Key to the Essential Arts Toolkit
Thinking in Threes

The Hawai‘i Essential Arts Toolkit is a grade level guide designed for use by elementary classroom teachers. Scarcity of instructional time and the pressures of an already crowded curriculum necessitate an approach to the arts as an integral part of elementary classroom learning. Rather than overwhelm K-5 generalist teachers, this guide encourages teachers to think of the arts using simple sets of organizational concepts with three ideas each.

3 Big Ideas
Organization, Communication, Culture

3 Tools for Thinking
Observing, Patterning, Representing

3 Artistic Processes
Create, Perform, Respond

3 Levels of Questions
Describe, Interpret, Evaluate
3 Big Ideas

To effectively link essential arts learning to other classroom instruction, this Essential Arts Toolkit consolidates the Hawai‘i Standards for dance, drama/theatre, music, and visual arts under three overlapping “big ideas”:

1. **How the Arts are Organized** (Elements/Principles of the Arts)

   Students explore how works of art – dances, scenes, songs, or images – are organized. Just as the elements of writing (words, sentences) can be organized into a variety of forms (essays, poems), so are the arts organized by elements and principles.

2. **How the Arts Communicate**

   Students also come to understand that the arts exist for a variety of purposes, or functions. Artists make work to communicate. By studying “How the Arts Communicate,” students build literacy and develop critical thinking, analysis, and interpretive skills.

3. **How the Arts Shape and Reflect Culture**

   The arts also connect people across time and cultures. Through the study of the arts, students gain a greater understanding of their own culture as well as prepare for global citizenship.
3 Tools for Thinking

In designing the Essential Arts Toolkit, Hawai`i artists and educators spent many years thinking deeply about arts education. We researched and read. We wrote and we rewrote. We debated endlessly the roles and value of the arts in schools, asking ourselves: “What do the arts do for children that nothing else does so well?”

One of the texts that moved our thinking forward was Sparks of Genius: The Thirteen Thinking Tools of the World’s Most Creative People, by Robert and Michele Root-Bernstein. The authors explain that a century ago, Francis Galton studied what he called “genius.” He observed that many of his eminent contemporaries tended to visualize things, to think with their bodies, and to transform ideas such as numerical patterns into visual or musical ones.

These tools are not to be taken for distinct forms of inheritable “intelligences.” Rather, tools for thinking are just that: tools. With practice, anyone can learn to use them along with other analytical tools, such as logic, and with communication tools, such as words and equations.

The Root-Bernsteins identified the following thirteen thinking tools: observing, imaging, abstracting, recognizing patterns, forming patterns, analogizing, body thinking, empathizing, dimensional thinking, modeling, playing, transforming and synthesizing. In our professional development work with teachers in Oahu’s Windward District (as part of a U.S. Department of Education Model and Dissemination research grant), we selected three combinations of the Root-Bernsteins’ “tools”: observing, recognizing and forming patterns, and representing – a combination of body thinking, modeling and transforming. We discovered that non-arts teachers quickly understood the power of using these tools in the classroom.

Through observing, students examine details closely, yielding deeper understanding of the subject. Observing not only promotes awareness of details but also increases depth of visualization. Observing well helps students see patterns and relationships in math and text.

Patterning is a tool with two parts. Recognizing patterns is involved with the discovery of nature’s laws and the structure of mathematics, but also the rhymes and rhythms of language, dance, music and the formal intentions of the artist. Pattern forming, whether in music, art, math or dance, almost always begins with combining simple elements in unexpected ways.

Representing involves a range of similar tools: creating metaphors and analogies, expressing ideas bodily, playing characters, and dimensional thinking – the imaginative ability to take a thing mentally from a flat plane into three dimensions. When children play out a story through movements or assume the role of a character, they are using the arts to reenact history or literature.
3 Artistic Processes:

As defined by the 1997 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) Arts Framework

The content that students gain in dance, drama/theatre, music, and visual arts, is learned while practicing three artistic processes: creating, performing, and responding.

1. Creating refers to generating original art. This may include but should not be limited to the expression of each student’s personal ideas through the arts.

In dance, students express their ideas in the form of movement, choreography or improvisation. Through the creative process, students can collaborate with others in shared expression and creation of dance.

In drama, students create through immersion in stories, events, and other subjects. Even when students interpret characters from existing stories or plays, the process is a creative one.

In music, students are encouraged to create new songs and rhythms using instruments and voices to improvise and compose sound stories, rhythmic phrases, and melodic lines.

In visual arts, students use a variety of art materials, personal ideas, and artistic concepts to create original works. Students are encouraged to explore new ways of expressing their ideas and feelings.
2. **Performing/Exhibiting** involves presenting the arts in both formal and informal ways. At the elementary level, teachers are encouraged to focus on small in-class sharing of student work before attempting formal productions.

In **visual arts**, performing refers to students presenting and exhibiting their artwork, sharing their ideas, and intentions.

In the performing arts of **dance**, **drama**, and **music**, performing refers to the presentation of learned work, a process that calls upon the interpretive skills of students. Students progressively develop knowledge, skills, and techniques that allow them to perform with confidence, success, and insight.

3. **Responding** in all four art forms depends on keen observation, description, analysis (or interpretation), and judgment. As part of the responding process, students reflect upon their own work as well as that of others. Teachers introduce students at all grade levels to a rich array of important works of art in dance, drama, music, and the visual arts. Teachers guide students through a series of questions that help them **describe** works of art before advancing to **interpretation** and **evaluation**.
3 Levels of Questions:

1. **Describe** artworks.
   - What do you see or hear?
     What (colors, sounds, shapes, instruments, movements, etc.) can you name?
   - What is missing? What do you not see or hear?
   - Compare this work with another work of art.
     What similarities and differences do you see or hear?
   - What is the title of this work? Who is the artist?

2. **Interpret** artworks:
   - What are the relationships between the objects or characters?
   - What does this remind you of?
   - How does the work make you feel and why?
   - What mood or feeling do you think the artist is trying to convey?
     Describe elements that make you think so.
   - Does the artist have a message to convey? If so, what might it be? If not, why not?
   - What does this work of art tell us about the culture or time period in which it was made?
   - Why do you think the artist selected these elements to work with?
   - What might the artist look like? If the artist were here, what would you say to him/her?

3. **Evaluate** artworks:
   - How well does the title of the work capture the essence/meaning/purpose/idea of the piece? Why or why not? What other title might you give it? And why?
   - What was the most interesting or surprising aspect of the work and what made it so?
   - What are the reasons that other people should or should not experience this work of art?
   - If you were the artist, what would you do differently?
   - Do you like this? (Would you buy it?) Why or why not?

Work of art refers to artwork such as paintings, plays, dances, and symphonies.