

Creating a Sense of Place

Community-Themed Murals

Union City Elementary School, Union City Pennsylvania

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Unit 1- Grade 3

“Crossing Paths with Nature: Third grade connections to the natural world”

Goals:

Know

PA Art: 9.1.3.C: Art Production

Recognize the vocabulary used when drawing a landscape.

PA Art: 9.1.3.B: Art Production

Know how to use watercolor paint to depict a time when you crossed paths with nature.

PA Art: 9.1.3.A: Art Production

Know and use the elements of art to create an original piece of art that communicates meaning.

Understand

PA Art: 9.3.3.A: Critical Response

Understand the importance of providing instructional criticism to peers about written and drawn work.

PA Art: 9.4.3.D: Aesthetic Response

The importance of teamwork and how to work together for a common goal to communicate a shared idea.

Be able to

PA Science: 4.1.3.F: Habitat

Identify wildlife that is native to Northwestern Pennsylvania.

PA Writing: 1.4.3.A: Writing poems and stories

Share personal stories through nonfiction writing.

PA Art: 9.1.3.H: Art Production

Demonstrate safe use and selection of art materials when collaborating on final mural assemblage.

Instructional Concepts:

“Crossing Paths with Nature: Third grade connections to the natural world” addresses the big ideas of habitat and ecology. These ideas are addressed in an interdisciplinary way with nonfiction writing. Students are able to reflect on their personal habitat as well as the natural habitat of wildlife native to Pennsylvania through writing, drawing, and painting. The work that students complete will be assembled into a 4x8’ mural that is part of the larger community themed mural project. The process of teaching and learning through community “focuses on parallel concepts and promotes the transfer of knowledge” (Brown, 2007, p. 174). Students are able to learn and retain the interdisciplinary content in a multidimensional way.

Students begin with landscape drawings that depict their backyard and personal habitat. They are guided with questions that ask them to think about their environment and the nature that surrounds them. Personal stories are then written about times when their paths crossed with nature. These stories help students to develop and strengthen their drawn details so that the picture is telling the story. Final paintings are created and the stories are layered into a meaningful mural assemblage of French Creek and the wooded region of Union City, PA.

Lessons:

- **Lesson One:** Students begin the unit by drawing a landscape of their backyard and the nature that surrounds them everyday using the parts of a landscape: Foreground, Middleground, and Background. The wildlife that students encounter is added to the landscape with a different material so that it stands out as an important detail. Pennsylvania landscape artists Karl Eric Leitzel: "Tait Farm Market, Morning Light," "Approaching Storm, August," and Susan Williamson: "Crammond Farm," and "Summerfield" are studied.

- **Lesson Two:** Students share their experiences of crossing paths with nature through nonfiction writing. The landscape drawings from **lesson one** are used as a transition tool for writing. The wildlife that was added to lesson one's landscape can now be used as a story prompt. "What types of wildlife surround our community?" "When did you encounter nature?" "When did nature encounter you?" "Where do you spend most of your time outdoors?" "Why is it important to be aware of the environment around you?" "How can you use nonfiction writing to tell a personal story?" Sketches are drawn to illustrate the story.
- **Lesson Three:** Students participate in an in-process class critique of nonfiction stories and illustrations completed in **lesson two** at the beginning of class. Students look at the illustrations to see if the best details are being used to depict the story. Students move to a smaller group critique at tables to share stories with peers in groups of four to get opinions on strengthening details. The key words in the story are circled and then added or refined in the illustration. These important and meaningful details are then transferred into final watercolor paintings for the mural. Students are given small squares and rectangles of gessoed taracloth that they draw paint their final work on, making sure the entire piece is filled with color.
- **Lesson Four:** Students are divided into four groups to choose color palettes to represent the four seasons that we experience in Northwestern Pennsylvania. The colors are stamped with sponges on gessoed taracloth (a 4x8' piece cut in 4 sections) to create the feeling of the season. The seasons effect our habitat and are important to recognize as the first layer in the mural assemblage. Class discussions are held to decide what the main content of the mural should be. In our mural, French Creek and an Oak Tree were decided upon since they are the vital parts of our local landscape. Residents of Union City have long utilized our wooded region for recreation and sustenance. These two details are made 3-Dimensional by taping newspaper to the first layer of taracloth. Students final watercolor paintings from **lesson three** are sorted by color and cut/glued into the mural to represent French Creek and the wooded region.

Materials:

• Lesson One:

- 12x18 White Drawing Paper
- Drawing Pencils
- Watercolor Paint
- Scrap Paper
- Scissors
- Glue

• Exemplars:

Karl Eric Leitzel: "Tait Farm Market, Morning Light," "Approaching Storm, August"

Susan Williamson: "Crammond Farm," and "Summerfield"

• Lesson Two:

- 9x12 Drawing Paper
- Drawing Pencils
- Colored Pencils
- Landscapes from Lesson one

• Lesson Three:

- Cut and gessoed taracloth (6x6" squares)
- Watercolor Paint
- Black Markers
- Drawing Pencils
- Landscape drawings from lesson two

• Lesson Four:

- Watercolor paintings from lesson three
- Newspaper
- Masking Tape
- Acrylic Paint
- Sponges
- Gessoed 4x8' taracloth sheet
- 4x8' piece of Luan

- Pine for framing mural
- Tacky Glue
- Scissors

Assessment:

Students are assessed in lesson one for the three parts of a landscape as well as wildlife shown in the picture. Lesson two assesses the student's nonfiction writing abilities with a rubric. Lesson three uses an informal critique to guide student work and lesson four provides students with checklists for the collaborative aspect of the project.

References:

Brown, S. (2007). An arts-integrated approach for elementary level students. *Childhood Education, 83*(3), 172-174.



Unit 2- Grade 4

“Personal Places and Shared Spaces: Fourth grade fosters a sense of place”

Goals:

Know

PA Art: 9.1.5.B: Art Production

Use colored pencils correctly to produce an original work of art.

PA Writing: 1.4.4.A: Writing multi-paragraph stories including literary elements

Write reflective narratives using appropriate literary elements.

Understand

PA Art: 9.4.4.D: Aesthetic Response

Understand the importance of teamwork and how to work together for a common goal to communicate a shared idea.

PA Art: 9.1.5.E: Art Production

Artists communicate experiences by making pictures of places that have personal meaning.

Be able to

PA Art: 9.4.5.B: Aesthetic Response

Investigate and communicate multiple views about places of importance.

PA Writing: 1.5.4.E: Revising Writing

Incorporate text into a drawing in a meaningful way.

Instructional Concepts:

“Personal Places and Shared Spaces: Fourth grade fosters a sense of place” addresses the places in Union City that are both important to the community and personal to students. Interdisciplinary connections are made with writing and art, incorporating key words within artwork. Students are given mini blank books to reflectively write narratives about memories in special places located in Union City. Practice with using literary elements is enhanced because “students learn better when they can connect

their learning in meaningful ways to their own lives...” (Ball and Lai, 2006, p. 268). A local focus on place through art allows students to “realize that artists do not operate in a vacuum; rather, they are part of a social world in which art objects are created” (Villeneuve and Sheppard, 2009, p. 6). It is necessary for students to know how to produce art that communicates meaning. Students gain an increased sense of place when they learn how to connect their memories in local places with other students memories in similar spaces.

Students begin by generating lists of places in Union City, PA. The places are categorized and referenced in narrative writing. Students record as many memories as they can in their individual books. From this work a final image is created on vellum with colored pencil that incorporates the necessary key words to describe the place of importance to the student. The place picture is bound in a book that contains similar stories and is added to the mural assemblage that is part of the larger community themed mural project. It is hoped that with this mural students, staff, and community members can interact with the books and reflect on their own memories in the places that students have drawn about.

Lessons:

- **Lesson One:** Students begin the unit by generating a list of important places in Union City. “What are some important places in your town?” “Are any of these places not on a map?” “How do you define a place as being important?” Favorite places are sketched on drawing paper and will be used in a background collage for the first layer of the mural. Artists such as Romare Bearden are introduced who have many works that are inspired by memories of places where he lived.
- **Lesson Two:** “What types of memories do you have in places around town?” Students receive memory books and begin sketching and drawing about all of their favorite places. Discussion is held regarding the differences in a personal place,

where not everyone can go, and shared spaces that are public. Literary elements such as paragraph structure, topic sentences, and key words are reviewed.

- **Lesson Three:** “Can you make connections with the stories that your friends share about their special places?” Students review the work of their peers during a picture walk. After this picture walk the class needs to come up with several common categories that they can classify their picture in. Our group chose six categories for their places: Woods, Town, Field, Creek, Home, Pond). These were the most common places that students referenced in their place narratives and drawings. The best place narrative and drawing is chosen for each student and a final drawing on vellum is started. Students write descriptive words about their place to include in the drawing. Artists such as Thomas Broome, who use text in their work, are introduced to students for ways to incorporate words with an image.
- **Lesson Four:** Students begin assembling materials for the final mural. The initial place drawings from lesson one are used in a giant background collage for the first layer of the mural. Our group decided that a map of the town should also be incorporated in this layer. Original place drawings are arranged, taped, and projected by an opaque projector onto the gessoed taracloth. Students rotate through groups to trace images onto the taracloth, outline pencil in black marker, and paint with acrylics. The final place drawings on vellum are sorted for each class into the six categories and a total of twelve books are bound for the mural. Covers depicting the place categories are painted and glued into the mural. This is now a fully interactive mural where students and staff can turn the pages of the book to view the place stories and images.

Materials:

- **Lesson One:**
 - Pencils
 - Drawing paper

- Colored Pencils
- **Exemplars**
 - **Romare Bearden: “Tomorrow I may be Far Away”**
 - **“The Block”**
- **Lesson Two:**
 - Blank Books- “Memory Books”
 - Drawing Pencils
 - Colored Pencils
- **Lesson Three:**
 - Vellum cut to 4.5x8”
 - Colored Pencils
 - Drawing Pencils
 - Memory Books
 - **Exemplars**
 - **Thomas Broome: “Modern Mantra”**
- **Lesson Four:**
 - 4x8’ Gessoed Taracloth
 - 4x8’ Luan for Mural Backing
 - Pine Board for Framing
 - Opaque Projector
 - Place Drawings from lesson one
 - Final Place drawings on Vellum
 - Masking Tape
 - Drawing Pencils
 - Acrylic Paint
 - Black Markers
 - Tacky Glue
 - Needle and Thread
 - Coil Binding Spines

Assessment:

Formative assessments involve a “picture walk” of place drawings and written work. Students are given critique sheets to provide responses to the work of their peers and document the types of places that are discussed in the group. This picture walk is how the group will arrive on the categories of places for the books.

References:

Ball, E. L. & Lai, A (2006). Place-based pedagogy for the arts and humanities.

Pedagogy, 6(2), 261-283.

Villeneuve, P. & Sheppard, D. (2009). Close to home: Studying art and your community.

Art Education, 62(1), 6-13.



Unit 3- Grade 5

“Yesterday and Today: fifth grade reflections on Union City History”

Goals:

Know

PA Writing: 1.4.5.B: Writing a multi-paragraph description using relevant graphics.

Write a personal journal reflection that describes who you are through symbolism.

PA Art: 9.1.A.B: Art Production

Know how to use observational drawing techniques to create a realistic rendering of museum artifacts.

Understand

PA Art: 9.4.5.D: Aesthetic Response

Understand the importance of teamwork and how to work together for a common goal to communicate a shared idea.

PA History: 8.3.5.B: Historical Documents and Artifacts

Understand how the present is influenced by the past during historical museum visits.

Be able to

PA Art: 9.4.5.A: Aesthetic Response

Use color expressively to show meaning.

PA Art: 9.1.5.E: Art Production

Design a personal symbol that represents yourself.

Instructional Concepts:

“Yesterday and Today: fifth grade reflections on Union City History” addresses the history of Union City and how the past influences who students are today.

Interdisciplinary connections are made between writing, history, and art to deepen learning. Students reflect on who they are by creating symbols for themselves. These symbols are helpful when learning about ancestors who lived in Union City hundreds of years ago. Visits to the Historical Museum in Union City help bring to life the history of

the town. Artifacts are studied and drawn so students can easily make connections to modern technology. A mural is created that is based around meaningful symbolism with color and image. The mural is built completely by the ideas of students and is in a state of change through the entire process.

The option of “open-ended tasks permit the exercise of imagination...one of the most important of human aptitudes.” (Eisner, 2009, p. 9). The activity relies heavily on 21st century skills that deal with idea generation, problem solving, and process communications to bring visualizations to life. “Critical thinking skills cannot be taught in a vacuum...students must perform critical acts...” (Feldman, 1996, p. 78). When students are designing art for their own public spaces their sense of place is increased. Eger (2008) addresses Dana Gioia’s argument that all students need to be immersed in pleasure, beauty, and wonder in order to “create citizens who are awakened not only to their humanity, but to the human enterprise that they inherit and will -- for good or ill -- perpetuate” (para. 5). When the art curriculum is connected to a student’s life and personal surroundings a sense of place will occur that bridges classroom learning with the community.

Lessons:

- **Lesson One:** A transition from a previous unit on family structure helps students to start thinking about themselves in a reflective way. Students make symbols for themselves that are autobiographic drawings telling something about who they are. “How can you use symbolism to describe who you are?” “Who are you and how are you connected to the people who lived in your town 100 years ago?” “How does your past influence your present?” Students journal in a composition book and are guided by a “symbols for identity” question sheet- (if you were an animal, what creature would be? A place? A machine? A sound? etc.).
- **Lesson Two:** Final symbol drawings are enlarged on gessoed taracloth squares approximately 5x5” wide. Appropriate colors are used with watercolor paint and markers to add another level of personalization to the symbol. Artists such as Bernie Wilke and Anastassia Elias are viewed for their work with symbolism and silhouettes.

- **Lesson Three:** Students visit the Historical Museum in Union City and explore the various artifacts from the past. They bring composition books and cameras to record the artifacts they feel connected with or have questions about. Photographs are printed and used in class upon return. Drawings are created from the photographs and discussions are held about whether there are similarities and/or differences between yesterday's relics and modern technology. A class critique is held of the drawings and the best drawings are chosen to be used in the final mural.
- **Lesson Four:** Students begin the final mural assemblage with class discussions about where students see the past in their town today. What buildings have history? What still happens today that happened in the past? Students must decide on a first layer for the mural that can meaningfully depict the history of the town. Our group decided on using black and white values of paint to cover the background, representing the past, since their symbols are in color and represent the present. The images in the background are the buildings that were important 100 years ago as well as today and have stood strong as structures in the community. The old school house is now the court house, the old train depot station is now the hub for the largest lumber industry in the area, and the row of buildings are still thriving with business on Main Street. The silhouettes of students show how the fifth grade class is united and stand together. Inside the silhouettes are the personal symbols that represent each student in the fifth grade class.

Materials:

- **Lesson One:**
 - Composition Books
 - Drawing Pencils
 - "Symbols for Identity" questions
- **Lesson Two:**
 - Gessoed taracloth squares appx. 5x5"

- Watercolor paint
- Drawing Pencils
- Composition Books
 - **Exemplars: Anastassia Elias: “Tiny World inside Toilet Paper Rolls”**
 - **Bernie Wilke: “Cultivation” “Facing the World”**

- **Lesson Three:**
 - Composition Books
 - Drawing Pencils
 - Drawing Paper 9x12”
 - Field trip to the Historical Museum

- **Lesson Four:**
 - Gessoed taracloth sheet 4x8’
 - 4x8’ Luan for Mural Backing
 - Pine Board for Framing
 - Opaque Projector
 - Acrylic Paints
 - Tacky Glue
 - Scissors
 - Symbol paintings from Lesson Two

Assessment:

Students are assessed on their ability to complete multi-paragraph structures in written assignments. Peer critiques of in-process work with observational drawings of artifacts are held in the middle of the unit. At the end of the project, questions regarding the history of the town are presented to students. The students can use the finished mural as an aide to help in the answering of the questions.

References:

Eger, J. M. (2008). The arts in contemporary education. *School Administrator*, 65 (3), 32-35.

Eisner, E. (2009). What education can learn from the arts. *Art Education*, 62(2), 6-9.

Feldman, E.B. (1996). *Philosophy of art education*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

