

Portrait of a Graduate and the Power of Art

Samantha Nolte-Yupari and Valerie Savage
Advocacy Co-Chairs

New York State Educational Departments' recent (August 2025) release of the *Portrait of a Graduate* initiative considers six interconnected attributes of a graduate of NYS school systems. A successful graduate of NYS schools will thus be an Academically Prepared, Creative Innovator, Critical Thinker, who is an Effective Communicator, a Global Citizen, and a Reflective and Future Focused individual. How many content areas can argue that the learning they present can contribute to all six attributes? Maybe some, maybe all. But in Art Education, we can *definitively* say that quality art education contributes to all six attributes outlined in *Portrait of a Graduate*. In this article we will discuss how the NYS Visual Arts Standards contribute to each of these six attributes and then provide some additional explanations that you can use in meetings, professional development sessions, and during your classroom observations this year to proactively advocate to your administrators how art education meets *Portrait of a Graduate* goals.

Portrait of a Graduate as Seen through Visual Art Education

From the *Portrait of a Graduate* Diagram

Academically Prepared: *Demonstrates a strong foundation in the NYS learning standards and is equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve success in college, careers, civic engagement, service, and life.*

As an **academically prepared** art student, young artists engaged with art education learn the conventions of various visual art forms, to *create* and *present* expressive works from their own perspective, *respond* to artworks' meaning, and *connect* their own ideas and work to broader cultural contexts. These categories: Create, Present, Respond, and Connect, are the Anchor categories of the 11 NYS Visual Arts Standards and provide a connection point for not only a student moving on to continued study and/or a career in the arts, but the other attributes of a *Portrait of a Graduate*.

NYS Visual Art Standards:

CREATE Enduring Understanding 1.1: Creativity and innovative thinking are essential skills that can be developed.

CREATE Enduring Understanding 1.2: Artists and designers shape artistic investigations, following or breaking with traditions in pursuit of creative artmaking goals.

CREATE Enduring Understanding 2.1: Artists and designers experiment with forms, structures, materials, concepts, media, and artmaking approaches.

CREATE Enduring Understanding 2.2: Artists and designers balance experimentation and freedom with safety and responsibility while developing and creating artwork.

CREATE Enduring Understanding 2.3: People create, respond to, and interact with objects and places in ways that define, shape, enhance, and empower their lives.

CREATE Enduring Understanding 3.1: Artists and designers develop excellence through practice and constructive critique, and reflecting on, revising, and refining work overtime.

PRESENT Enduring Understanding 4.1: Artists, collectors, curators, and other arts professionals consider a variety of criteria when analyzing and selecting objects, artifacts, and artwork for presentation and preservation.

PRESENT Enduring Understanding 5.1: Artists, curators, and other arts professionals engage appropriate methods and resources when preparing artwork for presentation and preservation.

PRESENT Enduring Understanding 6.1: Objects, artifacts, and artworks collected, preserved, or presented communicate meaning and function as a record of social, cultural, and political experiences; resulting in the cultivating of appreciation and understanding.

RESPOND Enduring Understanding 7.1: Individual aesthetic and empathetic awareness developed through engagement with art can lead to understanding and appreciation of self, others, and the world.

RESPOND Enduring Understanding 7.2: Visual imagery influences understanding of and responses to the world.

RESPOND Enduring Understanding 8.1: People gain insight into meanings of artwork by engaging in a process of art criticism.

RESPOND Enduring Understanding 9.1: People evaluate art, based on various criteria.

CONNECT Enduring Understanding 10.1: Through artmaking people make meaning by investigating and developing awareness of perceptions, knowledge, and experiences.

CONNECT Enduring Understanding 11.1: Works of art and design embody and influence the needs, desires, beliefs, traditions, and values of people within a culture.

CONNECT Enduring Understanding 11.2: Generating and

NYSED PORTRAIT OF A GRADUATE AS SEEN IN VISUAL ARTS EDUCATION



New York State Visual Arts Standards:
Create, Present, Respond, Connect

Studio Habits of Mind:
Develop Craft, Engage and Persist, Envision, Express, Observe, Reflect, Stretch and Explore, Understanding Art Worlds

Adapted from NYSED Portrait of a Graduate, additional information available on the NYSED website

solving artistic problems prepares people to contribute to innovative solutions within a society or culture.

From the *Portrait of a Graduate* Diagram

Creative Innovator: *Utilizes imagination, curiosity, and flexible thinking to solve problems creatively, and develop new ideas and products, while adapting to evolving circumstances and challenges.*

The foundation of a **creative innovator** is the ability to use imagination, curiosity, and flexible thinking. At its heart, art education prioritizes the development of imagination, which hallmark literacy and arts educator Maxine Greene (2000) noted is the ability to imagine “elsewhere and otherwise.” The playful, and sometimes labeled “silly,” imaginative play we often see in young children, in mature form, is the ability to take other’s perspectives, feel empathy, think outside the box, and generate ideas that few have ever seen before. In the art studio, every time a young artist must think about how to use a material in a new way, generate ideas and strategies to communicate their artistic ideas to an audience and express their own unique voice, they build the skills of a creative innovator.

NYS Visual Arts Standards:

CREATE Enduring Understanding 1.1: Creativity and innovative thinking are essential skills that can be developed.

CREATE Enduring Understanding 1.2: Artists and designers shape artistic investigations, following or breaking with traditions in pursuit of creative artmaking goals.

CREATE Enduring Understanding 2.1: Artists and designers experiment with forms, structures, materials, concepts, media and artmaking approaches.

RESPOND Enduring Understanding 7.1: Individual aesthetic and empathetic awareness developed through engagement with art can lead to understanding and appreciation of self, others, and the world.

RESPOND Enduring Understanding 7.2: Visual imagery influences understanding of and responses to the world.

CONNECT Enduring Understanding 10.1: Through artmaking people make meaning by investigating and developing awareness of perceptions, knowledge, and experiences.

CONNECT Enduring Understanding 11.2: Generating and solving artistic problems prepares people to contribute to innovative solutions within a society or culture.

From the *Portrait of a Graduate* Diagram

Critical Thinker: *Analyzes information thoughtfully, evaluates evidence critically, and identifies patterns and connections between different pieces of information (across multiple content areas) to address complex issues and navigate the world with insight.*

Similarly in visual art, artists **critically think** when they observe and reflect upon their own and others’ artwork as well as artifacts of visual and material culture. Analyzing for connotation and denotation, cultural implications, and emotional effect and affect means understanding the ways

images and objects carry meaning, emotion, stories, agenda, and positionality. In a visual world, critical consumption of data is essential for meaningful engagement and participation.

NYS Visual Arts Standards:

CREATE Enduring Understanding 2.3: People create, respond to, and interact with objects and places in ways that define, shape, enhance, and empower their lives.

CREATE Enduring Understanding 3.1: Artists and designers develop excellence through practice and constructive critique, and reflecting on, revising, and refining work over time.

PRESENT Enduring Understanding 4.1: Artists, collectors, curators, and other arts professionals consider a variety of criteria when analyzing and selecting objects, artifacts, and artwork for presentation and preservation.

PRESENT Enduring Understanding 6.1: Objects, artifacts, and artworks collected, preserved, or presented communicate meaning and function as a record of social, cultural, and political experiences; resulting in the cultivating and appreciation and understanding.

RESPOND Enduring Understanding 7.1: Individual aesthetic and empathetic awareness developed through engagement with art can lead to understanding and appreciation of self, others, and the world.

RESPOND Enduring Understanding 7.2: Visual imagery influences understanding of and responses to the world.

RESPOND Enduring Understanding 9.1: People evaluate art, based on various criteria.

CONNECT Enduring Understanding 10.1: Through artmaking people make meaning by investigating and developing awareness of perceptions, knowledge, and experiences.

CONNECT Enduring Understanding 11.1: Works of art and design embody and influence the needs, desires, beliefs, traditions, and values of people within a culture.

From the *Portrait of a Graduate* Diagram

Effective Communicator: *Articulates ideas clearly and confidently through speaking, writing, and the use of different types of media for various purposes, while engaging with diverse audiences and actively listening to different perspectives.*

As **effective communicators**, visual artists (and art students) learn to combine visual elements like shape, color, and line, in various ways through various media to communicate their ideas and perspectives to others. In turn, they simultaneously learn to interpret visual communications and data in and from the world. Artists are also adept at transmediating their understanding through written and verbal analyses of artworks, and into artist statements, websites and social media engagement, and gallery and grant calls for artworks. A successful visual artist works in multiple literacy modalities, verbal, written, and visual formats.

NYS Visual Arts Standards:

CREATE Enduring Understanding 1.1: Creativity and

innovative thinking are essential skills that can be developed.

CREATE Enduring Understanding 1.2: Artists and designers shape artistic investigations, following or breaking with traditions in pursuit of creative artmaking goals

CREATE Enduring Understanding 2.1: Artists and designers experiment with forms, structures, materials, concepts, media and artmaking approaches.

CREATE Enduring Understanding 2.3: People create, respond to, and interact with objects and places in ways that define, shape, enhance, and empower their lives.

CREATE Enduring Understanding 3.1: Artists and designers develop excellence through practice and constructive critique, and reflecting on, revising, and refining work overtime.

PRESENT Enduring Understanding 6.1: Objects, artifacts, and artworks collected, preserved, or presented communicate meaning and function as a record of social cultural, and political experiences; resulting in the cultivating of appreciation and understanding.

RESPOND Enduring Understanding 7.1: Individual aesthetic and empathetic awareness developed through engagement with art can lead to understanding and appreciation of self, others, and the world.

RESPOND Enduring Understanding 7.2: Visual imagery influences understanding of and responses to the world.

RESPOND Enduring Understanding 8.1: People gain insight into meanings of artwork by engaging in a process of art criticism.

RESPOND Enduring Understanding 9.1: People evaluate art, based on various criteria.

CONNECT Enduring Understanding 10.1: Through artmaking people make meaning by investigating and developing awareness of perceptions, knowledge, and experiences.

CONNECT Enduring Understanding 11.1: Works of art and design embody and influence the needs, desires, beliefs, traditions, and values of people within a culture.

From the *Portrait of a Graduate* Diagram

Global Citizen: *Acts responsibly and ethically within local, global, and digital communities, employing civic knowledge, skills, and mindsets to promote global sustainability and contribute positively to a culturally diverse, democratic society.*

Engagement in the arts through artmaking and the study of art requires a young artist to be a **global citizen**. All cultures make art, visual communication forms from mark making, symbols, pictographs, and maps are early and fundamental ways to share knowledge and make meaning together. Engaging with visual arts from all cultures leads to the awareness, understanding and appreciation of self, others, and the world providing students with entry points to increased empathy, collaboration, and cooperation.

NYS Standards:

CREATE Enduring Understanding 2.3: People create, respond to, and interact with objects and places in ways that define, shape, enhance, and empower their lives.

CREATE Enduring Understanding 3.1: Artists and designers develop excellence through practice and constructive critique, and reflecting on, revising, and refining work overtime.

PRESENT Enduring Understanding 6.1: Objects, artifacts, and artworks collected, preserved, or presented communicate meaning and function as a record of social cultural, and political experiences; resulting in the cultivating of appreciation and understanding.

RESPOND Enduring Understanding 7.1: Individual aesthetic and empathetic awareness developed through engagement with art can lead to understanding and appreciation of self, others, and the world.

RESPOND Enduring Understanding 7.2: Visual imagery influences understanding of and responses to the world.

CONNECT Enduring Understanding 10.1: Through artmaking people make meaning by investigating and developing awareness of perceptions, knowledge, and experiences.

CONNECT Enduring Understanding 11.1: Works of art and design embody and influence the needs, desires, beliefs, traditions, and values of people within a culture.

CONNECT Enduring Understanding 11.2: Generating and solving artistic problems prepares people to contribute to innovative solutions within a society or culture.

From the *Portrait of a Graduate* Diagram

Reflective and Future Focused: *Engages in self-reflection to identify strengths and areas for growth, sets meaningful goals, uses social awareness to maintain supportive relationships, and demonstrates responsible decision-making that prioritizes social, emotional, and mental well-being.*

Working from an input paradigm that requires students to put learning in practice *right now* (Perkins, 2013), visual arts learning requires the art student to **reflect** on how their artmaking is going and determine next steps to succeed with this particular work and/or moving forward in **future** series or portfolio of work. Artmaking is non-linear process that requires ongoing observation and reflection. Artists determine the strengths of their current work and artmaking processes and then use that information to focus on future tasks of revision, idea development, and art making goals. This allows them to determine their current needs for communication, expression, and support from teachers, peers, and mentors as they create meaningful bodies of artwork.

NYS Visual Arts Standards:

CREATE Enduring Understanding 2.2: Artists and designers balance experimentation and freedom with safety and responsibility while developing and creating artwork.

CREATE Enduring Understanding 2.3: People create, respond to, and interact with objects and places in ways that define, shape, enhance, and empower their lives.

CREATE Enduring Understanding 3.1: Artists and designers develop excellence through practice and constructive critique, and reflecting on, revising, and refining work

overtime.

PRESENT Enduring Understanding 4.1: Artists, collectors, curators, and other arts professionals consider a variety of criteria when analyzing and selecting objects, artifacts, and artwork for presentation and preservation.

PRESENT Enduring Understanding 5.1: Artists, curators, and other arts professionals engage appropriate methods and resources when preparing artwork for presentation and preservation.

PRESENT Enduring Understanding 6.1: Objects, artifacts, and artworks collected, preserved, or presented communicate meaning and function as a record of social cultural, and political experiences; resulting in the cultivating of appreciation and understanding.

RESPOND Enduring Understanding 7.1: Individual aesthetic and empathetic awareness developed through engagement with art can lead to understanding and appreciation of self, others, and the world.

RESPOND Enduring Understanding 8.1: People gain insight into meanings of artwork by engaging in a process of art criticism.

RESPOND Enduring Understanding 9.1: People evaluate art, based on various criteria.

CONNECT Enduring Understanding 10.1: Through artmaking people make meaning by investigating and developing awareness of perceptions, knowledge, and experiences.

CONNECT Enduring Understanding 11.1: Works of art and design embody and influence the needs, desires, beliefs, traditions, and values of people within a culture.

As the *Portrait of a Graduate* becomes a topic of discussion, the power of art becomes apparent. We hope you use this article and the Quick Reference Handout on page 25 (and available on the NYSATA website) to proactively advocate for your art program, and the learning and artmaking of your students.

References

Greene, M. (2000). *Releasing the imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change*. Jossey Bass.

Perkins, D. (2013). Foreword for the first edition. In L. Hetland, E. Winner, S. Veenema, and K. M. Sheridan, K. M. (2007). *Studio thinking: The real benefits of visual arts education (2nd ed.)*, pp. vii-viii, Teachers College Press.