



Kansas State University
Agricultural Experiment Station and
Cooperative Extension Service

Fact Sheet

This lesson examines the development of children's art from the scribbling of a toddler to the more elaborate work of the grade-schooler. Children's drawing progresses developmentally. The expressive gestures of the toddler, from the moment they can be recorded by a crayon or pencil, gradually evolve into a set of consistent symbols or basic patterns. This development occurs in the context of play; it is not taught. This art is much like a window into the child's world. It plays an important role in children's overall mental development. The resource will also examine the role of parents and other care givers in nurturing creative expression in drawing.

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AT THE **HEART** OF THEIR ART

*Understanding children
through what they create*

Every child is born an artist. Activities such as drawing, painting, and sculpting are a part of human nature, and every healthy human being experiences the urge to create and to communicate through their creations.

The act of creation is most powerful when it is valued as a form of playful self-expression. Creativity declines when linked to approval. As long as children create art for enjoyment's sake, their art sparkles with energy, color, and personality. When they create for approval, their art grows dull and unimaginative. Child art is important, although it is not realistic.

This publication will introduce you to developmental changes in children's art and drawing. It is a much-abbreviated version of "Art Awareness," a PLUS Program in the "Basic Parenting" set of resources. Contact your county extension family and consumer sciences agent for more information about the program. You can also learn more by visiting our Web site at: <http://www.ksu.edu/wwparent/programs/art/>. This site will include full-color versions of the art in this handout.

Child art changes according to a developmental timetable. It continually evolves as the child's intellectual and motor skills expand. The following list summarizes these changes between the ages of 2 and 8.

About 2 years of age children begin to scribble.

Scribbles are the first purposeful marks left by children. They are the building blocks of children's art. At first glance, scribbles may seem nothing more than tangled spaghetti. Most adults view such work as nothing special. Few parents save their children's scribbles. Nevertheless, this creation has great significance. The child shows increasing motor control in the use of the crayon. Although spontaneous, they reveal the child's capacity to form an intention and to follow through with action. When children scribble, they are showing an awareness of figure and ground. This means the child is aware of the surface and what is written on it.



Scribbles: Tara—1 yr., 11 mos.



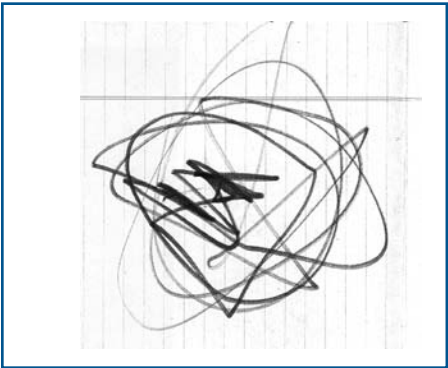
Scribbles: Colin—2 yrs.

By the age of 3, children draw shapes.

Scribbles evolve into emerging shapes. With increasing control and coordination, children make their first shapes. At first, these shapes emerge from scribbles. Then there is a moment when children lift the crayon from the paper and then deliberately draw a distinct shape. They may decorate this shape with scribbles. A parent may only be able to see the shape buried behind the rest of the drawing. Circles and crosses are likely to emerge first. Rectangles arrive next, followed by triangles.



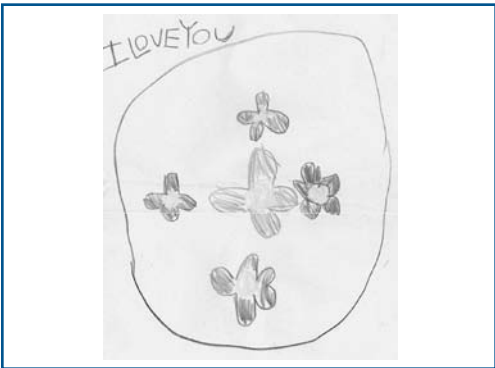
Emerging shapes: Tucker—3 yrs.



Emerging shapes: Bill—2 yrs.

Between 3 and 5 years, children draw mandalas.

The period of 3 to 5 years reveals tremendous gains in artistic ability. Soon after drawing embedded and distinct shapes, children will draw their first mandalas. Mandalas are two or more shapes with a common center. Mandala is a Sanskrit word that means “magic circle.” Two circles, one inside the other, are a mandala. So is a rectangle with a cross through the center. Humans have created mandalas from the beginning: They have been carved upon stones in the jungle, etched on the walls in prehistoric caves, and painted on the facades of elaborate temples. They are among the oldest magical and religious symbols throughout our history. Yet they are drawn spontaneously by a 3-year-old clutching a fat crayon. Children draw mandalas entirely on their own, without coaching of any kind. All they need is a drawing tool and a surface.



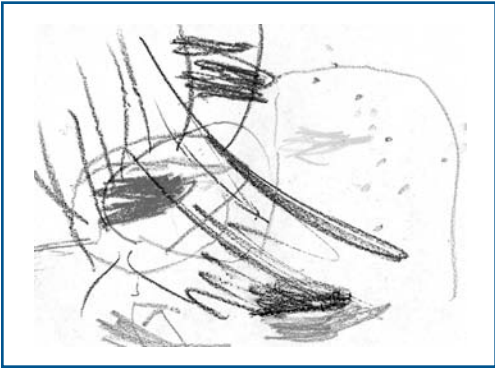
Mandala: Sarah—5 yrs.



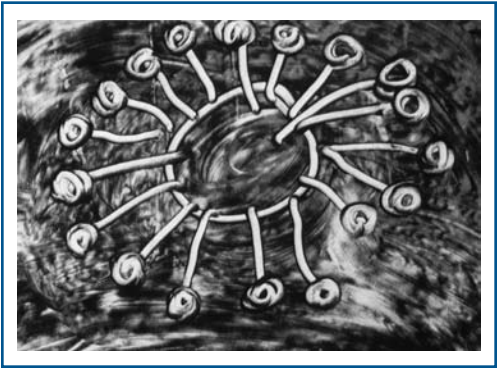
Mandala: Sarah—5 yrs.

Between 3 and 5 years, children draw suns and radials.

Close after the appearance of mandalas, children begin to draw suns and radials. Suns begin as circular shapes crossed with lines. The center markings soon disappear, and the lines cross only the outside of the shape. Radials are made up of a series of lines that spray out from a point. These two new features show that children are experimenting with their rapidly growing control.



Suns: Sarah—3 yrs.



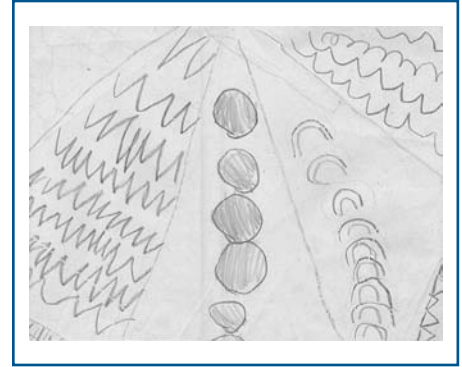
Suns: Unknown—4 yrs.¹
¹ Taken from Kellogg (1967), p. 54.

Between 3 and 5 years, children draw aggregates.

Aggregates are three or more shapes integrated as a unit. A recognizable, personal style begins to appear. Parents who are familiar with their child's work can probably pick it out in a showcase of many children's art. Aggregates constitute the bulk of child art between ages 3 and 5. They are not simply a hodgepodge of forms. Each reveals a child's preference for balance and symmetry. Children perceive and remember balanced line formations more easily than other formations.



Aggregates: Sarah—3 yrs.



Aggregates: Sarah—5 yrs.

Between 4 and 5 years, children draw people.

Mandalas and suns evolve into human forms. The first drawings of people seem rather inhuman. Rays of the sun become arms, legs, and hair. Before the child reaches age 6, most drawings of humans are made to fit into an implied circle or one of its variations. The circle represents the trunk and head, but the face predominates. Eyes are especially important. At this stage, children are not trying to draw a human likeness. Their first person is a representation drawn in a way that looks right and is pleasing to them.



Person: Bill—4 yrs.



Person: Hunter—5 yrs.

Between 4 and 6 years, children draw pictures.

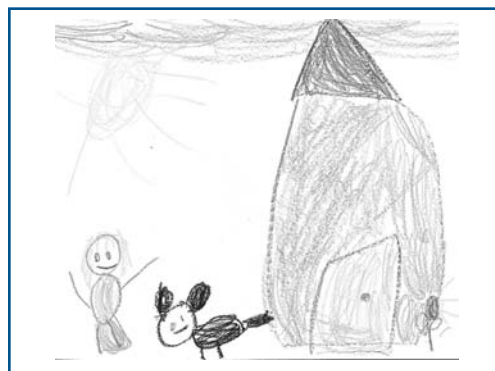
Between the ages of 4 and 5, most children arrive at the early pictorial stage in the development of their art. Their focus is on individual objects. Besides people, children begin to create animals. Their animals stand up firmly on two legs instead of crouching down on all fours. Trees may look like armless humans. Soon flowers and leaves may be added. A triangle set on a square is called a boat. A rectangle or square perched on two circles is a car or a wagon. Often, the child is simply drawing designs of squares and triangles, not real things. Adults are eager to label them as representations before the child intentionally does so.

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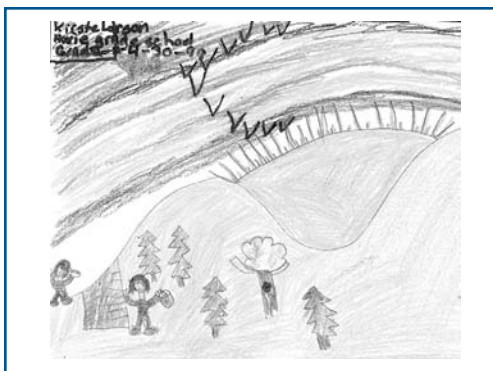
Picture: Colton—5 yrs.



Picture: Kaycee—5 yrs.

Between 5 and 7 years children draw scenes.

During the early pictorial stage, children paint or draw people, houses, and trees primarily as designs. Sometimes, they may purposefully draw such representations. Not until they are 5 or 6 years old do their pictures begin to tell a story. At a more mature picture stage, children create scenes. A house may be painted on a hill, sheltered by a tree. Instead of individual objects, the picture is a collection brought together around a theme. At this stage, the child's art begins to reveal how they perceive and feel about the world around them.



Scene: Kirste—8 yrs.



Scene: Tiffany—9 yrs.

Collecting children's art is a great way to better understand them and how they view the world. Children do not need to be taught how to draw. In fact, we can learn a great deal from the spontaneity, energy, and life they invest in their creations.

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