

# Culture and the Creative Arts in preschools

Ideas to Support and Inspire





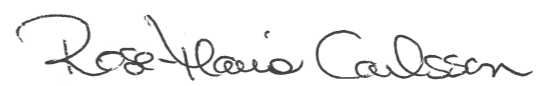
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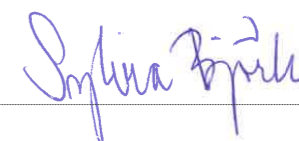
### ***Culture and the Creative Arts in preschools – Ideas to Support and Inspire***

results from several years of collaboration between the Preschool Department and the Culture Department of the City of Malmö. This material provides ideas and inspiration for working with the culture and the creative arts in Malmö's preschools.

We know that arts and culture are important tools for ensuring that Malmö is a sustainable city. Arts and culture contribute to our understanding of ourselves and the world around us as well as encouraging the development of identity. The Department of Culture and the Preschool Department work together to ensure that all preschool children in Malmö have access to culture and the creative arts, and that they can explore a broad and diverse range of self-expression. This collaboration has led to a high-quality collection of knowledge and competence that we can draw upon, ensuring that children can experience exemplary culture and creative arts and culture.

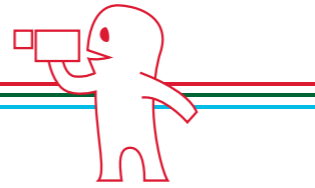


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# Introduction



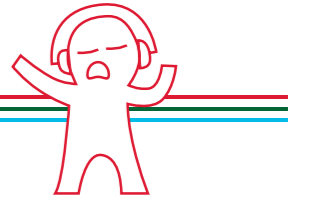
*Preschools provide an essential platform for children's access to arts and culture. Experiencing and participating in culture and the creative arts can lead to better attainment of educational outcomes for preschool children; yet culture and the creative arts have an intrinsic value too. Children have the right to enjoy culture and the creative arts without any academic pressure or obligation. Culture and the creative arts help us to learn about ourselves, make sense of our own interpretations and values and to feel empathy. This is closely connected to forming of identity, and also strengthens democracy and solidarity.*

We must ensure that the opportunities of children in Malmö to experience and participate in culture and the creative arts are not limited or prevented by geographical, social or financial factors. Being able to see, experience, create and express yourself is a democratic right for all children, regardless of gender, intellectual and physical

ability, ethnicity or religion. In this material, we would like to highlight culture and the creative arts – literature, music, dramatic arts, visual art, film and cultural heritage – as well individual creativity. Culture and the creative arts often co-exist for preschool children; they can enter into and relate to many different forms of artistic expression, all at the same time. Culture and the creative arts can be produced by adults for children, for example, theatre performances, or can be created by the children themselves in the form of painting, song or role play.

*Author's note: this material has been translated from the original Swedish text, published in 2018, which contained references to Swedish laws and guidance for pre-school education, as well as local services in the city of Malmö. These references have been removed from the translated version. If you wish to know more about the Swedish context, please contact Fiona Winders, [fiona.winders@malmo.se](mailto:fiona.winders@malmo.se)*

# Some background

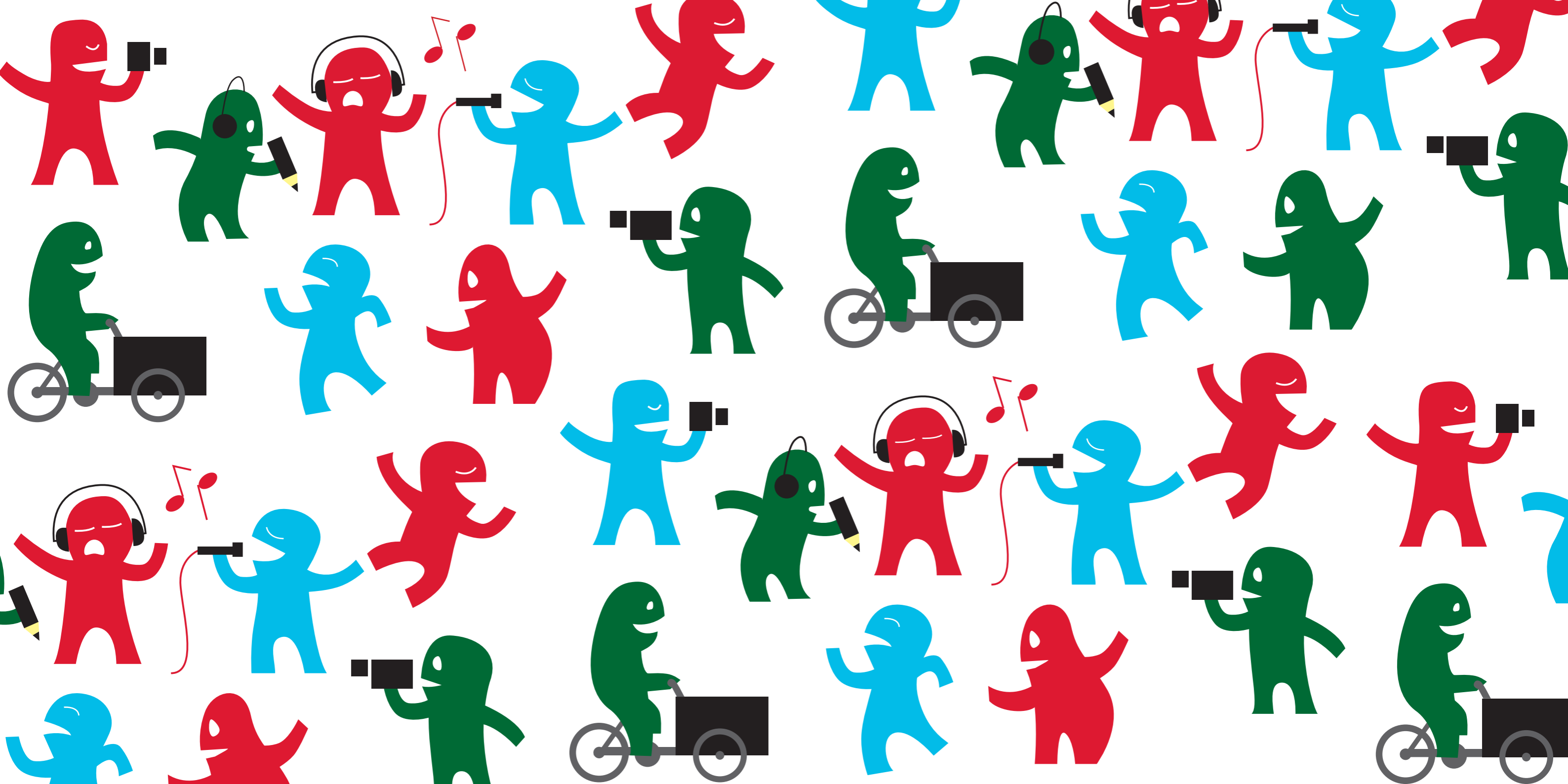


*This material contains ideas to support and inspire working with culture and the creative arts in preschools and draws upon, amongst others, the Malmö Culture Strategy 2014–2020 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030).*

*Malmö Culture Strategy 2014–2020 applies to the City of Malmö's entire municipal organisation. According to the strategy, the creative arts and culture are tools for developing and enhancing sustainability in Malmö. Thus artistic and cultural expertise needs to be understood and applied in many new and different ways. Children and*

*young people are a priority target group and the importance of cooperation between departments is clearly delineated in the Culture Strategy.*

*The UN Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030) can be achieved by working with creative arts and culture. Agenda 2030 defines three dimensions of sustainable development: the social, the ecological and the economic. Sustainable development satisfies the needs of today without putting the living conditions and opportunities of future generations at risk.*



# Visual art, design, crafts and architecture

*Our surroundings are, in a large part, designed and shaped by human hands; often in ways that aim to influence us. It is important that we create space for the experiences, understandings and opinions of children when working as early years educators. No one viewpoint is “better” than any other. Reflecting on these understandings and experiences together creates greater appreciation of visual art and our designed environment. Children and adults are influenced by visual art, design, crafts and architecture every day.*

Preschools provide children with the opportunity to encounter visual art, design, crafts art and architecture through their senses. Children need opportunities to experiment with a range of materials and techniques that challenge and inspire their own creativity. When we listen to children’s ideas and support their creative experiments, we help them understand the creative process. Every child’s creative process is meaningful and we need to ensure that this is respected. Children have the right to express themselves and to develop their own artistic language without being manipulated or judged by others.

## THE CREATIVE PROCESS

Early years educators need to be interested in and supportive of the exploratory process: for example, mixing paints, experimenting with glue, tape and cardboard, or mark-making with a pencil. Children’s experiences are important: they can express their feelings or what they are trying to convey or comprehend. Documentation and reflection help to make visible children’s diverse artistic processes. When working with children, we can create space for different ideas and reflections on visual art, design, crafts and architecture, what they can mean and the different ways they can be understood.

## THE CREATIVE SPACE

The educational environment should provide spaces where children can discuss and express themselves via creative activities. In a creative space, the borders between artistic expression and other subjects, and between experimentation and play, are often fluid. The educational environment needs to be inviting, providing a diverse range of materials and means of expression as well as being accessible for children.

## Things to try out

**Take** a walk and look at different sculptures. Talk about shape and pattern and the colours and materials of the sculptures you encounter. Document your discoveries by taking photographs or drawing sketches. Encourage the children to comment on and interpret what they have seen. At your preschool, use this documentation and talk about how different materials express different things. You could round off the activity with an art exhibition for children and parents.

**Take** a look at a construction project. Following the progress of a construction project near your preschool is a fun way of promoting children’s interest in and knowledge of architecture and the city. Children are often very well-informed about their local area and this perspective is needed in shaping our urban environment. Visit the construction site and observe what is taking place. Take photographs, draw maps, take measurements and build models. Explore shape, size and dimension by comparing with our own body, use measuring devices and other tools. If the children have questions about the construction, why not contact the architect or construction company for answers?

**Design** and build objects with the children. Three-dimensional materials like plaster, clay and recycled materials all invite children to experiment, play and learn. Use this opportunity to support children when designing, creating and constructing their own objects and inventions. Discuss the creative process with the children, and how we can create things that are both interesting to look at and have a functional value.



# Photography, film and moving image

*One of the tasks of preschools is to encourage and develop children's understanding of and empathy with the situation of other people. Watching a film together takes us to another world, providing powerful experiences as well as opportunities to discuss our thoughts about what we have experienced. Watching, interpreting and making films, makes visible children's competence, abilities and stories.*

Photography, film and moving image are a natural part of many children's lives. Film can both impart knowledge and provide inspiration for the creative process and for play. When we show interest in the films children watch and the images they view, we create a productive space for important conversations.

## WORKING WITH FILM IN PRESCHOOLS

It is important when selecting a film to think about age group, quality and content. Watch the film first, preferably with your colleagues, so that you can discuss its content together. It is a good idea to have several adults present when watching a film. One educator can take notes of the children's comments, while others can help the children to get more out of the film experience. Watching a film

can evoke many different feelings. Some children need to process and discuss what is happening when watching a film; this can be physical or verbal.

It is important to discuss the film together afterwards. Use your notes and show your interest by asking questions. What was the film about? Who was in it? Did something exciting happen? It can be a good idea to watch the film several times. Make screenshots of the scenes that provoked the greatest reaction from the children and print out these images so that the children can look at them again. Be open and responsive to the new stories created by the children after watching a film.

## SOURCE EVALUATION

The creative arts and culture offer many opportunities for evaluating source material. Digital tools make this very easy to do. When the children create their own images and texts, for example, by manipulating images, examining source materials becomes much easier. Is everything that we see on the internet or watch in a film true? Can an image trick us? Who says what? How and why do they do this?

## Things to try out

**Make** your own film. Write a story and draw your own storyboard. Early years educators can help children by asking questions about the characters in the film and where the action takes place. How did it all begin? What problems do they face? How did the film end? Why not finish the project by organising your own film festival and inviting other children, brothers and sisters and parents? Showing their film to an audience is a way for children to present their reality, their competence and to feel appreciated.

**Give** the children the opportunity to investigate and be inspired by the camera. Allowing them to take photographs and make films is a way of experimenting, documenting, creating or seeing something with new eyes. Children can be detectives who are commissioned to film a movement or to photograph various objects, for example, things in the shape of a circle.

**Investigate** norms and identities in our society with a camera. In our everyday lives, we see thousands of images and many of these messages aim to influence our opinions and values. Talk to the children about the way people look in different images. What's an acceptable image? Are there any differences, and if so, why? Who decides? Let the children photograph themselves, each other and people they know. Look at the images and talk about them.



# Cultural heritage

*Cultural heritage is culture created by earlier generations all over the world. People living today pass on culture to future generations. Cultural heritage can take many forms: language, traditions, crafts, texts, cultural sites and landscapes. Although we are not always aware of our cultural heritage, we experience it in many ways throughout our lives. We make use of and apply our cultural heritage and can also change it, refine it or even destroy it.*

We can explore and talk about our cultural heritage and what it means with children. This gives us a historical perspective on our everyday lives and the present day. We can learn about the cultural heritages of all children in our preschools. Cultural heritage includes games, children's play, food and clothes. Early years educators can discover and deepen our understanding of cultural heritage in a great variety of ways. Archives, libraries and museums

are all cultural heritage institutions; cultural heritage is collected here and there are resources available to help us process, convey and understand our cultural heritage. Children's families are also a rich source of knowledge about different cultural heritages.

## WORKING WITH CULTURAL HERITAGE IN PRESCHOOLS

Going out into your immediate surroundings, near the preschool or where the children live, and making discoveries about what is there is an entertaining and interesting way of learning about cultural heritage. You will find traces of what happened in the past. What did people do there? Who lived there? What kind of work did they do? What did children do? Working with cultural heritage in these places allows us to compare and to reflect upon important questions like integration, democracy, gender equality and reconciliation.

## Things to try out

**Take** the children on a voyage back in time. Nature and human influence have left traces all around us. Perhaps there is a graveyard or old building near you that could tell us more about what happened 50 or even 500 years ago? What do the children think about these places today? Choose a spot that has an interesting history and research it with the children. Make use of literature, images and maps to find out and create more; use drama techniques too.

**Choose** an object to talk about. Present an object from "long ago" to the children and discuss with them what it was used for. What is the object made of? Does it remind them of anything? Is it something we need today? If so, what would it look like today? Design and build models of the object based on your discussions.

**Collect** information about the preschool's own cultural heritage. Discuss their favourite preschool activities with them. Perhaps there is a game that many of them like to play or a song you like to sing together. Document your cultural heritage using photographs, film or drawings and give them to a city archive. Perhaps in a hundred years' time, other people will look at your cultural heritage.



# Literature, reading aloud, oral storytelling

*Literature, reading and oral storytelling are excellent tools for ensuring togetherness, interaction and participation in shared experiences. Imagination and new ideas are stimulated and we can move in time and space, between the imaginary and the real. Stories about people's lives give us knowledge of the world as well as evoking empathy and curiosity about ourselves and other people. Vocabulary, intonation and rhythm all play a part.*

Stories and fairy tales can create spaces for identification and recognition. Early years educators can read aloud and talk to the children about what happens in different kinds of stories. This stimulates the development of language and imagination. They can also support children in learning about written language when working with literature, reading aloud and telling stories.

## READING ALOUD AND STORYTELLING

Early years educators themselves are the most important tool for storytelling and reading aloud. The way we use body language and our voice, for example, tone, volume and intonation, all play a role when reading with children and inspiring them to develop language. For children to truly benefit, we need to know the story we are telling well. Props like fabrics, hats, gloves or anything else that

you have to hand can further enhance the experience. The outdoor space also lends itself well to storytelling and reading aloud. Outdoors, we experience more with our senses than when we are indoors and we can move between different locations in order to tell a story.

## READING AREAS IN PRESCHOOLS

Reading areas play an essential role in developing children's language and identity. They should include different types of books like fiction, poetry and non-fiction in different languages. Books without text can encourage discussion as they allow us to explore images together and also stimulate our imagination. A well-planned and appropriate range of literature provides opportunities for self-recognition, identification, joy, curiosity and excitement.

## CHILDREN'S OWN STORIES

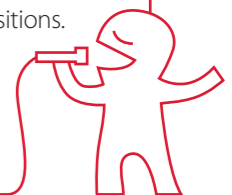
It is important to encourage children to create their own stories to help them develop an understanding of literature as an art form. This can be done using film, drama or movement during the reading circle. Children can also tell their stories spontaneously during the day. We need to listen carefully to what the children are saying and are trying to express. We can help them to make a connection to the written word by writing down their story.

## Things to try out

**Make** your reading circle exciting. Evoke curiosity and add magic to reading aloud and storytelling by following a path or a trail to a special place. The children can participate by using an object, movement or a song to create a special setting for storytelling. Involving a range of different spaces can enhance the action and support the characters in your story. Creating excitement and emotion in this way adds depth and interest to reading aloud and storytelling.

**Help** all the children to participate and stay interested during the reading circle. If your preschool is allowed to make a digital copy of a book, photograph the book's pages using a tablet and make an album of them. Connect the tablet to a projector and display the album while you are reading aloud. Make sure all the children can see the images. The experience can be enhanced using dramatisation, perhaps with music, movement or the use of props. Another fun idea is to project the images onto a large piece of paper attached to the wall. Here, the children can add their own drawings to the images from the story.

**Let** the stories live on in different areas of the preschool. If a story is especially popular, make sure there are copies of the story in several places. Perhaps some of the characters or some other detail from the book could "move into" the preschool or in the playground? Combine different forms of artistic expression and create unexpected juxtapositions.





# M

## usic, rhythm and movement

*We are born with competence in music, rhythm and movement as well as the desire to imitate and respond to movement using sound and actions; this is one of our basic communicative abilities. Music, rhythm and movement are closely connected to the development of identity and language and can help children to express themselves, and to understand and influence the world around them and their own lives.*

Children participate in and create music, rhythm and movement in a range of situations and contexts every day. One example is the way children skip and sing while moving between different activities and areas in the preschool. Concepts like tempo, beat and dynamics are all important.

Listening to music is an active experience that requires concentration; we can support the children who need help with this. Listening is a musical ability in itself as well as being a point of departure for developing other musical forms of expression like singing or playing an instrument.

### WORKING WITH MUSIC, RHYTHM AND MOVEMENT IN PRESCHOOLS

Children need opportunities to dance and move to music, to create their own rhythms and movements and to sometimes just sit still and listen. We can promote their creativity and curiosity by improvising songs, by playing instruments or by moving. Doing this with adults and other children can create feelings of connection and belonging.

Children can benefit greatly from interacting with professionals working in the fields of music, rhythm and movement. These provide role models for children and can inspire them to make their own music. Children also benefit from experiencing, listening and moving to different types of music, both in the form of live music and by listening to the range of musical genres available in the preschool on CDs or digital tablets. Music and movement that the children become interested in, for example, after attending a concert or watching a film, is a good way to begin experimenting with music, rhythm and movement.

## Things to try out

**Make** images with the children of different instruments, sounds or musical terms. By placing these images in a certain order, we create a musical form we can follow. Put the images on the floor and let the children act out the role of conductor.

**Create** music and movement stories; here the children decide what sounds or movements represent different events, atmospheres and feelings. We can create rhythms and sounds with our bodies: for example, with our mouths by smacking our lips or making a drum-shape with our cheeks. Test out the tone and strength of the voice. Include musical instruments and also digital media like a music programme from a tablet to encourage the creative process.

**Listen** to different types of music together and try to differentiate various sounds. Try and identify similarities and differences in tempo, beat and rhythm. Follow along with the music using instruments or just try free improvisation.



# Dramatic arts

*Artistic and expressive experiences are a way of seeing and understanding new things, ourselves and our own environment. By their very nature, the dramatic arts directly access the imagination and creativity of children. The dramatic arts can be a kind of intensified reality that asks questions that help us learn about our own reactions, understandings and values and those of others.*

The dramatic arts refer to cultural expressions portrayed on the stage, for example, dance, opera, theatre or contemporary circus. The stage can be in the preschool, in a theatre or in a public space. The dramatic arts can be performed by professionals or become one of the children's own creative activities at preschool.

## THE DRAMATIC ARTS IN PRESCHOOL

Preschool children benefit from access to professional dramatic arts as well as having the opportunity to develop their own creativity. Allowing the children to participate in and influence a performance is an important tool for building their self-esteem and physical awareness. Children can use their bodies to give expression to that which is hard to say in words. This makes them feel more at ease in their own bodies and encourages playful exploration of their sense of self.

## CHILDREN AS AUDIENCE

We can encourage children to participate when watching a performance with them. Their spontaneous sounds and movements are their way of exploring and processing the experience. Children are very good at making associations, so co-creating is a playful way for them to interpret and develop their impressions of the action on stage. By sharing their experiences with each other during the performance or later at preschool, they learn new things about each other and create new ways of being together. Our impressions of a performance and what it makes us think, feel and wonder all provide opportunities for better understanding of our own interpretations and values. This, in turn, helps us to learn more about ourselves.

When professional actors come to your preschool, you can rely on them to manage the smooth running of the performance. Children reacting to what they see on stage rarely disturbs the performance or the actors. The actors will be used to and will appreciate an audience that participates in the performance.

## Things to try out

**Listen** and be attentive to the children's thoughts and feelings during and after the performance. Make space for them to express themselves so that they can process the experience in their own way. You could use images or other material from the performance to assist them in relating to it.

**Prepare** a room for dancing with music, light and some inspiring props. Follow and encourage their explorations. Reinforce the experience by copying their movements. Repeat and vary the movement using the space: from high to low, fast to slow, over the entire floor or on one spot.

**Develop** the children's own play and activities in a drama game. Start with a warm-up exercise like singing, dance or movement. Use simple instructions like "Dance gently over the leaves in the park; dance slowly underwater" etc. Make use of different exercises like contact and collaboration, imagination and creativity, working with the senses, communication, mime, movement and improvisation. End the drama session with quiet relaxation while listening to soothing music.



# References

The 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals [bit.ly/38LRsp6](https://bit.ly/38LRsp6)

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (SÖ 1990:20) [bit.ly/2EpWksA](https://bit.ly/2EpWksA)

Malmö Culture Strategy 2014-2020 [bit.ly/38LRg9m](https://bit.ly/38LRg9m)





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