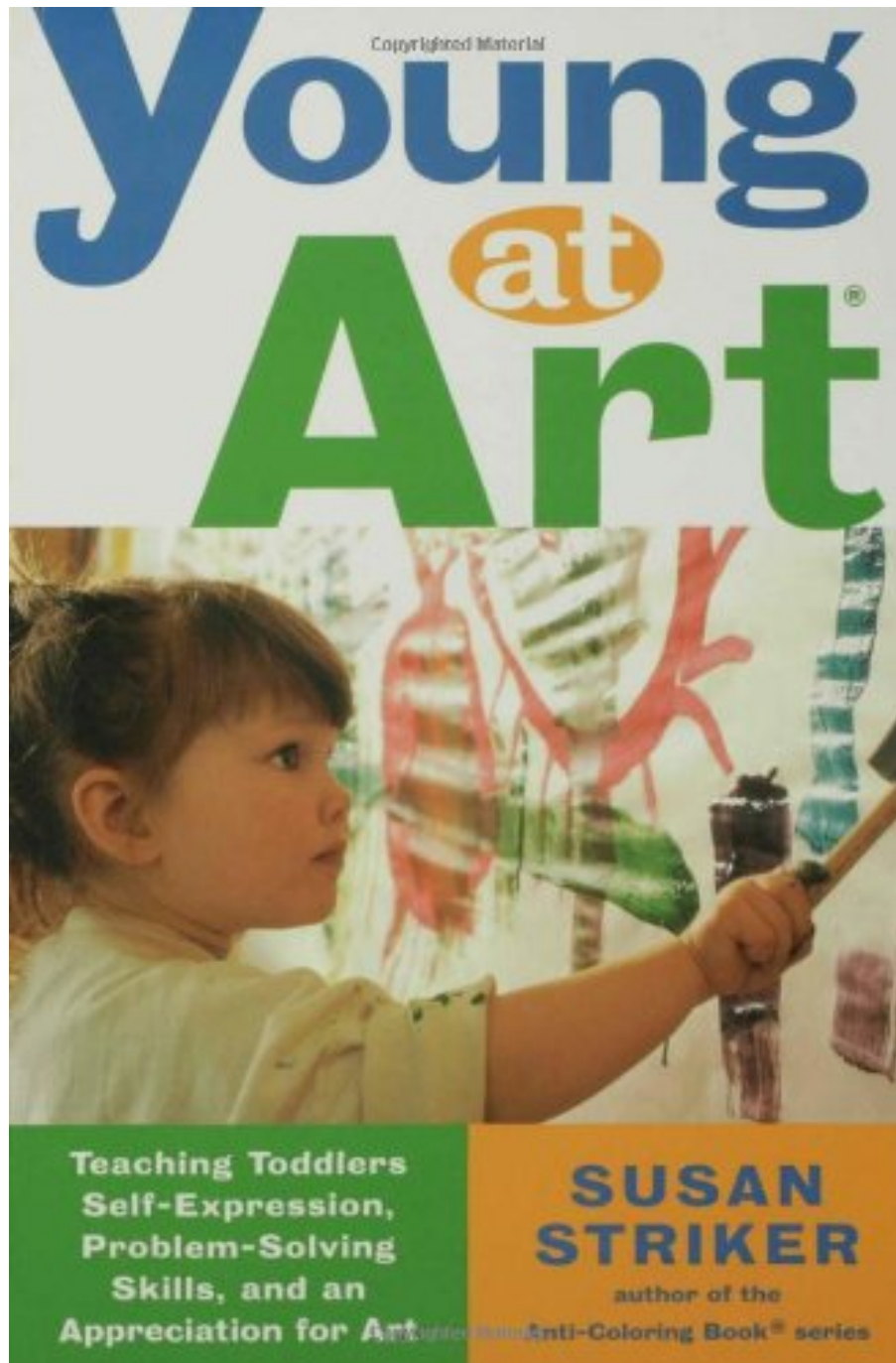


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SELF-EXPRESSION, PROBLEM-SOLVING
SKILLS, AND AN APPRECIATION FOR ART
BY SUSAN STRIKER**



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Amazon.com Review

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Lisa Powell Williams, Moline P.L., IL
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About the Author

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From the creator of the bestselling Anti-Coloring Book series with more than 600,000 copies sold, a new parenting guide to encouraging creativity in preschool-age children

Young at Art is the first and only comprehensive book for the general audience about the nature, value and impact of art on very young children. Directed towards parents and educators of one to five year olds, Susan Striker explains why children's art is not a frill, but the very foundation upon which all later fundamental skills are built. She drives home the idea that encouraging children's artistic growth will have beneficial effects on all other aspects of their emotional and intellectual development.

At the core of this practical guide is the understanding that art is an important tool in teaching young children crucial concepts related to self-expression, reading and writing. As opposed to more structured exercises, such as coloring on dittos and underlining pictures in workbooks, Striker stresses that scribbling and free drawing experiments are the most important art activities a child can engage in; they better prepare children to read independently as they grow.

Young at Art provides descriptions for age-appropriate art activities, tips for carrying them out safely, and helps parents recognize what a child's art work should look like at each stage of development. With Young at Art, parents will develop realistic expectations of their children's work, learn how to speak to their children about their art, and facilitate skills well beyond their creativity that will benefit children.

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148 of 153 people found the following review helpful.

Excellent resource if you can get past the preachy tone

By GadgetChick

I got this book because I am very interested in developing my toddler's artistic and creative abilities. There are some great things about this book. And some very bad things.

The good:

- The descriptions of projects in the book are fantastic. The projects are innovative and really designed to allow children to freely express themselves. The projects made me think about art, and even about the world, differently and helped me to understand how the world looks from a toddler's perspective.
- There is a lot of detail given about why a particular activity is important, or why it should be done a certain way. In general, there's a lot of detail in the book, and the author does a great job suggesting variations on projects or ways to look at materials in a different way.
- The author clearly delineates which supplies you should use and how you should use them. The book is more or less a comprehensive curriculum for preschool art - there are suggested books to read, songs, recommendations on where to get art materials, etc. This would be an awesome resource for a homeschooling family, or for a preschool teacher looking to break away from the traditional way of looking at and teaching art.

Okay. That's what's good about the book. And believe me, there's a lot that's good. However. What's bad about the book would probably turn a lot of people off, and away from using the excellent activities in the book with their child. The bad:

- The author's tone is extremely judgmental, holier-than-thou, snarky, etc. It gets extraordinarily tiresome after the first few pages. The laundry list of things you should NEVER EVER EVER do is miles long and goes on for page after page after page. Let me sum some of them up for you - basically, everything you have ever done with your child in regards to art is wrong and everything they've done in daycare, preschool, with their grandparents, at the babysitter's, etc. is also wrong and has almost certainly irreparably damaged their fragile self-esteem, their creativity, and their budding artistic talent. Having kids make "holiday themed" art is wrong. Telling a child a picture is pretty is wrong. Giving kids more than one color of crayon at a time is wrong. Speaking sharply when a child draws on your wall, table, priceless heirloom Sargent portrait, etc. is wrong - you should speak calmly and redirect the child to draw on some paper without telling them drawing on the wall is wrong because hey, the kid was just trying to express him/herself. Altering your child's artwork in any way is wrong. Throwing even a single piece of artwork out is wrong and you are an insensitive parent if you do that. Putting kids' art on the refrigerator is wrong; you should take it to a frame shop and get it framed. Thinking you know what art is or what's best for your child is wrong; in fact, the author states that the more parents think they know about art, the more likely they are to "damage" their child by doing the wrong thing. The "wrong thing" is anything that the author didn't tell you to do. Oh, and never, ever give your child a coloring book or draw on a piece of paper with them or the Holy Gods of Art (and apparently the author thinks she is one) will smite you, with great vengeance and furious anger.

Exhausted yet? I could go on with the ways the author thinks parents permanently cripple their children's creativity by doing things people have done for decades - the selection above is from the first 20 pages of the book, before the author's even talked about any projects. Unfortunately, the scolding and proselytizing doesn't stop. Throughout the book the author takes any and every opportunity to point out to you what a crappy parent you are because you do X which is not the way the author would do it. It really, REALLY gets old.

- There's not a lot of backup provided for any of the author's claims. She's taught elementary school art for 25 years. She's not a child psychologist, a developmental specialist, a physical therapist, a special educator, a Ph.D. in education, or someone with an advanced degree in fine art. She apparently has done no studies or academic research on childhood art instruction, or at least she doesn't cite it in this book if she has. Yet she makes claims that really only have credence if they're provided by someone who has some kind of credential or who has data from a controlled study. Some of the claims are so outrageous, they are just begging for some kind of citation or backing evidence from some kind of expert source. She doesn't provide any of that. In the back of the book she thanks a few people who seem to have educational credentials but the majority of supporting cites in the text are unrelated to the counterintuitive and incredible-sounding "facts" she presents as the indisputable, gospel truth.

- The author does an awful lot of inappropriate projecting, claiming that kids feel this way or that way when X happens after they make art. Maybe she felt insulted when someone referred to her art as "pretty," or her kid was overly sensitive to being told not to color on the wall. But that doesn't mean all kids are that way and claiming that it's a simple equation of "you do X, and therefore your child's confidence and self-worth is destroyed" is both inappropriate and irresponsible. I am a little unsure how a parent drawing with a 2-year-old, who does not fully understand that other people exist as separate entities from him, will kill his creativity and artistic confidence at a young age. The two-year-old is not really aware that other people even have feelings, and is certainly not capable of seeing a parent making a line on a piece of paper as a negative value judgment about their own work. There's a lot the author claims that doesn't jive with contemporary research about how a child's self-concept or their relationships with others develop.

It's really tough to give this book the recommendation it probably deserves, because there's no way the average parent is going to read this and not either a. roll their eyes so much that they stick that way in their head eventually or b. feel terribly guilty about all the ways that they've doomed their child to life as a corporate accountants payable clerk instead of encouraging them to be the next Picasso. I think if you can read the book from the perspective of "I want to encourage my child to make art, and I'm not really sure how" and read the project descriptions, and skip all the holier-than-thou preaching, it is a great book and a wonderful resource for any parent. Let's face it, just by reading something like this, you are obviously a caring and involved parent. Having your kid carve a Jack O' Lantern on Halloween isn't going to permanently warp their creativity and their sense of self-worth, despite what this author says. You know that, and I know that. So take what's good from this and take the rest with an enormous grain of salt. Some amazing artists out there started out making "hand turkeys" at Thanksgiving and using the whole box of 64 crayons. A child's creativity and sense of self-worth are a whole lot more resilient than this author seems to think.

A book that I've found more helpful, which has the same themes about valuing the process of making the art over the product of the process is "First Art" by Maryann Kohl. The philosophies of Striker and Kohl are very similar but Kohl's book is a lot less preachy, and has the advantage of being VERY user-friendly (easy to read, supplies for projects clearly outlined, much less wordy, more focused on enabling parents to get their kids involved in art projects and less concerned with long-winded philosophizing, etc.), a lot more so than this book. All in all, I'm glad I read this but I think I'm going to use "First Art" a lot more on a day-to-day basis.

27 of 29 people found the following review helpful.

Enlightening.

By A Customer

I wish I had had this book when my child was two. It guides the reader through the mysterious world of children's art. Basically, Striker explains that preschool children should not be "taught" art; rather, they should be allowed to experiment avidly with art materials. When given the opportunity, children use art materials to express themselves and pass through stages of mark-making that are vital to later reading and writing skills. My only complaint about this book is that Striker makes such a strong case against interfering with the natural learning process by, for example, suggesting imagery or otherwise rushing a child into the next stage of development, that it is guilt-inspiring for those of us who made some of these mistakes in the past. However, she gives the reader many concrete suggestions for appropriate art activities so that we can make up for lost time. They include the five basic art techniques: painting, drawing, printmaking, sculpture, and collage. The author explains how these mediums can be presented so as to promote the child's own discovery process. This is a very valuable book for parents, care takers, and educators.

21 of 22 people found the following review helpful.

Possibly the most important parenting book I've come across

By smilla

If you're reading reviews of this book, you're probably a parent who is interested in ways to foster your child's creative development. This book has been a revelation for me, and I would highly recommend it to fellow parents of toddlers. For those of us with little to no art education, this book is a complete resource for guiding young children through their early years with the appropriate art materials and encouragement. Covering drawing, painting, sculpture and collage, the author explains the importance of free experimentation with the media, and cautions parents against interfering with the creative process in ways that many of us may mistakenly have considered "helpful". I agree with another reviewer, who states that this information may cause pangs of guilt in those of us who have made mistakes in this area. However, the author indicates that her sequencing of art activities that build on previous experiences can be started later in toddlerhood and still be effective.

I have started to weave many of the ideas from the book into our daily lives, e.g., greater availability/visibility of art materials, starting simply with black and white to focus on the drawing/painting process, encouragement with avoidance of judgemental commentary, and even borrowing and reading library books that support the concept at hand (be it color, or shape). After a couple of weeks, I have already noticed that my 2.5 year old twin boys are more interesting in working with the materials - we have a huge and growing pile of original artwork! Also, I feel much more confident as a parent in this area since I am working with the advice of a well-known art educator. Prior to this, I was getting ideas from "busy books", that mostly covered crafts that would be largely done by me and be of little benefit to my children in any way.

Also, in case this helps anybody who uses this books and seeks out art materials online, I had the best success with ClassroomDirect.com (I am not affiliated with them in any way!)

See all 21 customer reviews...

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