

# ENGAGING CHILDREN

presented by Ellin Keene

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*Once you have tasted flight, you will forever  
walk the earth with your eyes turned skyward,  
for there you have been and there you will  
always long to return.*

—Leonardo da Vinci

## TWO KEY IDEAS

- 1 Your engagement and how you talk about it
- 2 What engagement looks like in our classrooms

### WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN...

COMPLIANCE  
PARTICIPATION  
MOTIVATION  
ENGAGEMENT?

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE ENGAGED?

**ENGAGEMENT IS BORN** of intellectual urgency. Engaged children often tell us through talk and action that they “have to know more about” a topic. They are willing to put time and considerable effort into learning more. They drive the learning with their own questions. Often, conflict is embedded in the experiences, concepts, and stories in which children are deeply engaged. We’re drawn to conflict and lean toward a resolution. Children are intrigued by conflict and may want to act to mitigate a problem in their community or the world. They believe that they just have to apply more attention to this text or idea.

**ENGAGEMENT IS OFTEN BORN** of an emotional resonance to ideas—engaged children can describe experiences when a concept is imprinted in the heart as well as the mind. They are far more likely to remember the idea when a strong emotion is tied to a concept they’re learning or a text they’re reading. They may want to share their emotional reactions through writing, conversation, or art.

**ENGAGEMENT IS DEEPENED** by perspective bending—engaged children are aware of how others’ knowledge, emotions, and beliefs shape their own. When children talk and write about their beliefs, they are more engaged; they have a stake in the learning. They may be open to changing their thinking or beliefs when challenged and particularly relish the idea that their ideas can impact other learners. Their beliefs may bend, but rarely break.

**ENGAGEMENT IS OFTEN CONNECTED** to a learner’s sense of the aesthetic—engaged children can describe moments when they find something beautiful or extraordinary, captivating, hilarious, or unusually meaningful. They may speak of a book or illustration, a painting, or an idea in science or math that seems to have been created just for them. They are drawn back to view it, discuss it, read it again and again. They claim the idea as somehow their own.

# BOY MEETS PAINTING. PAINTING GRABS BOY. BOY MYSTIFIED.

2/7/2014 7:58AM ET

ROBERT KRULWICH

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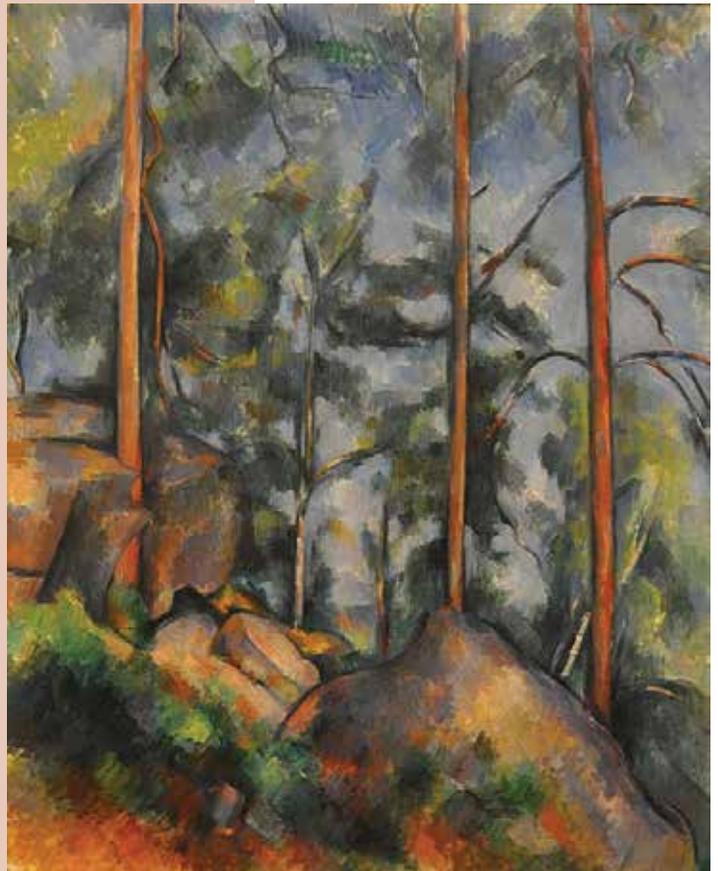
**HERE'S WHAT I REMEMBER:** The day it happened, I was around 8 years old, which puts me in the second grade. It was definitely a Sunday (because we never went anywhere on Saturdays). My dad had decided to take me to the Museum of Modern Art to see some paintings, and I always liked going places with my dad, it didn't matter where, so we arrived at the lobby, bought our tickets, handed them to a man who tore them in half, like at the movies. Then we took the escalator, walked into a big gallery, and as we were moving through — that's when it happened.

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## GRABBED BY A DEAD MAN

I was walking behind my dad, trying to keep up, when something on the wall kind of flung itself at me, stopped me short, and (for lack of a better term) grabbed my eyes. I came to a full stop.

It was a woodland scene, a blur of greens, blues and purples, a tumble of rocks in the foreground, tall pines, branching into a blue sky, breaking up into arabesques. It had no people in it, no girls, nothing I recognized. But with a force that felt like a fist, it jerked my head to it — almost as if it were calling out, “*You!*” — like it knew me. Like it wanted to pull me to it and tell me something — something personal. But what? I had no idea. Nothing like this had ever happened to me. Furniture, pictures, carpets had always stayed in their place, being, after all, things. But not this thing. It had power.



Stephen Sandoval/Museum of Modern Art, New York City, Lillie P. Bliss Collection



Stephen Sandoval/Museum of Modern Art, New York City, Lillie P. Bliss Collection

As I moved closer, it tightened its grip. The boulders in the foreground were dark at the edges, light where the sun peeped through. The upper branches broke free and became little dabs of paint, applied in rhythmic strokes. Paint became tree; tree became paint. I knew nothing about painting, zilch about art history, but the crazy energy coming off that canvas felt like it was addressing some puzzle I already had in my head. I couldn't stop looking. I barely moved. My dad, who had turned around wondering where I'd gone, found me standing a few feet from the image, and when he came up behind me, without turning around, I asked him, "What is this?" And he, without looking for a label, answered, "This ... (and it was the first time I ever heard the name) ... is a Cézanne."

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### HOW DID CEZANNE DO THIS TO ME? I WAS 8.

To this day I cannot explain what happened to me. The fact that it kept happening — keeps happening, all these (almost) 60 years since — is one of the

mysteries of my life. Cézanne produced precarious little worlds that almost, almost, almost lose their balance, but somehow hold themselves together, creating tension, beauty and danger all at once. But why would these crazy dares thrill an 8-year-old? What was it about me that was ready for Cézanne? Because I was so ready. Even in the second grade. Here's all I can think: that when we are born, we are born with a sort of mood in us, a mood that comes to us through our genes, that will be seasoned by experience, but deep down, it's already there, looking for company, for someone to share itself with, and when we happen on the right piece of music, the right person, or, in this case the right artist, then, with a muscle that is as deep as ourselves, with the force of someone grabbing for a life preserver, we attach. And that's what happened to me that day.

I saw something on a wall that knew what I knew, felt what I felt and wanted me just as badly as I wanted it. When I left the museum I was a different boy. I had

been addressed, personally addressed, by an artist whom I could never meet, who didn't speak my language, who had already been dead for 50 years. But I didn't care. His painting pulled me into a conversation I'd apparently been longing to have. It came at me with a force I will never forget and it began very simply. I looked at it. It looked at me, and all it said was, "Me too!" — and Cézanne and I have been talking ever since.



Courtesy of Sara Krulwich