



Wisdom in Watercolor

Nurturing Creative Gifts in Children You Love

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If you have children in your life, there's a good chance there's one (or more) with a heart for art. Whether you're a parent, grandparent, relative or friend, encouraging the creative gifts woven into the kids you love can be a life changing experience--- for them and for you.

As a professional artist today, I'm very thankful to the Lord for surrounding me with loving adults who recognized and nurtured my creative gifts during my childhood. My grandparents invested their time and money in me as a musician. Even though they had a limited income, they generously paid for me to take piano lessons for ten years (seven of which my grandmother drove me to my lesson with Mrs. Pierson, waited in the car during the session, and drove me home afterwards). My parents recognized my artistic bent and allowed me to take watercolor lessons one summer with Jean Richardson. I am so grateful for this and want to encourage you to do likewise!

Although the creative gifts I'm encouraging you to nurture in this article are aimed at art, you can apply the following information to just about any area of giftedness--- music, math, athletics, building things, etc.

Two very wise things you can do to make a difference in the lives of the young artist you know are these: observe and invest. Let me explain. . .



Observing Artistic Gifts

Evaluating a child's giftedness does not always require formal testing because gifts often are expressed with NTN- "no test needed." Here are a few questions to ask yourself as you observe a child's natural "bent" toward art:

How does she choose to spend her time? Art typically isn't a team sport. Solitary behavior involving painting and drawing is a sure sign an artist is in the making. One mom told me her daughter just didn't fit in with all the team sports she tried, but when her daughter discovered painting, it was as though she found her "home."

How does she interact with color? Does she have a flair for selecting and arranging things according to color? I used to spend lots of time playing with sheets of clear, tinted plastic my dad brought home from the newspaper where he worked--- magenta, cyan and yellow. I loved layering them to create new colors and holding them up to the light so they looked like stained glass. That "color play" was a clue of things yet to come.



How does she deal with design? Ever notice her careful manipulation of things like food or clothing? Artistic arrangement of objects ---as varied as peas on a plate to shoes in a closet--- can be an expression of an inner artistic talent. Watch how she arranges things in a creative design.

How does she describe the world around her? While talking about banks and banking one day, a little girl explained to her mom that the monetary system was like a ladder. She went on to elaborately describe this word picture to her astonished mother. How did the little girl come up with this? She was thinking in pictures. That's often a sign of an artist.

How does she choose to spend her money? If she spends her allowance on art supplies---pens, pencils, crayons, etc., (or things she can create with her hands) you may have an artist on your hands. My little girl purse was continually stuffed with markers and crayons. To this day, I love colorful school supplies and Pink Pearl erasers. I've been known to buy purple pens and pencils just because of their color and my purse is *still* stuffed with writing and drawing instruments. Where kids spend their money is a strong indicator of their artistic interests (as it is for adults).

Is her talent being recognized outside of the home? Admit it--- as parents or grandparents we tend to think our child's work is the greatest ever. Sometimes our love for our kids skews our perspective on their talent. That's why recognition for their artistry from an outside source so valuable. I've had several parents ask me to teach art to their children after a teacher at school commented on their artistic ability. One boy joined my art classes after winning a PTA sponsored poster contest. Recognition from the *outside* is often evidence of a gift on the *inside*.

Have you prayed for wisdom to see and nurture the gifts in the kids you love? My daughter once told me, "Mom, art is your thing. It's not *my* thing." She said that after I tried forcing my love for art upon her through an art camp. She was absolutely right. Her "thing" was athletics and math. It's wise to pray for the Lord to give you insight into the lives of children you love so you can nurture the gifts He has given them. . . and not force the ones you like (but they don't) upon them. Pray for wisdom to see the difference.

In her book, *Drawing Closer*, artist Carolyn Blish tells of the time when, as a child, she painted all over the walls of her closet. As she did so, her mom flung open the closet door and gasped at what she saw. Carolyn thought she was in big trouble, but that's when her mom gasped, "*Carolyn! You're an artist!*"

That story warms my soul. Her mom observed and affirmed Blish's gift. By asking the observation questions above, and praying for guidance from the LORD, perhaps you will discover an artist among the kids you love as well.

Observation is key to encouraging young artists, but there's another powerful step you can take to help them grow- *invest* in them.





Investing in Artistic Gifts

There may be a cost involved for you as you invest your time, money and (most of all) encouragement to help your kids grow artistically.

Consider giving the gift of lessons---

Does this child you love really need another toy or item of clothing or video game? Why not give them a series of lessons to encourage their talent instead. This makes a terrific birthday or Christmas present.

Make it clear that you see a gift in them and that you are choosing to invest in their talent. You could even make it a big deal, like taking the child to dinner and saying something like, "Katie, I've noticed that you really love art. I see you drawing whenever you have spare time and I love the painting you made for me last summer. I want to invest in your creative gift by paying for you to take _____ lessons."

Follow up on the lessons by taking time to ...

- ★ Ask her to tell you what she's learning in her lessons.
- ★ Invite her to show you what she's learning (like demonstrating a skill or letting her actually "teach" you how to do it).
- ★ Display her art. There's nothing that dignifies and affirms someone's art work like a frame.

My friend Dot Bonner asked me to paint a watercolor tree for her when I was in elementary school. I can't describe the honor I felt when I visited her house one day and my painting was prominently hanging in a beautiful frame in her entry.

With the shaky nature of financial investing these days, it's nice to know that one wise investment that keeps giving and giving is the kind we can make in the artistic nurturing of a young artist. It's time, money and energy well spent when those deposits are made.

And, who knows? The Lord may call forth those gifts to be used in His service. I've seen that happen in my life and hope you will see the gifts inside the children you love used to God's glory as well. As a result of your wise observations and investments, perhaps the children you long to nurture will flourish, then pass on their love for art (and your legacy of investing in the gifts and talents of others) to future generations of artists as well.



Debbie Hannah Skinner is a follower of Christ who is also an artist, national speaker, and writer. Her colorful "paint talks" combine biblical teaching with a watercolor painting that comes to life on stage, inspiring women to strengthen and soothe their souls by savoring Scripture. She hopes you will drop by WisdomInWatercolor.com for a visit!

