

Reading + Writing+ Art = Recycling

“A public installation project for Auburn Junior High School”

What started out three years ago as a traveling blue jean project has morphed into a public installation project at Auburn Junior High School. Betsy Logan received a \$2,500.00 Teacher Incentive Grant from the National Art Education Association Foundation and a \$600.00 grant from the PTA FACES program to complete an installation project for Auburn Junior High School. Nancy Raia, community outreach coordinator and artist from the Eastern Shore Art Center in Fairhope, Alabama, was contracted to come and work with the 8th grade students to create this installation. With many in-kind donations from the Alabama Marine Resource center, parents, teachers, students, Auburn Junior High and even an art education group from Southern Mississippi the 8th graders spent a week painting on old blue jeans. The theme of the installation was the environment, recycling and conservation. All academic classes worked on incorporating this theme into their classes. The students began to scavenge and hunt for jeans to use for the project, and even Southern Mississippi art students led by Kristina Odom (studying to be an art teacher) gathered jeans as a service project. Other community groups were contacted to volunteer with the paint sessions. Members of the Young Life Youth Leaders from Auburn United Methodist Church (Thomas Williams, Kristyn Guillette, Alexie Chadwick, Weatherly Summers, Molly Lewis, Carly Leavitt and Emmy Aldridge), students of Chi Chi Lovett's Auburn University elementary art education classes (Jenny Rodriguez and Jana Baldwin), the City of Auburn Jan Dempsey Art Center Director - Sara Hand, the Arts Education Coordinator for the city of Auburn - Cari Philen, and a group of outstanding parents (Caroline Fichtner, Ginny Hand, Jeanne Ryland, Jane Perry, Jodi Ruggles, Valerie Fetsch, Natalie Smith, Jason Smith, Michelle White, Lori Chase, Janie Gray, Melanie Iannuzzi, and Polly Machen) came to participate and provide help. Some were so engaged in the process and the value of it, they returned day after day to help out. They became invested in the project and several took ownership roles, choosing to help glue and paint to finalize the finished canvases on the last day.

The final installation is a four panel work that focuses on the rivers of Alabama. The local Alabama River was featured and students learned how it is connected to the Gulf of Mexico and that what happens in the gulf and on the rivers affects everything that surrounds them. Students began work on this installation in their English classes. They were asked to imagine that they were 6 years old and were enjoying being outside somewhere. They jotted down images that came to their minds. Then they were to imagine that they were 88 years old and had small children around them waiting to hear stories about the past. They were to think of one thing from nature that they wanted to still be here when they were 88 that they could tell these children about. The students came up with some wonderful stories, some of which will be displayed with the installation. The writings are currently being read and will be read by writers in Fairhope. A few will be picked out to get an award. The next step of the project was a presentation by Diane McKinnon of the Marine Resources Division, a biologist educator; she spoke to the science and social studies classes and told them of the various issues facing the coast and the wildlife. She also explained about the many species are dependant on clean water in the gulf. She talked about the oil spill caused by the explosion of the Deepwater

Horizon Oil Rig and how it has affected not only the environment but the economy as well. She also talked about the things that the Marine Research Center does. She showed many pictures of fish and various animals and talked about why it is important to these animals that we recycle and work hard to keep our waters clean.

Each English class came in to the auditorium for two 96 minute periods. They worked on multiple jean pieces painting marine animals, flowers, trees, insects, clouds, and many more things that they would miss if they weren't here in the future. Some even painted the Toomer's corner trees. The painting was so popular that the English teachers that came with their students painted blue jean pieces to be included on the installation. The entire project took the over 495 students involved for an adventure in environmental installation work, and had painted denim covering the room for days. Indeed, the overflow of painted denim took over the science lab (how appropriate! Since they were covered with the study of the scientific world, they looked great on the black lab tables) The two rooms were a buzz of painting, thinking, exploring, researching (pulling out laptops to look up images of species, or looking at Marine Resource fishing calendars). Some students brought in their own jeans, and after creating some small pieces to add to the installation, they went on to decorate their own jeans or jeans that had been donated. Some students shared one pair of jeans and painted either one leg or a common theme on the jeans. One group painted an alligator with the legs of the jeans as his mouth. Since all of the students who painted this wore braces they added braces to the teeth. The 9th graders in Mrs. Logan's Studio in Art classes also participated by painting the background canvases and adding their own pieces to the installation. A group of four students was picked to paint on tar paper which was used to represent the oil spill and its impact on the marine life of the Alabama coastline as well as the Gulf of Mexico. This will be displayed with the rest of the panels. Students would stop by between classes to show their friends what they drew or to see if their work was picked to be placed on the panels. The work that wasn't picked was returned to the English teachers who will create smaller installations for their individual teams. By doing this, almost every students work will be displayed somewhere.

This project has the potential of reaching out to a great many viewers. Betsy is working with Nancy Raia to find dates for the installation to travel. The first place it was on display was at Auburn City Fest on April 30th, 2011. How do we measure the success of a project of this scope? Let it travel and watch the impact. Right now, all the students are very proud to point out their pieces in the installation, and the beaming faces as they stopped in during the last two days to see it getting pulled together is something we will never forget