

Creativity



"Some of the most powerful works of art have been produced by older Americans by hands that have engaged in years of hard work, eyes that have witnessed decades of change, and hearts that have felt a lifetime of emotions. Our whole society benefits when older Americans use their talents and experiences to become involved in the arts as creators, teachers, mentors, volunteers and audiences."

-- Hillary Rodham Clinton, from a monograph for the National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies, Americans for the Arts, in 1996.

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OVERVIEW

"Stay young by taking inspiration from the young in spirit who remained creatively active all their lives: Goethe completing Faust at 80; Titian painting masterpieces at 98; Toscanini conducting at 85; Justice Holmes writing Supreme Court decisions at 90; Edison busy in his laboratory at 84; and Benjamin Franklin helping to frame the American Constitution at 80."

-- Author Unknown

It is difficult to separate spirituality and creativity, as both are tied to the notion of self actualization, stepping beyond oneself, transcendence. Creativity is viewed to have universal meaning that extends beyond time and self. Creative activity combines the energies of feelings imagination and thought. Some believe that the approach of one's end of life actually *stimulates* creativity with increased urgency, intensity and energy.

This section on creativity is also quite related to [Activity and Leisure](#). Please refer to that section for additional activities that may bring meaning and

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spirituality into older adult lives.

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT CREATIVITY AND OLDER ADULTS

"Imagination is the highest kite one can fly."

-- Lauren Bacall

The process of creating and one's attitude, the way one approaches the project, may be more important than the actual product or tangible outcome. Studies have shown that creativity may emerge during periods of loneliness and depression. Elizabeth "Grandma" Layton, an older Kansas woman, used line drawing to develop great talent and highly regarded art. As a result of her drawings, she overcame her depression, thus illustrating the ability of creativity to overcome physical or emotional decline or loss.

Benefits of Creativity

There are many benefits to artistic expression. Creativity meets developmental needs and is an essential part of the human experience. Creative expression may accomplish many of the following:

- **Create balance and order**
- **Give a sense of control over the external world**
- **Make something positive out of a loss, bad experience or depression**
- **Maintain an individual's integrity**
- **Resolve conflicts**
- **Make thought and feeling clear**
-- (Ebersole & Hess, 1998)

In a 1991 issue of *Generations* (entirely focused on creativity), several scientists recounted their qualitative observations of the power of creative expression in older adult lives. Berman examined the

importance of personal journal or diary entries as stories of immense worth and creativity. Through in-depth interviews, **Rugh** (p. 28-29), studied Florence Kleinsteiber, a very ordinary Oklahoman, who found "workin' on this art has helped me to bring it all together where I feel more complete...more at peace with myself for things that happened way back years ago." Through the detailed study of Francisco Goya's life and works, Winkler found evidence of moral expression and teaching about the human spirit through the visual arts.

Lehman's research (1953), was a pioneer effort to connect chronological age with creativity in his well known, *Age and Achievement*, which suggested that it peaked at 35 years. This may suggest that creativity is reserved for the young. But we understand today that the typical age curve is an average of hundreds of separate age curves and is based on career age, not a function of chronological age (Simonton, 1991). People differ in the timing of their creative expression.

Interest in the related areas of spirituality and creativity is growing. In the lead article of the October 1999 issue of *The Gerontologist*, "Nature, Spirituality, and Later Life in Literature: An Essay on the Romanticism of Older Writers," Waxman explores the connections among creativity, nature and spirituality. The article focuses on how experiences in nature generate spirituality by examining past and current literary works. Waxman particularly reviews the works of older 20th century writers who call readers to age well by rejecting the "productivity" of aging; reaching, through nature, beyond the social and physical to the metaphysical.

Increased longevity, improved health and a decline in ageism have changed the opportunities for development of creativity in older adults. There are countless examples of quite famous and talented artists who have continued, improved or begun artistic expression late in life. Carl Sandburg, the poet; Pablo Casals, the famed violinist; and Grandma Moses, folk painter, are just a few who have demonstrated these possibilities.

Stages of creativity have been identified

- Preparation - where time and experiences foster creative opportunity
- Frustration – expression and approach are unclear
- Incubation – the idea takes shape
- Illumination – the approach becomes clear
- Elaboration – a plan is developed and built upon

(Ebersole & Hess, 1995)

Some conditions encourage creativity, including:

Aloneness	Being alone allows the person to make contact with the self and be open to new kinds of inspiration.
Inactivity	Periods of time are needed to focus on inner resources and to be removed from the constraints of routine activities.
Daydreaming	Allows exploration of one's fantasy life and venturing into new avenues for growth.
Free thinking	Allows the mind to wander in any direction without restriction and permits the similarities among remote topics or concepts to emerge.
State of readiness catch similarities	One must practice recognizing similarities and resemblances across to perceptual of cognitive domains.

Gullibility	A willingness to suspend judgment allows one to be open to possibilities without treating them as nonsense.
Remembering & replaying past traumatic conflicts	Conflict can be transformed into more stable creative products.
Alertness	A state of awareness that permits the person to grasp the relevance of seemingly insignificant similarities.
Discipline	A devotion to the techniques, logic, and repetition that permit creative ideas to be realized.

Adapted from S. Arieti,
(*Creativity: The Magic Synthesis*, 1976)

Limitations to Creativity

Individual and societal influences may block opportunities for artistic expression. Aging changes, such as arthritis, may limit one's mobility. Economic status can inhibit access to programs or places that offer artistic expression. Geographic distance or terrain may prohibit artistic exposure. Discrimination based on sex, ethnicity and age may block opportunity. Cultural differences and deeply held values may inhibit the exploration of new ways to express oneself.

TYPES OF ARTISTIC OR CREATIVE EXPRESSION

There are many ways to express creativity and many variations within these:

Dance

Rhythms cross all cultures and aspects of life. Many cultures use non-verbal gestures in the patterns of their daily lives, such as Polynesians who use their hands in daily communication. There are numerous ways to use

dance in creative expression.

- Individual expression; tap, ballet or modern dance
- Dance clubs for couples as social occasions
- Dance lessons
- Specialized groups, such as line dancing, square dancing or ballroom dance
- Exercise dance through fitness clubs

Music

Music is universal and familiar in some form to all peoples. Even if one cannot sing or dance well, most can relate to rhythm. One can enjoy music individually and personally or enjoy it publicly in social settings. The many forms of music make it adaptable to everyone.

Studies have proven the therapeutic use of music in exercise, communication and memory improvement for frail and demented persons. Music therapy is an approach where individual programs are prescribed and created by professionals to change behavior. Its positive effects have included:

- Pain reduction
- Exercise
- Self expression, such as writing lyrics
- Teaching
- Self confidence

Music can be enjoyed and expressed creatively in many ways:

- Listening
- Meditating
- Improvising
- Moving to music
- Creative dancing
- Composing
- Learning a song
- Studying music history
- Learning a new instrument
- Building an instrument

- Rhythm patterning
- Relaxing

(Ebersole & Hess, 1998)

In recognition of the potential value of music therapy, Congress has allocated monies through the Older American Act to fund research, training and education in music therapy.

Poetry

Poetry is much like music with rhythmic appeal. Contemporary poetry may not appeal to the current cohort of older adults. They prefer more traditional patterns with rhymes and free verse. Koch (1977) explained how to use poetry with older adults. Matsumoto refined these strategies in 1978. The following are modifications of their strategies to create interest in poetry for older adults:

- Translate the poetry for those who have a different primary language
- Recite poetry individually and in groups
- Memorize favorite poems
- React and discuss poetry
- Attend and listen to public presentations
- Create a group poem
- Illustrate a poem
- Set a poem to music, a favorite song
- Focus on particular type of poetry such as contemporary, children's poetry or specific works of a poet
- Make a poetry notebook
- Create humorous limerick or poetry for special occasion, etc.
- Analyze a poem
- Rewrite an existing poem
- Write a new poem about a particularly favorite subject
- Use a cultural focus for a poem

Theater

The theater is a wonderful forum for artistic expression. In performing before others especially with older adults, an atmosphere of trust is needed with structure, acceptance, non-judgmental surroundings and rules.

Older adults have been used in the theater in many capacities:

- Teachers
- Mentors, Patrons
- Students
- Volunteers

There are many ways to express one's self creatively in the theater.

- Storytelling/ Oral Histories
- Dance
- Painting/staging
- Writing
- Singing
- Costuming

There are many theater groups focused on older adults. It has been found that drama offers an older adult the chance to leave his/her own role and take on new ones with different futures, hopes and dreams. This may have a healing effect.

1998)

(Ebersole & Hess,

RESOURCES

In your own community you may look to a variety of different agencies and institutions for creative activities or opportunities:

- Churches
- Schools or universities
- Book clubs
- Nature/Environmental Organizations

For artistic interests:

- Theater groups
 - Schools or universities

- Civic Theaters (for example, The Barn Players of Johnson County Kansas, a senior troupe; and The Lyceum in Arrowrock, MO, a professional group)
- Service Groups (such as the Tomahawk Drama Service League, a children's theater league seeks to arouse awareness in theater in the local school children)

- Art galleries
- Nonprofit art organizations (national and local branches)
- Schools and universities

If a program is not available in your area, start one by contacting existing groups.

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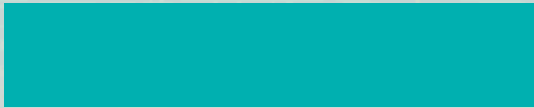
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LINKS

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