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ARTSBRIDGE TO THE YAVAPAI CHILDREN:
A DESERT ECOLOGY UNIT IN VISUAL ART

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&

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“It’s just fun! I never used clay before. It was my favorite art project. I liked doing clay, and I learned how to make things pop out. Clay was my favorite project because I liked to do an owl. I liked clay because I’m good at it. We made clay things of our Yavapai Trail.”

In the above comments, Yavapi third graders express their excitement about an ArtsBridge Program called “Our Place in the World” that came to their school for 10 weeks in the spring of 2002.

WHAT IS ARTSBRIDGE?
ArtsBridge is an arts education outreach program that started in 1996 at the Claire Trevor School of the Arts at University of California Irvine. The goals are to provide high quality arts programs to elementary school children and to provide scholarships for arts students who apply to conduct arts-related workshops. ArtsBridge reaches under-served schools that cannot afford arts teachers. The program offers arts teacher-scholars in music, dance, theatre or visual arts to schools that apply for them each semester. A grant in Fall 2001 from the U.S. Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) supported the expansion of the program from eight University of California campuses to a total of 15 universities in four states, including ASU (UC Artsbridge. 2003).

Dr. Mary Stokrocki, Professor at Arizona State University and faculty mentor, worked with art scholar-teacher Laura Hales who was one of her graduate students, to offer an art class to Yavapi third graders at the Hmañ 'Shawa Elementary School, Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation, Fountain Hills, Arizona. The 10-week program was based on the theme “Our Place in the World”(www.artsednet.getty.edu) and included exploratory art criticism, art history, and creating art components. The program began with a prequestionnaire and a pre-drawing of what they like to do, oil pastel and watercolor resist, and ended in a clay relief. Earlier, Hales introduced third-grade students to an art inquiry discussion based on a painting of a girl by Navajo artist Shonto Begay (Clover & Jim, 1997). They learned about the concepts of foreground, middle ground, background and center of interest. Students also learned that “art is making something special!”
VISUAL ARTS PROGRAM 2002: THE YAVAPI TRAIL

The last four-week unit, called "The Yavapi Trail," integrated art with desert ecology, which was a subject they were studying in their homeroom (ASU Artsbridge, 2003). The students created a desert trail alongside of their school campus and studied the indigenous plants and animals that lived on or near the trail. The art project was to create a desert scene that was made from clay. Students had to incorporate a background, middle ground, and foreground, and center of interest in their clay-slab relief sculpture. They also had to repeat something three times.

The first week, students chose photographs of the outdoor desert trail they created and examples of desert animals and plants from books and magazines to create images that they used in their own clay relief projects. They drew three thumbnail sketches and enlarged one larger sketch.

The next week, students practiced clay techniques with small pieces of clay and tools (coffee stirrers, plastic knives), toothpicks, plastic knives). The next week, they finished them. **Precaution:** Some students may be allergic to clay or severely dislike brown clay [anal fixation], so have an alternative color in case.

Hales showed them a finished clay relief sculpture for motivation and the step-by-step procedures. Figure __ shows the background line, middle ground with some deserts plants, and foreground with a pop-up lizard in relief. She first showed how to roll out the clay with a rolling pin and reminded students to keep the clay thick [one half to an inch]
so it won’t fall apart. She also demonstrated clay techniques that were **subtractive** and how carving out an area can make it recede into the background. She also offered **additive** methods --how to attach a piece of clay (cookie shape) to the slab by **scoring** the back of the piece, and using some water to connect it solidly. **Scoring is a method of** adding scratches in pieces of clay to be joined together. Scoring and applying slip (creamy clay like glue) to such roughened surfaces creates a bond that holds clay pieces together. Definitions of concepts come from the Art Dictionary website (Delahunt, 2003).

Ms. Hales provided photographs, magazine pictures of desert plants and animals, and a planning worksheet (3 squares for thumbnail sketches) with one larger square for the final sketch. She also pre-formed the self-hardening clay squares for each child and kept them moist under plastic to keep it from drying out.

The third week, she showed them how to **texture** their clay pieces by smoothing the surface with water and how to experiment with rough textures with various simple tools, like a stick or fork. Throughout the lesson she reinforced new vocabulary words and gave students a list for their folders. She informally monitored their technique and offered additional suggestions. Finally, she reminded students that their clay piece had to be **three-dimensional**, seeming to have, height, width, and depth. This clay piece would be in relief--flat in the back with pieces popping out.

During the last week that was their final assessment, Hales asked students to identify the subject matter (the plants and animals) on a worksheet. Students also pointed out the spatial elements (the background, middle ground, foreground and center of
interest) in their clay work. Five out of the nine students on said that the clay project was their favorite art project. Some comments from the post questionnaire included, “Clay was hard (difficult); It’s just fun! I never used clay before. It was my favorite art project. I learned how to make things pop out. I liked to do an owl. We made clay things of our Yavapai Trail.”

Students later guided their parents along the ecology trail that they constructed and pointed out desert subject matter—animals and the cactus names that they had learned and spatial concepts (the background, middle ground, foreground and center of interest) in their work. A local Yavapi artist was also invited to speak to students.

Other assessment questions were What is art? (ART IS MAKING SOMETHING SPECIAL!) What kind of art is this? (Ceramic clay relief); How thick should clay relief plaques be? (More than a half to an inch thick), and How do you attach the clay? (Slip & score)

PARTICIPANTS’ REACTIONS

Classroom teacher, Jacqueline Harris, reflects on the ASU ArtsBridge experience: "The ArtsBridge Scholar, Laura Ramson Hales, did a great job. We did many watercolor activities and each child has their own sketch pad, pencils and cushion so we can sketch outside. It's beautiful here. The children are also developing a trail guide coloring book and drawings of an ethnobotany trail we have created"
Laura Ramson Hales comments,

I think that in my case, the elementary school is excited about continuing an arts program in the future. I have received very positive comments about the value of the lessons. Ms. Lewis and an office worker mentioned to me that they really see a difference in the students’ drawings - they have improved from the lessons. My goal wasn't to improve their art, but to get them excited about it and confident! I hope that's what they meant! I learned a great deal from this teaching experience and have a much better appreciation of what the teaching profession entails. The students' enthusiasm for the art projects did not go unnoticed by the school administration. The role model idea is important; students begin to see themselves as having art careers, and it helps them to see that others have art careers. There needs to be a counter-movement to the current trend of closing down art classes in the schools. Schools need to see that when art is taught in a way that is standards-based and well planned, the students can really benefit. This is the value of ArtsBridge.
ISSUES

Participating classroom teacher subtly communicated:

- **Need to look good.** They correct students’ grammar instead of leaving students’ bilingual messages fresh and unhampered. This is due to pressures from the State Aims testing.

- Wish that their students’ artworks deal only with **positive image making**, not the realities of everyday life that the theme “documentary photography” demands

- Desire for a coloring book, so final **negotiations** included some student artwork

- The program demands a tremendous **amount of work** with **limited funds** for materials.

- Liability for injury is nebulous.

FUTURE SESSIONS AND PROGRAMS

In the Fall of 2002, Artsbridge funded scholar Barbara Fischer, an outstanding undergraduate student. The Administration and Dean were so impressed with her program that they visited the school and featured her work on the websites. Her unit theme was “My Community: A Photographic Documentary” for second graders at the Kenilworth Elementary School In Phoenix with a predominant population of bilingual Chicano students.

The theme of the unit was "**Documentary Photography.**” Students explored the purpose and process of documentary photography.” The term “documentary “means
making a record and the word “photography” is drawing with light. They learned compositional elements, new viewpoints, and photo techniques by studying the work of an accomplished artist, Dorothea Lange, and her Art in Context—the Great Depression. Students participated in an Art Inquiry discussion of her famous photograph, Migrant Mother, based on questions that included the subject matter, composition, viewpoints, and why the photo is important. Composition concepts included: background, middle ground, and foreground and candid or posed. Technical concepts include d viewfinder, lens, sand hutter button. Student used 35mm camera to record three aspects of their community: their families, their school, and their surrounding businesses around the school. Students compiled their work in individual portfolios and created a group project fabric wall hanging or mixed media that depicted a cognitive map of their community, by using the media of drawing, painting and photographic transfer. Students assessed their own photographs by explaining their subject matter, their composition and viewpoints, and why the photo is important.

The Spring 2003 program features an Arts & Science Unit on Photography Old and New that consists of explorations of pin-hole cameras and digital photography at the same school with sixth graders. Another program is at Northern Illinois University.

**STATE STANDARDS**

1AV-F1. Select and use subjects, themes and symbols in works of art.

(PO1)
AV-F3. Demonstrate knowledge and use of a variety of techniques, processes, and media to create two-and-three dimensional artworks. (PO2)

AV-F4 Apply the elements of art and principles of design (e.g., showing perspective and varying the size of objects in a landscape to create space (fore-middle-back grounds) create and control mass, form, and space constructions. (PO1, PO2)

REFERENCES


Figures

- The teacher Laura Hales shows students how to add details to the clay. Students practiced first to get familiar with the clay.
• Her step-by-step example shows how to start with the background first [top left]. The second step is to add a middle ground [top right] that included a prickly pear cactus. A tortoise overlaps the cactus. A larger example on the right bottom is of a lizard done by the teacher.

• Student example of a desert jackrabbit that is planned by drawing first [at the top] and made in clay at the bottom. The rabbit is partially made here and is attached like a cookie.

• This student example the background horizon line is scratched in first, then a small cactus is placed in front on the left and a bigger saguaro is added on the right of it. The child added a cutout clay owl with some rough texture for feathers [on the far right].

Final relief examples include a lizard at the top. On the second row from the left is a snake, then an owl, and a small rabbit that is leaping out at you. The first or closest row shows another lizard to the left, and turtle with a prickly pair cactus, and an owl to the far right.