

# Educate. Inspire. Connect.

ARTS INTEGRATION LESSONS



## The Amazing Impossible Erie Canal

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# Who is Arts for Learning WNY?

Formerly Young Audiences of Western New York, Arts for Learning WNY is the leading arts education organization in Western New York seeking innovative ways to integrate the arts into learning. For more than 60 years, Arts for Learning has empowered teachers to inspire young people through meaningful creative experiences, seamlessly integrating the arts into the classroom.

## WHAT IS ARTS INTEGRATION?

Arts integration is an approach to teaching where the arts (e.g., music, dance, drama, or visual arts) are woven into lessons from other subject areas such as math, science, language arts, or social studies. The goal is for students to learn both the art form and the academic content at the same time.

## WHY IT WORKS!

Arts integration is a powerful educational tool because it unlocks how kids naturally learn. This type of instruction utilizes the whole brain and hands-on experiences connect academic content to real-life. It supports different learning styles, bolsters relationship-building skills, and naturally boosts motivation.

# How to Use this Arts Integration Guide

**THE ARTS ARE ALL AROUND US** and everyday moments can become creative adventures when we pause to look, listen, and imagine together.

Whether you are dancing in the kitchen, drawing your favorite story characters, or acting out scenes from a book, you are using the power of the arts to make learning stick in joyful, meaningful ways.

This guide is designed to help you and your family dive deeper into the story, beyond just reading the words on the page. With this book, the suggested art supplies, and a little imagination, you will explore the characters, setting, and themes in a whole new way.

You do not need to be a trained artist or teacher – just be willing to play, create, and explore. Along the way, you will support your child’s learning, build memories, and maybe even discover your inner artist!



Visit our website to explore more arts integration ideas!



# Visual Arts meets Social Studies

In *The Amazing Impossible Erie Canal*, Cheryl Harness shows us detailed illustrations of the Erie Canal and the cities, locks, and boats along it. Let's make our own colorful map inspired by the amazing canal that connected New York!

## SUPPLIES NEEDED

- ▶ *The Amazing Impossible Erie Canal* book
- ▶ New York State outline
- ▶ Glue
- ▶ Markers/crayons/colored pencils
- ▶ Old magazines

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Look at the maps and pictures in *The Amazing Impossible Erie Canal*.** What cities or landmarks do you see along the canal? What parts do you think were most important to the people in the story?
- 2. Grab your paper with New York State outlined.** Mark Buffalo where the canal begins and Albany where it ends.
- 3. Draw the Erie Canal's path across the state.** Use a blue line for the water. You can glue on blue paper or fabric scraps if you like, or just use a crayon/marker!
- 4. Add landmarks and labels.** Use Cheryl Harness's drawings to help you think of things to add – boats, locks, bridges, and towns. Label places like Syracuse and Rochester.
- 5. Decorate your map.** Color in land, water, and towns. You can draw these or add collage pieces from cut outs of old magazines for towns, locks, or other symbols.

## VOCABULARY

**Map** - A drawing that shows where places are.

**Route** - The path something follows, like the Erie Canal!

**Community** - A group of people who live, work, or play together.

**Landmark** - A place or thing that helps you know where you are, like a city or bridge.

**Collage** - A picture made by gluing pieces of paper, fabric, or other materials onto a surface.

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

**Turn your map into a memory map!** Mark locations on the map where you or family members have visited. Add a note about what you did when visiting that location. Can you add an illustration to show this memory?

# Dance meets Social Studies

**The Amazing Impossible Erie Canal shows all the hard work and movement that went into building and using the canal. Let's bring the story to life by moving like boats, mules, and workers along the canal!**

## SUPPLIES NEEDED

- ▶ **The Amazing Impossible Erie Canal book**
- ▶ **Music (with a steady beat)**
- ▶ **Scarf or towel (optional)**

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## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Talk about the people and animals that worked on the canal.** In the book, who helps move the boats? How do they move?
- 2. Pretend you are a boat floating down the Erie Canal.** Move slowly and smoothly. Are you gliding on calm water or going through a lock where you might stop and raise or lower?
- 3. Act out parts of the canal journey:**
  - Pulling a rope (like a mule pulling the boat)
  - Opening a lock gate with wide arm movements
  - Waving to a town you pass by
  - Celebrating when you finish the journey
- 4. Use levels and space in your movements.** Try moving low to the ground (like a boat in a lock), medium (like traveling the canal), and high (like a bridge or tall sail).
- 5. Put your movements together!** Perform a sequence of your Erie Canal journey.

## VOCABULARY

- Movement** - The way you move your body (e.g., running, twisting, jumping).
- Space** - The area you move in; it can be big or small.
- Level** - How high or low your body moves.
- Glide** - To move smoothly like a boat on water.
- Sequence** - A series of movements that follow each other in a certain order.
- Canal Lock** - A special box in the water with gates at both ends that helps boats move between different water levels, like going up or down a hill.

## EXTENSION ACTIVITY

**Have a grown-up hold out the scarf or towel.** Imagine it's your rope or sail. Mirror its movements! If it goes up, you go up. If it spins, you spin. Move like you're part of the canal's amazing adventure.

# Music meets English Language Arts

Long ago, workers and travelers on the Erie Canal sang songs to pass the time. Let's learn part of a famous Erie Canal song and write a new verse of our own!

## SUPPLIES NEEDED

- ▶ *The Amazing Impossible Erie Canal book*
- ▶ Your voice
- ▶ Pencil
- ▶ Paper

## INSTRUCTIONS

**1. Sing part of this Erie Canal folk song together: “I’ve got a mule, and her name is Sal, fifteen miles on the Erie Canal...”** (With the help of a trusted adult, you can find the song online. You can sing the melody you hear online or make up your own tune!)

**2. Talk about the story in the song.** Who is Sal? What’s happening on the canal? What other characters are in the song? Do you see any images of mules in *The Amazing Impossible Erie Canal*? Can you find an illustration highlighting the first 15 miles dug on the Erie Canal? What city was this near?

**3. Draw inspiration from the story to write your own verse!** Think of two lines about something your boat sees or does. For example:

*We passed a town, the bells did ring,  
The locks went up and down, oh what a thing!*

**4. Sing your new verse!** Add it to the folk song melody and perform it as a family.

## VOCABULARY

**Beat-** The steady sound or pulse in music that you can clap, tap, or move to.

**Verse -** A part of a song with its own words.

**Rhythm -** A steady beat or pattern of sounds or movements.

**Illustration -** A drawing or picture that helps to explain or tell a story in a book, magazine, or other text.

**Character -** A person, animal, or being in a story that has personality traits and furthers the plot.

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

**Make simple rhythm sticks by tapping two wooden spoons or sticks together.** Keep a steady beat as you sing your new song. Try changing the tempo—what happens when you sing fast or slow? How does it feel?

# In the Community

**The Erie Canal is full of bridges, boats, locks, and nature. You and your family will take a walk or bike ride and create mini artworks inspired by what you see along the way. Let's explore the canal like an artist!**

## SUPPLIES NEEDED

- ▶ *The Amazing Impossible Erie Canal book*
- ▶ Small sketchbook or paper
- ▶ Markers/crayons/colored pencils/watercolors
- ▶ Camera (optional)

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Here in Western New York we have the Erie Canal in our backyard!** With a trusted adult, take a walk or bike ride along the Erie Canal or a nearby canal path. As you go, stop to sketch something interesting that you see – maybe a bridge, a lock, a boat, or a tree reflected in the water. During your walk, look for landmarks that were also illustrated in *Amazing Impossible Erie Canal*.
- 2. Take photos of things you'd like to draw or paint later.**
- 3. When you get home, turn your sketches into postcard-sized paintings or colored drawings.** Use your watercolors, crayons, or colored pencils to add color and detail.
- 4. On the back of each postcard, write a message like you're sending it to a friend:** "Hello from the Erie Canal! Today we saw..."

## VOCABULARY

- Sketch** - A simple drawing that shows an idea or plan.
- Postcard** - A small card you can send to someone, usually with a picture on one side and a message on the other.
- Landmark** - A place or object that helps you know where you are, like a bridge, building, or tree.

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

**Pretend you lived in 1825 and just traveled down the Erie Canal.** What would you write to a friend about your journey? What are some landmarks you might mention?

**With a trusted adult, visit some of the landmarks mentioned in *The Amazing Impossible Erie Canal*.** Maybe you will visit the terminus of the canal at Canalside in Downtown Buffalo or the famous locks in Lockport. Don't forget to bring your sketchbook!

**Education** ▶ For over 60 years, we have been the leading arts education organization in Western New York seeking innovative, equitable, and inclusive ways to integrate arts into learning.

**Inspiration** ▶ We are committed to empowering local artists to teach and inspire young people and educators through new and meaningful creative arts experiences.

**Connection** ▶ By serving as a reliable connector between artists and organizations and providing high-quality education, we seamlessly fill a need to integrate arts into the classroom.



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*Affiliated with the national Young Audiences Arts for Learning*