

News from the Art Room December 2008

The long, dry, Fall provided us with beautiful color and opportunities to be outside sketching. Each student (K-OG) has a sketch book of their own. Sketching nature allows them to be more aware of their natural surroundings. When they spend time drawing one of the gazillion acorns that are found on our school grounds, or when they fill their pages with landscapes of the playground, they are building their relationships with their natural surroundings as artists. I have encouraged note taking along with sketching. Noting time and/or date, identifying plants or animals, and reflections can accompany their art.

If your child was coming to the Art Room last year you will recall that there is one other practice that I do across the grade levels. When the children arrive in the Art Room they are asked to look at a piece of art. In the past I have had them observe famous art: paintings and sculpture (posters), artifacts and art and craft forms that relate to topics they are studying in or outside of the Art Room. For instance after visiting the Moravian Tile Works in Doylestown with the OG we spent time looking at some Persian tiles. We discussed the motif, how they were made, the pattern, and who would have had these tiles in their homes. Likewise, when the Kindergarten visited the Delaware County Nature Museum they sketched the collection of taxidermy birds. We later spent time looking at Audubon Magazine photos and drawings of birds by Paul Klee.

"Looking at Art" at the beginning of class re-focuses and grounds us. During this ten minutes we may compare styles and techniques, discuss the medium used, what the work is trying to say, and where it fits on our time line. Hearing about the artist and his/her life gives the students something else to relate to. The ultimate goal is for the children to be exposed to many artists and to be able to have discussions as a group by respecting each other's opinions and thoughts.

Over the past year I have heard questions like, "Why do we need to know this? I don't plan to be an artist." In response to this I have begun to discuss with the students where they would use the skills in daily living or in various professions. Talking about design, structure, measurement, color, balance, and so many other aspects of the arts lessons can show those who need it some applications or purposes of the concepts. One day we spent time looking at the design of the IKEA chair in my room. The discussion brought us from comfort to designing the seats in a Ferrari sports car. Looking at maps we chatted about measurement, scale, getting lost, and GPS instruments.

Just being creative and having fun in art class are easier for some than for others. So, teaching those who struggle with letting go to become relaxed and lose their inhibitions, is my charge as well. I enjoy this part. I give students permission to be free and "go for it," and that "is it okay to mess up, that is how you get better." Most times the so called mess-up turns out okay. And most likely by the next art class, they like it. Pride is eventually found in the end. I prefer not to refer to their work as mess-up's but part of the process, and I rarely let students start over. There is always the other side of the paper that is clean, but you learn more if you fix what you started. "Mess it up, fix it up" has been a motto in the Art Room forever. The students use this line with each other and it is always received as advice, and just the way it is. Hey, what ever works!

My hope is that the students find the Art Room as a comfortable, cheery and challenging place to be.

In partnership,

Kathy