

Curriculum for Grades 6 to 8

Aligned to Florida’s Next Generation Sunshine State Standards for Visual Art (VA.68)

This curriculum organizes the visual arts program for middle school around five Big Ideas drawn from the state standards. Each Big Idea holds a set of Enduring Understandings, and each Enduring Understanding is taught and assessed through a Signature Project. The projects are studio-based and built to grow in complexity from sixth to eighth grade, so a student meets the same core idea three times, each time with higher stakes and greater independence.

How to read this curriculum

Big Idea. the broad domain of learning (for example, Critical Thinking and Reflection).

Enduring Understanding. the lasting insight students carry beyond the classroom.

Benchmark. the specific, state-defined skill, listed by its official code.

Signature Project. the studio project that teaches and assesses the benchmarks, with a distinct expectation for each grade level.

BIG IDEA 1

Critical Thinking and Reflection

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING 1

Cognition and reflection are required to appreciate, interpret, and create with artistic intent.

BENCHMARK	WHAT STUDENTS LEARN TO DO
VA.68.C.1.1	Apply a range of interests and contextual connections to influence the art-making and self-reflection processes.
VA.68.C.1.2	Use visual evidence and prior knowledge to reflect on multiple interpretations of works of art.
VA.68.C.1.3	Identify qualities of exemplary artworks that are evident and transferable to the judgment of personal work. <i>e.g., personal, cultural, historical</i>

SIGNATURE PROJECT

The Blue Periods of Artists

Targets VA.68.C.1.1

How students get there. Students study the blue periods of renowned painters and discover that some of many artists' most famous works emerged from exactly those seasons. Then, working introspectively, they explore their own blue periods through different techniques and media.

Grade differentiation

Grade 6 Vincent van Gogh

Grade 7 Leonardo da Vinci

Grade 8 Frida Kahlo

SIGNATURE PROJECT

Works of Art Through the Centuries

Targets VA.68.C.1.2

How students get there. Students interpret major works and discuss their meaning using visual evidence. The teacher then reveals the meaning the artist intended, and the class debates whether their reading matched it or was something entirely different.

Grade differentiation

Grade 6 Guernica, Pablo Picasso

Grade 7 The Kiss, Gustav Klimt

Grade 8 Las Meninas, Diego Velázquez

SIGNATURE PROJECT

What Identifies Each Artist?

Targets VA.68.C.1.3

How students get there. Students examine works by several artists and identify what makes each one instantly recognizable through visual elements, media, technique, and personal style.

Grade differentiation

Grade 6 Romero Britto

Grade 7 Joan Miró

Grade 8 Frida Kahlo

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING 2

Assessing our own and others' artistic work, using critical-thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills, is central to artistic growth.

BENCHMARK	WHAT STUDENTS LEARN TO DO
VA.68.C.2.1	Assess personal artwork during production to determine areas of success and needed change for achieving self-directed or specified goals.
VA.68.C.2.2	Evaluate artwork objectively during group assessment to determine areas for refinement.

BENCHMARK	WHAT STUDENTS LEARN TO DO
VA.68.C.2.3	Examine artworks to form ideas and criteria by which to judge/assess and inspire personal works and artistic growth.
VA.68.C.2.4	Use constructive criticism as a purposeful tool for artistic growth.

SIGNATURE PROJECT

Can You Sell Your Art?

Targets VA.68.C.2.1

How students get there. Students create a work and then present it in a sales pitch, describing the process and everything that went into making it, in order to sell it. Art is subjective, but the buyers hold demanding criteria.

Grade differentiation

Grade 6 Pitch to classmates

Grade 7 Pitch to family members

Grade 8 Pitch to a panel assembled by the teacher

SIGNATURE PROJECT

Improve the Technique, Not the Concept

Targets VA.68.C.2.2, C.2.3, C.2.4

How students get there. Working in groups, students evaluate their own work objectively and identify what to improve through changes in technique, media, or the way the piece is presented, all without changing the underlying idea.

Grade differentiation. Grades 6, 7, and 8 follow the same approach, with the level of critique growing more demanding each year.

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING 3

The processes of critiquing works of art lead to development of critical-thinking skills transferable to other contexts.

BENCHMARK	WHAT STUDENTS LEARN TO DO
VA.68.C.3.1	Incorporate accurate art vocabulary during the analysis process to describe the structural elements of art and organizational principles of design.
VA.68.C.3.2	Examine and compare the qualities of artworks and utilitarian objects to determine their aesthetic significance. <i>e.g., comparison, classification, cause and effect, reasoning, hypothesizing, critiquing</i>
VA.68.C.3.3	Use analytical skills to understand meaning and explain connections with other contexts.
VA.68.C.3.4	Compare the uses for artwork and utilitarian objects to determine their significance in society.

SIGNATURE PROJECT

Art or Just an Object?

Targets VA.68.C.3.1 to C.3.4

How students get there. Students build a shared critique vocabulary wall of the elements of art and principles of design, then use it to analyze both museum artworks and everyday designed objects, defending in a structured critique whether each one succeeds and why. The goal is precise language, not just opinion.

Grade differentiation

Grade 6 Critique everyday objects they use daily (a sneaker, a chair) alongside one artwork

Grade 7 Compare an artwork and a utilitarian object that share a theme or material

Grade 8 Lead a full group critique of a peer's work using only accurate art vocabulary, then transfer that same analytical language to a non-art problem

BIG IDEA 2

Skills, Techniques, and Processes

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING 1

The arts are inherently experiential and actively engage learners in the processes of creating, interpreting, and responding to art.

BENCHMARK	WHAT STUDENTS LEARN TO DO
VA.68.S.1.1	Manipulate content, media, techniques, and processes to achieve communication with artistic intent.
VA.68.S.1.2	Use media, technology, and other resources to derive ideas for personal art-making.
VA.68.S.1.3	Use ideas from cultural, historical, and artistic references to create personal responses in personal artwork. <i>e.g., texts, visual media, Internet, museums, Florida history, Holocaust, African American history</i>
VA.68.S.1.4	Use accurate art vocabulary to explain the creative and art-making processes.
VA.68.S.1.5	Explore various subject matter, themes, and historical or cultural events to develop an image that communicates artistic intent.

SIGNATURE PROJECT

One Idea, Five Ways

Targets VA.68.S.1.1 to S.1.5

How students get there. Students choose one personal theme and interpret it across several different media and techniques, drawing, collage, digital, printmaking, sculpture, documenting how each material changes the message and presenting with accurate process vocabulary.

Grade differentiation

Grade 6 One theme in two contrasting media

Grade 7 One theme in three media, drawing on a chosen cultural or historical source

Grade 8 One theme across four or more media, including a technology-based version, with a written reflection on how process shaped meaning

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING 2

Development of skills, techniques, and processes in the arts strengthens our ability to remember, focus on, process, and sequence information.

BENCHMARK	WHAT STUDENTS LEARN TO DO
VA.68.S.2.1	Organize the structural elements of art to achieve artistic goals when producing personal works of art.
VA.68.S.2.2	Create artwork requiring sequentially ordered procedures and specified media to achieve intended results.
VA.68.S.2.3	Use visual-thinking and problem-solving skills in a sketchbook or journal to identify, practice, develop ideas, and resolve challenges in the creative process.

SIGNATURE PROJECT

Order Matters: The Process Piece

Targets VA.68.S.2.1 to S.2.3

How students get there. Students complete an artwork that only works if the steps happen in the right sequence, such as a reduction print or a layered build, keeping a process journal detailed enough to reproduce the result. When a step fails, they troubleshoot rather than start over.

Grade differentiation

Grade 6 A three-step layered piece with a checklist

Grade 7 A five-step process they sequence themselves

Grade 8 A multi-stage piece where they must diagnose and fix a deliberate mistake introduced mid-process

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING 3

Through purposeful practice, artists learn to manage, master, and refine simple, then complex, skills and techniques.

BENCHMARK	WHAT STUDENTS LEARN TO DO
VA.68.S.3.1	Use two-dimensional or three-dimensional art materials and tools to understand the potential and limitations of each.

BENCHMARK	WHAT STUDENTS LEARN TO DO
VA.68.S.3.2	Develop spontaneity and visual unity in artwork through repeated practice and refined craftsmanship.
VA.68.S.3.3	Demonstrate understanding of safety protocols for media, tools, processes, and techniques.
VA.68.S.3.4	Demonstrate respect for copyright laws and intellectual property ownership when creating and producing works of art. <i>e.g., thics, plagiarism, appropriation from the Internet and other sources</i>
VA.68.S.3.5	Apply two-dimensional techniques and media to create or enhance three-dimensional artwork.

SIGNATURE PROJECT

Make It Yours

Targets VA.68.S.3.1 to S.3.5

How students get there. Students run safe studio skill drills to gain real control of their tools, then create an original work inspired by a master without copying it, learning exactly where inspiration ends and infringement begins. Safety routines and a clean studio are part of the grade.

Grade differentiation

Grade 6 Skill drills plus a work in the style of an artist that is clearly their own

Grade 7 A work that transforms a copyrighted image enough to be original, with an explanation of the changes

Grade 8 An original piece plus a short artist statement defending its originality and naming its influences

BIG IDEA 3

Organizational Structure

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING 1

Understanding the organizational structure of an art form provides a foundation for appreciation of artistic works and respect for the creative process.

BENCHMARK	WHAT STUDENTS LEARN TO DO
VA.68.O.1.1	Make connections between the structural elements of art and the organizational principles of design to understand how artwork is unified.
VA.68.O.1.2	Identify the function of structural elements of art and organizational principles of design to create and reflect on artwork.
VA.68.O.1.3	Combine creative and technical knowledge to produce visually strong works of art.

BENCHMARK	WHAT STUDENTS LEARN TO DO
VA.68.O.1.4	Create artworks that demonstrate skilled use of media to convey personal vision.

SIGNATURE PROJECT

Lead the Eye

Targets VA.68.O.1.1 to O.1.4

How students get there. Students design a composition that deliberately directs the viewer's eye using the principles of design (balance, contrast, movement, emphasis), then test it on classmates to confirm it actually works.

Grade differentiation

Grade 6 Use contrast and emphasis to create one clear focal point

Grade 7 Use movement and balance to guide the eye along a set path

Grade 8 Combine four or more principles and prove, with viewer feedback, that the composition works as intended

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING 2

The structural rules and conventions of an art form serve as both a foundation and departure point for creativity.

BENCHMARK	WHAT STUDENTS LEARN TO DO
VA.68.O.2.1	Create new meaning in artworks through shared language, expressive content, and ideation.
VA.68.O.2.2	Investigate the problem-solving qualities of divergent thinking as a source for new visual symbols and images.
VA.68.O.2.3	Create a work of personal art using various media to solve an open-ended artistic problem.
VA.68.O.2.4	Select various media and techniques to communicate personal symbols and ideas through the organization of the structural elements of art.

SIGNATURE PROJECT

Say It Without Words

Targets VA.68.O.2.1 to O.2.4

How students get there. Students design a work that communicates a specific message or emotion using only visual symbols and deliberate media choices, no text allowed, then check whether viewers actually read the intended meaning.

Grade differentiation

Grade 6 Communicate a single emotion

Grade 7 Communicate a short message or story using a symbol system they invent

Grade 8 Design a symbol-based piece for a real purpose (a poster, a warning, a brand) and revise it based on how viewers interpret it

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING 3

Every art form uses its own unique language, verbal and non-verbal, to document and communicate with the world.

BENCHMARK	WHAT STUDENTS LEARN TO DO
VA.68.O.3.1	Select and use the structural elements of art and organizational principles of design to document images in various formats for public audiences. <i>e.g., digital, presentation, artworks, video/motion</i>
VA.68.O.3.2	Discuss the communicative differences between specific two- and three-dimensional works of art.

SIGNATURE PROJECT

Two Languages, One Message

Targets VA.68.O.3.1 to O.3.2

How students get there. Students express the same idea in two different art forms and then discuss what each form can say that the other cannot.

Grade differentiation

Grade 6 The same subject as a drawing and as a collage

Grade 7 The same theme in a two-dimensional and a three-dimensional form

Grade 8 The same concept across two forms plus a written comparison of each form's unique visual language

BIG IDEA 4

Historical and Global Connections

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING 1

Through study in the arts, we learn about and honor others and the worlds in which they live(d).

BENCHMARK	WHAT STUDENTS LEARN TO DO
VA.68.H.1.1	Describe social, ecological, economic, religious, and/or political conditions reflected in works of art.
VA.68.H.1.2	Identify suitable audience behavior needed to view or experience artworks found in school, art exhibits, museums, and/or community cultural venues.
VA.68.H.1.3	Analyze and describe the significance of artwork from a selected group or culture to explain its importance to the population.

BENCHMARK	WHAT STUDENTS LEARN TO DO
VA.68.H.1.4	Explain the significance of personal artwork, noting the connections between the creative process, the artist, and the artist's own history.

SIGNATURE PROJECT

Art as a Window Into a World

Targets VA.68.H.1.1 to H.1.4

How students get there. Students study artworks from cultures and time periods different from their own to read the social, historical, and belief conditions behind them, then create a piece that speaks about their own world and present it in a class gallery with real gallery etiquette.

Grade differentiation

- Grade 6** Analyze one artwork from another culture and present it respectfully
- Grade 7** Compare artworks from two cultures or eras and connect them to their conditions
- Grade 8** Curate a small themed exhibit, write wall labels explaining significance, and host a gallery walk where audience behavior is part of the grade

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING 2

The arts reflect and document cultural trends and historical events, and help explain how new directions in the arts have emerged.

BENCHMARK	WHAT STUDENTS LEARN TO DO
VA.68.H.2.1	Describe how previous cultural trends have led to the development of new art styles.
VA.68.H.2.2	Explain the impact artwork and utilitarian objects have on the human experience.
VA.68.H.2.3	Describe the rationale for creating, collecting, exhibiting, and owning works of art. <i>e.g., private, public, and personal art collections</i>
VA.68.H.2.4	Explain the purpose of public art in the community.

SIGNATURE PROJECT

Public Art With a Purpose

Targets VA.68.H.2.1 to H.2.4

How students get there. Students investigate how public art such as murals, monuments, and installations reflects and shapes a community, then design a proposal for a public artwork that responds to a real local trend or need, arguing why it deserves to be made and preserved.

Grade differentiation

- Grade 6** Analyze a famous public artwork and explain its purpose
- Grade 7** Research how a cultural trend produced a style, then sketch a public piece in response
- Grade 8** Pitch a full public-art proposal (design, location, rationale, audience) as if to a community board

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING 3

Connections among the arts and other disciplines strengthen learning and the ability to transfer knowledge and skills to and from other fields.

BENCHMARK	WHAT STUDENTS LEARN TO DO
VA.68.H.3.1	Discuss how knowledge and skills learned through the art-making and analysis processes are used to solve problems in non-art contexts.
VA.68.H.3.2	Discuss the use of background knowledge and critical-thinking skills, learned in the visual arts, to understand varying concepts, viewpoints, and solutions. <i>e.g., identify facts, ideas, problem-solving skills</i>
VA.68.H.3.3	Create imaginative works to include background knowledge or information from other subjects. <i>e.g., from history, environment, literary works</i>

SIGNATURE PROJECT

Art Meets Everything Else

Targets VA.68.H.3.1 to H.3.3

How students get there. Students create an artwork that draws on another school subject or a personal life experience, showing how observation and knowledge from one field feed creativity in another.

Grade differentiation

- Grade 6** Connect art to one other class, such as symmetry from math or a moment from history
- Grade 7** Build a piece around a concept from another subject and explain the connection
- Grade 8** Create an imaginative work fusing background knowledge, a personal experience, and one academic discipline, with a reflection on how the fields informed each other

BIG IDEA 5

Innovation, Technology, and the Future

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING 1

Creating, interpreting, and responding in the arts stimulate the imagination and encourage innovation and creative risk-taking.

BENCHMARK	WHAT STUDENTS LEARN TO DO
VA.68.F.1.1	Use non-traditional thinking and various techniques to create two-, three-, and/or four-dimensional artworks. <i>e.g., potential to transfer and incorporate technological applications</i>
VA.68.F.1.2	Use creative risk-taking strategies learned from artists' works to incorporate artistic solutions in the creation of new personal artworks.

BENCHMARK	WHAT STUDENTS LEARN TO DO
VA.68.F.1.3	Investigate and describe how technology inspires and affects new applications and adaptations in art.
VA.68.F.1.4	Use technology skills to create an imaginative and unique work of art. <i>e.g., convey depth, scale</i>

SIGNATURE PROJECT

Take the Risk

Targets VA.68.F.1.1 to F.1.4

How students get there. Students study how innovative artists took creative risks, then deliberately break a rule of art to make something new, using at least one technology or non-traditional technique. Failure is allowed and is part of the reflection.

Grade differentiation

Grade 6 Try one non-traditional material or technique

Grade 7 Combine a traditional and a digital method in a single piece

Grade 8 Create an experimental work (multimedia, digital, or time-based) that takes a real creative risk, with a reflection on what did and did not work

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING 2

Careers in and related to the arts significantly and positively impact local and global economies.

BENCHMARK	WHAT STUDENTS LEARN TO DO
VA.68.F.2.1	Investigate career opportunities available in the visual arts to determine requisite skills and qualifications for each field.
VA.68.F.2.2	Identify careers in support industries related to the art-making process, industrial design, digital media, and/or graphic design. <i>e.g., exhibition, sale of art products, technology, entertainment</i>
VA.68.F.2.3	Identify art careers that have a financial impact on local communities.
VA.68.F.2.4	Present research on the works of local artists and designers to understand the significance of art in the community.
VA.68.F.2.5	Create an artist statement to reflect on personal artwork for a portfolio or exhibition.

SIGNATURE PROJECT

The Working Artist

Targets VA.68.F.2.1 to F.2.5

How students get there. Students research real art careers, along with the support industries and local artists and organizations around them, then position themselves inside that world by writing a professional artist statement for their own portfolio.

Grade differentiation

Grade 6 Research and present one art career

Grade 7 Research a local artist or arts organization and the industries that support it

Grade 8 Build a mini-portfolio with an artist statement and a realistic career pathway plan

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING 3

The 21st-century skills necessary for success as citizens, workers, and leaders in a global economy are embedded in the study of the arts.

BENCHMARK	WHAT STUDENTS LEARN TO DO
VA.68.F.3.1	Use technology applications through the art-making process to express community or global concerns.
VA.68.F.3.2	Analyze the procedural and divergent thinking skills developed in visual art to identify a purpose for the communication of art ideas.
VA.68.F.3.3	Collaborate with peers to complete an art task and develop leadership skills. <i>e.g., task: voluntary, assigned; time: long-term group project</i>
VA.68.F.3.4	Follow directions and complete art tasks in a timely manner to show development of 21st-century skills.

SIGNATURE PROJECT

The Studio Team

Targets VA.68.F.3.1 to F.3.4

How students get there. Students work in teams to plan and deliver a shared artwork on a real deadline, dividing roles, using technology tools, and managing their own process the way a professional studio would. Both the finished product and the teamwork are assessed.

Grade differentiation

Grade 6 Collaborate in pairs on a small piece with assigned roles

Grade 7 Work in a small team with a shared deadline and a digital planning tool

Grade 8 Run a full team production (roles, timeline, technology, final client presentation) and self-assess how the team performed

A note on differentiation and access. Every benchmark in the Florida standards also carries Access Points, alternate expectations for students with significant cognitive disabilities. Those are kept in the source standards file and can be folded into any Signature Project on request, so the same project can serve a full, inclusive classroom.