

# The application of theme-based teaching mode in junior high school art teaching

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**Abstract:** *The version of Art Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition) puts more emphasis on cultivating students' core literacy in art as well as strengthening the comprehensiveness of the curriculum, and the theme-based teaching mode is in line with this requirement. The theme-based teaching under the core arts literacy is to take the big idea as the unification and the theme as the lead, so as to realise the interdisciplinary theme-based teaching. This paper intends to introduce the basic concept of the theme-based teaching mode on the basis of exploring its specific implementation strategies in junior high school art teaching.*

**Keywords:** *junior high school art, theme-based teaching, interdisciplinary teaching, art core literacy*

## 1. Introduction

The Art Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition) (hereinafter referred to as the "New Curriculum Standards") makes it clear that art education should cultivate students' core qualities and strengthen the comprehensiveness of the curriculum. The thematic teaching mode will become the aim point for the implementation of art curriculum and teaching reform in primary and secondary schools. The interdisciplinary thematic teaching mode implemented under the core qualities focuses on connecting with real-life situations and teaching in a scenario, so as to enhance students' holistic, comprehensive and coherent mastery of knowledge, thereby improving their comprehensive qualities.

## 2. Interpretation of the Thematic Teaching Model

The prototype of theme-based teaching practice was first advocated by Henry C. Morrison, a professor at the University of Chicago in 1931, who advocated the unit teaching method of letting students learn a kind of teaching material or solve a problem for a period of time to promote the development of personality. In the 1950's, the idea of theme-based teaching was first put forward in the U.S.A., and at that time the movement of curriculum integration had not yet been weakened, and scholars innovated the theme-based teaching as a representative teaching model. In 1955, American scholar Lavarni A. Hanna formally put forward the theme-based teaching style of gathering and understanding of a topic of social significance and the development of a purposeful learning experience<sup>[1]</sup>. In the 1980s, scholars Ruth Gumberg and Jane Gambrell. In the 1980s, scholars Ruth Gumberg and Jane Orem continued to deepen the theme-based approach to teaching and learning. In the 1980s, scholars Ruth Gumberg and Jane Orem further developed the concept of theme-based teaching and learning, which places students at the center of the process. They emphasized that theme-based teaching and learning is a model that operates through a broad range of thematic inquiries, rather than being confined to a single subject area. Meanwhile, during the same period, the concept of thematic teaching was introduced to China, with Professor Gu Mingyuan, a renowned education expert, being the first to publish an article that highlighted the important point that "students are both the object and the subject of education". Some famous professors, such as Huang Ji, Wang Ce San, Sun Xiting, Wang Daojun and so on, have expressed their opinions to further elaborate the viewpoint of "students are the main body of education". In 2022, China carried out a new round of basic education reform. The new curriculum reform is mainly based on the core concept of making students develop as a whole person<sup>[3]</sup>, integrating students' life world and scientific world, seeking to construct knowledge with students as the main body, and changing the concept of subject-oriented; focusing on scientific inquiry, and advocating the diversification of learning styles. The content of the new curriculum is divided according to learning areas and themes. To break through the concept of knowledge-centered education and challenge the notion of teacher authority, it is necessary to consider the interests and experiences of

students. There should be a close connection between textbooks and students' lives, as well as the development of modern society and science and technology. We should move beyond the limitations of solely emphasizing the systematic and logical nature of subjects themselves. Instead, we should reflect the role that each subject's curriculum in compulsory education should primarily serve - the development of students. The thematic teaching mode is precisely in line with the reform concept advocated by the new standard, which allows students to learn in an environment of high motivation, thus strengthening students' internalisation and long-term memory of new content[1].

### **3. Significance of theme-based teaching**

Thematic teaching is a meaningful teaching model that builds on students' original knowledge systems to learn new content, and it is in line with the theory of the zone of nearest development proposed by Vygotsky. It has the following significance for teaching:

1) Thematic teaching is to create a theme based on the content of the study, create corresponding scenarios based on the theme, and let students learn in the scenarios. Learning in the context of learning can increase students' interest in learning, and will be abstract knowledge and skills into concrete scenes and scenarios, so that students can more easily understand and accept, thus stimulating students' interest in learning and enthusiasm for knowledge exploration.

2) The thematic teaching mode is a problem-oriented, interdisciplinary learning teaching method, which closely associates students' learning with real life, and organically combines the knowledge of various disciplines with a theme or problem as the centre, so that students can learn through inquiry and master knowledge and skills in practice. In the specific teaching, teachers will be problem-oriented, guiding students to explore the problem and solve the problem, in the process of problem solving students need to carry out practical activities, enhance the students' practical ability and comprehensive application ability.

3) Thematic teaching is problem-oriented, combining the knowledge of various disciplines organically, placing greater emphasis on students' independent learning and interdisciplinary cooperation among students, allowing students to use different knowledge to solve problems together, in the process, students learn to study and communicate with each other, collaborative inquiry, thus promoting students' communication and cooperation skills[2].

### **4. Design Ideas for a Thematic Teaching Model**

#### ***4.1 Based on the new curriculum and the holistic nature of the art discipline***

Grounded in the holistic nature of the art discipline, the following points should be kept in mind when implementing the programme:

1) Emphasis on the integration of fine arts and culture: The new curriculum requires that fine arts education should be combined with cultural education, focusing on the integration of fine arts and culture. Teaching should integrate art knowledge with cultural knowledge, so that students can understand the intrinsic connection and wholeness between art and culture.

2) Pay attention to the student's subjectivity: the new standard emphasises the student's main position, teaching should focus on the student's subjectivity and participation, so that students become the main body of art learning. The new standard emphasises the students' subjective position.

3) Emphasis on teachers' professionalism: the new curriculum requires art teachers to have a high level of art literacy and educational and teaching ability, and teaching should focus on teachers' professionalism and teaching ability.

4) Emphasis on teaching evaluation: the new standard requires that art education should focus on the comprehensive quality of students and the cultivation of art literacy, and teaching should focus on the scientific and objective nature of evaluation.

#### ***4.2 Task-driven and advocating contextualised thematic teaching***

This can be done in the following ways:

1) Design of tasks: Tasks should be situational in nature, capable of arousing students' interest and

curiosity and making them willing to participate in them. The design of the tasks should be close to students' real life and learning, and be able to promote the improvement of students' comprehensive quality and core qualities.

2) Situationalised themes: Themes should be situational in nature, enabling students to immerse themselves in the realities of the subject matter and feel a sense of closeness. It is close to students' real life and learning, and promotes the improvement of their thinking and creative abilities.

3) Student participation: task-driven teaching should focus on student participation, make students the main body of learning, and promote students' interest and motivation in learning through enquiry and practice[3].

4) Teacher guidance: Teachers should have a high level of subject literacy and pedagogical competence, and be able to design appropriate tasks and situationalised themes to guide students in their investigations and practices, according to the actual situation of the students.

## 5. Problem-driven, interdisciplinary learning

A question is the starting point of scientific enquiry and a source of deep motivation. Interdisciplinary learning is an educational approach that combines knowledge and skills from different subject areas to solve real-world problems.

In specific teaching, teachers can design specific and meaningful tasks to enable students to master art skills and knowledge in practice, and at the same time can cultivate students' creativity and interdisciplinary thinking. Students can also be guided to understand artistic expressions in different cultural contexts, promoting cultural exchange and cross-cultural understanding. In interdisciplinary learning, questions are an important starting point and traction point. Questions can stimulate students' curiosity and desire to explore, prompting them to cross the boundaries of disciplines and search for answers. Through interdisciplinary learning, students can explore issues from different perspectives and domains and gain a more comprehensive knowledge and understanding.

## 6. Specific implementation of the thematic teaching model

Based on the design ideas given in Chapter 3, this chapter is mainly based on the above ideas to organise the theme-based teaching design ideas for the lesson "Imagination of Spring" in the first book of Grade 7, which can make the readers' understanding of the concepts explained in this paper easier and more thorough.

- Theme: Spring Fantasy
- Teaching grade: 7th grade
- Number of hours: 1
- Brief description of activities:

This activity is based on the scenario of "Swallows moving south", using the route of the swallows' southward migration as a clue, comparing the differences between the spring in the north and the south according to the route of the swallows' southward flight, and learning about the differences in temperature and climate between the north and the south in spring and the differences in flora and fauna. They will also create a spring-themed piece of artwork using materials they have learnt about spring inside and outside the classroom. In the process of completing the artwork, students pay more attention to the ecological environment, feel the fun of using different materials to create, and convey their feelings and express their creativity in the creation (Table 1).

The teaching objectives are as follows:

- The objective is to enable students to understand the characteristics of spring in South Africa and express them in the form of drawing by observing the route of the little swallows flying south. (Core literacy points: aesthetic perception, artistic expression)
- The goal is to improve students' observation skills, their ability to represent objects using art tools and colour, and to enhance their awareness of the importance of protecting the ecological environment. (Core literacy point: cultural understanding)

- The aim is to encourage students to use their understanding and emotional connection to spring to imaginatively conceptualize and express their ideas about the season, with the aim of stimulating their creative spirit. (Core literacy points: artistic expression, creative practice)

*Table 1: Reference table of teaching activities of teachers and students in the classroom*

Teacher level	Student level
Themes, modules (broad concepts, basic issues)	Themes, modules (basic issues)
Investigate the learning situation, set goals, and assign tasks.	Clarify objectives and receive tasks.
Ask basic questions to create problematic scenarios.	Enter scenarios, think and explore questions.
Break down the tasks of the activity and summarise the key issues. Issue learning task sheets, questionnaires or guides.	Implementing a division of labour based on the mandate. Think, discuss, question and derive trivia questions.
Provide assessment criteria and evaluation tools.	Familiarise yourself with assessment criteria and learn to use evaluation tools.
Observe the learning, monitor the process, provide support, and guide the biography.	Mobilise relevant resources, engage in independent learning and collaborative enquiry, and self-monitor learning behaviours and learning outcomes; Acquire and apply relevant knowledge and skills to solve problems and complete tasks.
Organise communication and target testing.	Show and share, reflect and evaluate.
Physical results to guide application.	Keep thinking about it and transferring it.

## 7. Key issues

- Why do swallows fly south?
- What places do swifts pass through as they migrate south, and what are the characteristics of spring in the places they pass through?

## 8. Activity tasks

The teaching objective is for students to compare and contrast the differences in climate, flora, and fauna between the northern and southern regions during spring by analyzing the route of the swallow's southward flight. Additionally, they are expected to create a painting that reflects their own understanding of these differences.

## 9. Teaching activities

In order to create a scenario of "Swallows flying south", Swallows fly south during the winter, but the exact destination might leave one wondering. Swallows belong to a category of migratory birds, which migrate in response to seasonal temperature changes. Every autumn, these birds embark on a journey from the north to the south to spend the winter months, only to make the return trip north when spring arrives the following year. However, careful students will find that swallows have not been seen in some places in the south of China, such as Guangdong, Fujian, Guangxi, etc. Where have they actually flown to? Some expert teams had the same doubt as us, so they put a mini locator on the swallows to track the migration route of the Beijing swallows, and the records showed that the swallows left Beijing at the end of July, but they didn't fly to the south, they first flew across Hebei to Inner Mongolia, and then they flew almost across the whole Xinjiang region to Southeast Asia, and then the swallows flew down south through Iran, Saudi Arabia, and then across the Red Sea to Africa, and then across the Red Sea to Africa, and then across the Red Sea to Africa. Immediately after that, it crossed the Red Sea to reach Africa, and kept going south along the African continent, passing through a number of African countries to reach Namibia and South Africa, with all the flight distance up to about two and a half thousand kilometres, taking about two months[4].

Question 1: Why do swallows go south for the winter?

Task 1: By learning about the flight paths of swallows, the students will discuss in small groups the reasons why swallows fly south and depict them. They will compare domestic and international paintings of spring, identify differences and variations, and critique them. (Table 2, Task evaluation form)

Table 2: Task evaluation form

serial number	Evaluation content	rating
1	Through discussion, you will be able to simply state the reasons why swallows fly south and describe them briefly.	★
2	Through discussion and observation, be able to name two to three reasons why swallows fly south and describe them accurately.	★★★
3	Through discussion, you will be able to name two or three characteristics of swallows' southward flight and identify two and more locations along the migration route where spring is compared.	★★★★★

[Design Intentions] The intention is to create a storytelling scenario that can mobilize students' emotions, provoke their interest in spring across different regions through questioning, and enable them to express their points of concern through painting.

Question 2: According to the road map of the swallows' southward flight, what does spring look like in the regions along the route?

Task 2: Based on the class's pre-class research, the students will identify at least two locations along the southern flight route of swallows to compare and contrast during spring. They will analyze the differences in climate temperature, animals, and plants in these different areas during springtime.

Task Sheet: (Comparison of Temperature and Climate)

The students will use the pre-class survey conducted by them to engage in group discussions about the contrasting features of spring in two or more regions that they have researched.. Each student should share their findings with the group members, and finally, each group should select one student who will present a more representative and comprehensive comparison in the class.

Task Sheet: (Flora and Fauna, Insect Comparison)

Based on the students' pre-class investigation, the students will collaborate in groups to share image information collected about various flora, fauna, and insects from different regions. Finally, within the groups, they will conduct further research to summarize and present typical examples in class.

[Design Intent]:

By using the southward flight of swallows as a thematic inspiration and employing thought-provoking questions, this activity aims to guide students towards exploring and understanding the main learning content.

Task 3: The students will appreciate and evaluate paintings on the theme of spring at home and abroad. (Figure 1 and Figure 2)



Figure 1 Early Spring (oil on canvas) Peter Timofeyevich Fomin.



Figure 2 *Spring of the Bridge (Prints) [Modern] Wu Jide*

Task 4: Based on observation and understanding, use creativity to create a piece of artwork on the theme of spring in the form of drawing, painting or paper cutting.

Request:

- You should define your theme and choose appropriate tools or materials to create.
- Your thinking should be creative and imaginative, which is suitable for the theme of springtime.
- The colour palette is sensible and the shapes are accurate and aesthetically pleasing.
- Once you have created your work, as a group, recommend a member to make up a short story based on your work and theme and tell it to the group.

Students create, and the teacher observes, guides, and provides assistance as needed by the students.

[Design Intentions] This approach takes the problem as a stimulus, treats the task as a motivator, and encourages students to engage in continuous thinking and exploration, ultimately achieving the learning objectives of creative design and production methods.

Finally the students' work is presented and self, mutual and teacher assessment is initiated based on the criteria. (Table 3, Work evaluation form)

Table 3: *Work evaluation form*

1. Colour: richness of expression	Yes ( ) No ( )
2. Theme: conveying the breath of spring	Yes ( ) No ( )
3. Emotions: express your feelings about spring	Yes ( ) No ( )

## 10. Conclusion

The works on the theme of "spring" in front of us not only show the infinite creativity of the students, but also reflect their love for nature. In real life, people get inspiration from spring and create many excellent works. For example, Tang Yin's Spring Flourish and Sui Zhan Ziqi's Spring Tour are some of the best works of art inspired by spring. Besides art works, there are also many literary works, such as Zhu Ziqing's essay "Spring", which was also inspired by spring. All of these express the creators' love of nature and reverence for nature.

## References

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