

FIELDWORK

NOTES FROM EXPEDITIONARY LEARNING CLASSROOMS

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Teaching and Learning Through the Arts:

PRACTICES, PRODUCTS, AND CONTENT

BY KEN SIMON

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How can teaching in and through the arts deepen and enliven learning?

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The fine arts will play more than a superficial role in our lives only when our lives become more like arts.

—Martin Engle

Here is a vision for the arts in the Expeditionary Learning high school:

There is a museum-like hush in a high school humanities class as students look closely at reproductions of paintings hanging on the classroom walls. These paintings are from a famous series by Jacob Lawrence called the Great Migration, which tells the story of the migration of African Americans from south to north at the beginning of the 20th century. As students wander through this gallery walk, they gaze at the paintings, take notes, and ponder the meaning behind the paintings. Their charge is to use their developing knowledge of the history of the Great Migration, and their developing knowledge of line, shape, form, and style in art to make plausible inferences about the meanings of the painting series.

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Keila McCracken, a student at Schoolcraft Learning Community in Bemidji, Minnesota, sketched this pencil drawing "Forsaken" for a language arts project during an expedition on WWII (see story on page 6).

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Teaching and Learning, continued from page 1

Unpacking this short example reveals several aspects of Expeditionary Learning's take on learning in and through the arts. First, the arts can offer an engaging window into important content and can help shape an investigation. In this case, Jacob Lawrence's artwork provides a window into an important period in U.S. history. Second, teachers model and require students to use comprehension strategies to make sense of the art they are viewing. In the example above, students draw inferences that are informed by their background knowledge of the time period and Lawrence's artistic style as well as by textual clues in the paintings. Third, the students' study of the Great Migration and Lawrence's techniques neatly scaffolds for a project leading to a product: to develop their own series of paintings to depict the experiences of African Americans upon arriving in the north, and to make sure their art work makes intentional use of shape, color, and balance.

ARTS AND CONTENT

By beginning with the Jacob Lawrence series on the Great Migration, students found an interesting and challenging avenue into significant historical content. More importantly, they did what all good historians do when trying to understand the significance of a particular time period or event; they used a diverse array of primary and secondary sources. The inquiry process that a historian (or scientist) uses, relies on diversity in source material and analysis of evidence.

Students who are trying to understand the significance of the great migration not only viewed Jacob Lawrence's work but also read short stories from Langston Hughes, poured over census data, diaries, and at least two secondary accounts of the great migration from noted historians. In essence, the students became historians and great works of art became another source of historical evidence as well as the subject of aesthetic study.



Max Roszkowski, a student at Schoolcraft Learning Community in Bemidji, Minnesota, sketched this pencil drawing to accompany a poem for a language arts project during an expedition on WWII (see story on page 6).

ARTS AND INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

The arts also provide a way for teachers to enhance and diversify the kinds of classroom practices they use. Certain artistic practices can be used as a way for students to gain a greater understanding of a topic or to synthesize their understanding of complex material.

As part of understanding how African Americans were treated when they reached northern cities, the students read journals of migrants. Yet, what was important in the journals and what larger understandings did students gain? In order to help students both synthesize the information from the journals and determine the importance of that information, teachers placed students in groups of 10 and instructed them to develop a readers' theater program. The assignment guidelines included the following stipula-

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Transforming Knowledge and Content in and through the Arts

WITH CARRIE HAYMOND-HESKETH, SARAH MORELL, AND NANCY VALLE

At Genesee Community Charter School in Rochester, New York, the music, physical expedition (i.e. movement/gym), and visual arts teachers participate in learning expedition planning sessions with classroom teachers. Classroom teachers attend arts lessons alongside their students and arts teachers often work with students in the classrooms. In this way, arts instruction is always tied to expedition content and, furthermore, arts instruction consistently informs content and skills learned in the classroom.

Recently, we sat in on a discussion between music teacher Carrie Haymond-Hesketh, art teacher Nancy Valle, and physical expedition teacher Sarah Morell about teaching content through the arts.

As part of a second-grade investigation of the lifecycle of a salmon, for example, children composed a song “First Come the Eggs” with Haymond-Hesketh.

Haymond-Hesketh: During the first music class students sat in front of the fish tank and quietly observed the movement of the fish and water for a half an hour, writing descriptive words about what they saw on a clipboard. The next week students brought the words to life through movement and then came up with musical motives for their descriptive phrases.

Still, the song lacked a melody and so I asked the children to create melodic phrases by selecting combinations of different notes in a major scale. One phrase built upon the next, and very soon we had a tune around which to center the fish motives. Then the students made up lyrics based on their knowledge of the spawning cycle of salmon.

Next, we had to organize the motives. More brilliant than anything I could have designed,

these seven-year-old children decided that the smallest instruments, the glockenspiels, should begin the piece and symbolize the eggs. Gradually, they added in bigger and bigger instruments that represented each stage of the fish's life until the climax of the piece was reached, at which point they played the melody. Then, in reverse order, the students subtracted each instrument until only the glockenspiels were left, symbolizing the cyclic nature of the spawning cycle.

Valle: In all of our arts programs, observation is essential to understanding the subject. Beginning in Kindergarten, learning to draw through all of the senses teaches our students to know the subject well. Recently, in our study of pre-history, students have been drawing rocks and fossils in order to learn more about them. By feeling the texture, judging the weight, listening to the sound they make when tapped, and following the contours with their eyes, our students are able to represent their understanding of fossils accurately. The next step for our students is to move from observation to communication.

One day last week the fourth grade came back from an extended field study of the Genesee River Valley with a focus on geology, water, and landforms. In their portfolios, they had collected many river drawings from varied locations along the river, all sketched from observation. I could



Sara Dill sketched this illustration of the Upper Falls of the Genesee River during a fourth-grade expedition at Genesee Community Charter School in Rochester, New York.

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Back in the classroom, I asked the students to spread out all of their river drawings for analysis. They then wrote reflectively about each drawing. Students recorded the caption, scientific data, and historical information.

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tell by the quality of the drawings that the students used all of their senses, sketched carefully, and really looked. Once our students have the skills to draw from observation, it's essential that they go further. What is it that they want to communicate to us about their experiences?

Back in the classroom, I asked the students to spread out all of their river drawings for analysis. They then wrote reflectively about each drawing. Students recorded the caption, scientific data, and historical information. They also recorded personal observations: things they wondered about, were intrigued by, and were compelled to communicate. Their final goal will be to create paintings for the covers of their individual expedition books, and so the students are now in the process of examining the written analysis and reflections to determine which drawings will be the most important and compelling to include in these final compositions. In synthesizing fact and feelings, they are now composing. The result, the cover, is not only representing their knowledge, but will exemplify voice because it will represent what was personally important to our students.

Sometimes abstract concepts come alive for children when learned through movement. In one recent second-grade expedition on the beginnings of the universe, the students were learning the difficult concepts of center of gravity and orbiting. During dance class, they began by looking carefully at photos of the Pilobolus Dance Company because the dancers often manipulate the center of gravity in their work.

Morell: Many children began making shapes and holding each other's hands, and so they really had to understand the center of gravity. We explored the idea that you need someone else in order to balance like a cantilever. If a student let go of her partner, they would both fall over. The students explored all the various ways they could do that. They found ways of exploring level changes. The classroom teachers said they were excited about the clarity of the students' understanding about the center of gravity.

During one fourth- and fifth-grade expedition last year students studied the role of government as they discovered the power of their own voice to create change. Valle worked with students to produce a videotape documenting the expedition. In the process, they learned video camera skills and technology, photojournalism, video editing, story sequencing and organization, and narration.

Valle: There was a strong connection between the writing trait of voice and my work with the students on the film. When I use the word voice in visual arts, students immediately know what I mean. They know it's that extra thing that makes their work expressive, individual, and unique.

Students working on the film became independently responsible for deciding when to capture footage, and labeling each tape with the five W's of photojournalism: who, what, where, when, and why. They also added their compelling reasons for saving the footage. In the end, students filmed more than 70 hours of expedition experiences.

We established group protocols for editing by consensus using one laptop computer with movie-making software and an LCD projector. First, students watched their previous weeks' tapes silently and reflectively, taking editing notes when necessary. Next, we edited the film in crews, stopping and starting, deleting, and using hand signals to signify when a clip was essential. As time went on, the fourth graders began to see patterns and the big ideas. Because they were comfortable with thinking abstractly in all other subjects, the students decided to not connect the film clips in a time linear order. They began to see some of the bigger ways that they share their voices in crews, the classroom, school, and community and the resulting video, *Bringing Voices Together*, became structured on a concentric circle of ideas, rather than a timeline. This way of representing knowledge transforms it into an artistic and aesthetic mode.

The abstract concept of voice was clarified for the children as they documented the expedition (described above), studied scat singing and jazz composition, and learned Capoeira (an Afro-Brazilian martial art dating back to the 1600s) and its connection to hip-hop.


Morell: Both Capoeira and hip-hop are art forms that existed under oppression and were transformed as a mode for self-expression. That connected with the fourth graders' classroom study on government and making a change within the charter school movement. The children learned some basic movements that hip-hop borrowed from Capoeira and they could begin to see how the hip-hop movement transformed the original dance form. One day I asked the students to each provide a word that would describe hip-hop, and they created a list. After looking at the list, I replaced the word hip-hop with Capoeira, and we discovered that the list of words described both hip-hop and Capoeira and that there were many similarities and connections between the two styles of movement.

Each student then came up with a movement that described three words of their choice, such as community, personal, and power. We put these movements together in one big dance. We had to find each child's personal voice and then weave it together as a collective piece. In doing this, they explored the skills of composition. The end result was isolated movements that flowed together. Each movement had a meaning. On the surface, it was just movement, but the students knew what they were saying to the audience. For exhibition night, the students performed the dance twice. The first time they stopped after each movement to explain what it meant.

Sometimes you're able to take an idea and find a different way to express it, so it's no longer just a word because you've taken time to internalize it. For example, if I read about *community* and understand its definition, I've reached one level of comprehension. I can take that definition and I express it through my body or through my voice or through painting. It's not just reading, *community is*. I'm really representing it. If I'm showing you, *this is what community is*, through movement, I've embodied it and it's not just on paper. Now I'm getting at a deeper, more sophisticated level of understanding.



Haymond-Hesketh: The closest thing we came to expressing voice in composition was in fifth grade. They really got the jazz thing because they related it to the debate they were planning for their final exhibition. When listening to jazz, the students could hear the dialogue that happens between jazz musicians on stage. In music class, the products of this understanding were compositions that started with an inner weaving of vocal scat conversations. Once instruments were added, the composition didn't really sound like jazz. What mattered is that the music originated with the concepts of jazz improvisation and debate.

Fourth graders, who were studying jazz while making their film, were beginning to understand that when you have something to say, it matters how and when you say it if you want your message to be heard. The same goes in jazz, and these analogies were made explicit to the children. It is essential that jazz musicians listen to each other and speak to the topic or rather the key and time signature at hand. Sometimes you need to use a loud voice to get your point across musically and sometimes you need to soften your tone to be heard effectively. Using your voice gives you a sense of power and people creating music together really drives that idea home. 

Sharde Garcia sketched this illustration of the Upper Falls of the Genesee River during a fourth-grade expedition at Genesee Community Charter School in Rochester, New York.

Infusing Art into a WWII Language Arts Project

BY SARA BREEZE

During our interdisciplinary learning expedition on World War II and world conflict at Schoolcraft Learning Community in Bemidji, Minnesota, our sixth and seventh graders had been studying books, stories, poetry, and art by children and young people imprisoned in the Terezin concentration camp. As an extension of this immersion, I thought that a poetry and art project centered around the Holocaust would make a great language arts focus.

We would sketch the pencil drawings during language arts time with some support from our art teacher. She taught me the correct art language so that we could reproduce some of the same techniques used by the artists in the concentration camps. For instance, we looked at a pencil drawing by Holocaust survivor Israel

Bernbaum, which he had done to accompany one of the poems of fellow survivor Inge Auerbacher's.

"What do you notice about this drawing?" I asked the students.

Chris responded, "I notice that some things in the drawing appear larger because they are closer, and some seem smaller because they are farther away. Like Inge seems bigger than the guards, but really she isn't because she's closer to us in the drawing."

"Yes," I answered. "There are layers of depth or perspective."

"I notice that the bricks are really dark, but the street she's on is lighter," Marcy chimed in.

I encouraged Marcy. "Yes, the shading is very noticeable. Artists call that value."

Our conversation continued and I saw how analyzing the art helped students engage in the content from a different perspective.

"I notice that Inge is surrounded by high walls. It must be very frightening not to be able to see out or to see what's around the corner," Talia said.

Michael said, "And look how her doll is just hanging there sideways. It makes her look sadder."

"You're right," I told the class. "We get a vivid feeling from the drawing. In art and poetry, that's called imagery."

Perspective, value, and imagery then became the important criteria on the rubric for the art portion of our project. Of course, the students also noticed that the drawings were done in pencil. They had learned from their readings that art supplies were at a premium during WWII, and that concentration camp artists drew in pencil not out of preference but by necessity.

LITERATURE OF THE HOLOCAUST

Fireflies in the Dark: The Story of Friedl Dicker-Brandeis and the Children of Terezin by Susan Goldman (Holiday House, 2000)—Kind, motherly, and courageous, Friedl inspired hundreds of children through art even as the threat of death hung over them in the Terezin concentration camp.

I Am a Star: Child of the Holocaust by Inge Auerbacher (Puffin Books, 1993)—Inge is one of 100 children who survived the Terezin concentration camp. From the ages of seven to 11 she wrote poetry on smuggled paper. Her friend, Israel Bernbaum, illustrated many of Inge's poems.

Facing History and Ourselves: I Promised I Would Tell by Sonia Schreiber Weitz and Susan Belt Cogley (Facing History and Ourselves, 1993)—Sonia went from a Polish ghetto to a succession of five concentration camps. Sonia also wrote poetry as a means to help her cope with the fear and suffering all around her.

The Artists of Terezin by Gerald Green (Schocken, 1988)—This biography of artists in the Terezin concentration camp includes more than 100 pieces of artwork produced by the imprisoned Jews.

Therefore, the students quickly agreed that using pencil would be the correct medium.

LISTENING TO STUDENTS

The sixth- and seventh-grade students liked the idea of illustrating a poem as part of language arts class. However, they had been learning so much about the events of WWII in other subject areas that they did not want to limit this project to the events of the Holocaust. The students had been learning about major battles of WWII, the war in the Pacific theatre, Japanese internment, the role of organizations in resistance efforts, struggles and sacrifices on the home front, the bombing of Berlin by the allies, Blitzkrieg, women in the work force, and many other aspects of the war. They convinced me that we would have a much richer poetry/art project book at the culmination of our expedition if they could write a poem and make a drawing that accompanied the poem using a WWII topic of their choice.

There were many teachable moments and opportunities for research as this project progressed. For instance, Sam Drewes came to me with an idea for her poem and illustration. She knew she wanted to write a poem about what it must have been like to be the wife of a soldier, waiting at home for news, good or ill. But she did not know how the army contacted family members if a loved one was injured or killed in battle. I sent Sam to our classroom library of resource materials and websites so that she could investigate this problem for herself. She found a picture of a WWII yellow telegram with these forboding words, “We regret to inform you” Sam knew she wanted to include these words in her poem.

We had a fine book of WWII poems and illustrations to give to friends and parents at our celebration of learning—poems and drawings about a variety of topics having to do with WWII. I was glad I listened to my students.



Sara Breeze teaches language arts at Schoolcraft Learning Community in Bemidji, Minnesota.

WAITING

Waiting in silence for a moment of relief,
I think of when we'll be reunited,
the moment he comes walking across the field to our home.
I'd tell him that I love him,
He'd say with a smile,
"I missed you so much,
I'm happy to be home."
I will myself not to think the thought,
Though the same two words repeat in my head-
what if....what if....what if....
The fear of receiving a haunting telegram,
that awful report,
"We regret to inform you."
As thoughts of us race through my head,
I look out the window across the barren field.
The dog begins to bark as he races through the field.
My one thought again is,
what if.....
I worry as I see a man in uniform coming.
But the dog is happily licking his face.
Could it be....?
I rush to him with my arms open wide.
As he embraces me in a hug,
tears fill our eyes and stream down our faces.
We hold each other tight,
never again to let go.

— Sam Drewes



The poem and accompanying pencil drawing, *Waiting*, were done by Sam Drewes, a student at Schoolcraft Learning Community in Bemidji, Minnesota, for a language arts project focused on WWII.

Becoming Artists:

READING, WRITING, AND CREATING WEST AFRICAN FUNERARY FIGURES

BY CARLA GETZ

“Have you ever considered honoring a deceased relative by creating a small sculpture to adorn a basket of the ancestor’s bones?” I posed this question last April to my seventh-grade art students at C.S. Porter Middle School in Missoula, Montana as they viewed photos of Gabon funerary figures. They, in turn, bombarded me with questions such as, “Why would anyone want to put their relatives’ bones in their artwork?” and “Would all the bones fit in that small basket?”

My students were primed to read about

Gabon Funerary Figures to gain more information. But before feeding this interest, I asked students to predict why the Gabonese people created these sculptures. As they read articles gathered from various websites, students discovered the importance of ancestor spirits in western African culture. Again, students looked at images of the sculptures and discussed how these forms were created, what materials were used, and why the figures were shaped so uniquely.

These young learners were busy decoding the cultural messages of these sculptures while asking questions like, “Are those wings on the Gabon figures?” I introduced the Adinkra or goodbye cloth of Ghana and how these West African people also honored ancestors. Students were beginning to understand the importance of keeping their ancestors’ memory alive to people from Ghana and Gabon. The topic became more compelling and personal when I asked students to create their own—cardboard figure in honor of one of their own ancestors or another person they knew.

I wanted my students to produce a quality product that reflected new knowledge. To attain this end these students needed rich background knowledge. When C.S. Porter began working with Expeditionary Learning Schools, I had already worked on aesthetic literacy with the eighth-grade English program. Aesthetic literacy involves experiencing, interpreting, and responding to images as another form of reading. Through this process, I had realized that involving reading and writing with art production increased students’ understanding of the artistic process as well as their literacy skills.

WRITING IN THE ART ROOM

My great grandpa was a kind and nurturing person. He sheltered me from the rain and made me feel good about spiders. He taught me not to be afraid of “daddy long legs.” He taught me to love many things that grow. That’s why I love him. And he will always stay alive in my heart.

—Sarah Hendricks

I chose to honor my grandpa as my Gabon figure. I picked traits such as greatness, charisma, lead [sic], cooperation, interdependant[sic], love, safety, security, wisdom, knowledge, excellence, genuineness, authenticity, faith and trust in God... faithfulness, precision, and skillfulness. . . . He used his greatness to help other people whenever they needed help. . . . He could talk to anyone, he must have passed that trait on to my sister and I. You could feel safe and secure when he was around. It felt like he knew everything. . . .

—Samantha Riordon

Students at C.S. Porter Middle School in Missoula, Montana picked the symbols used by Gabonese to create their funerary figures. Each symbol represents a person’s character trait. Above are excerpts from the descriptions students wrote about the person they selected to honor.

The aesthetic literacy experience, plus the inflexibility of our schedule to allow me to work with grade level teams at Porter, lead me to try investigations that were separate but related to learning expeditions in content areas. For example, choir teacher Saxon Inabnit and I developed an investigation around the social studies curriculum of West Africa, which all of our students study at some point during the year. Because of my experience with aesthetic literacy I knew the material presented to students must have authenticity. To me this means the students can make personal connections to the art and can see themselves as artists.

In preparation for the funerary project, I wanted to give the students the art knowledge and skills they needed to really become artists and, in the meantime, infuse some necessary art history into the curriculum. Art is an invaluable tool for teaching literacy to students as they interact and make meaning of words in a different symbol system of line, shape, texture, space, and color. The class took time to read about African textiles, and to study and practice the art composition skills of repetition and variation. We also interpreted and responded to the body of Pablo Picasso's work influenced by African art. We discussed how artists such as Picasso become familiar with a cultural art form and adapt the art into a personal style of expression. Students were seeing more and more how they would be working like artists in this project.

Many of these students who were engaged in

Through this process, I had realized that involving reading and writing with art production increased students' understanding of the artistic process as well as their literacy skills.

these activities in art were attending choir the next period of the day. In choir students learned the rhythms of Africa, experiencing African drumming performed by an expert musician who had traveled extensively in West Africa. After the drumming performance the students went on to develop their drumming skills. In both choir and art, students were representing their learning through product or performance. A University of Montana student from Africa, a guest speaker, answered many student questions about what it was like to live in an African country today.

Equipped with knowledge of early West African social structures, economics and geography from social studies, the sounds of African rhythms from music, and various images of West African art, students working like *real* artists set out to honor their chosen person. Background knowledge was imperative to the artistic process in this lesson. Students first had to match the character traits of their honored person with symbols. As students investigated the different Adinkra symbols and the meaning of those symbols, we discovered that Adinkra symbols are evolving and new ones are still created. This gave students permission to create their own symbols for personality traits if necessary. Students designed their figures from cutout cardboard with white and black acrylic paint and black marker for symbol development. In identifying those traits that made a person special the students were revealing what they value in their lives and for some students this task alone involved risk.

Peer critiques helped students improve



Madison Brambo, a student at C.S. Porter Middle School in Missoula, Montana, created this funerary figure.

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their craftsmanship during the production phase. Students put their art in progress up for the class or small groups to critique, focusing on composition or another specific skill we were developing in class. When projects were completed, students wrote about their artwork and the process. In this written reflection, I asked students to describe how their art was successful, how they could improve their work, or what they could have done differently. The combination of preliminary drafts, peer critiques, and reflective writing build strong craftsmanship. (A personal belief of mine is the more students connect that they are working like real artists the stronger the final product.)

Writing in the art room? It clarifies students' thoughts. It takes the students through a solid reflection of just what they were doing while creating their artwork. The student writing tells me how thoroughly the student thought through the direction of the art piece. After completing the Gabon figures I asked students to write a paragraph about the person they were honoring, including a special time or remembrance of this person (see sidebar on p. 8). Reading comments such as one about a grandfather who taught, "to love things that grow in the garden and not to be afraid of spiders" or "I think my grandpa has wisdom without having gone to high school," convinced me



In an arts expedition at C.S. Porter Middle School in Missoula, Montana, Emily Fagerquist made this Gabon Funerary Figure.

these students had taken their art to a personal level.

The student-produced Gabon figures were the backdrop at an evening performance entitled African Celebration in which the seventh-grade choir performed their African drumming. Next, the Gabon figures with student writings were exhibited in the citywide student art show at the local mall.

In this investigation, students not only produced a fine piece of personal art that was part of a large public exhibit, but also gained enrichment on West African culture they were studying in social studies. Students experienced how artists borrow ideas from different cultures and art periods to convey personal thoughts. These young artists were making connections from West African culture to their own, while seeing themselves as artists describing and honoring a significant person in their lives. ✎

Carla Getz teaches art at C.S. Porter Middle School in Missoula, Montana.

ENRICHING LITERACY THROUGH ART

Reading related material while students work is another literacy teaching tool I use frequently. Once students had their idea for their funerary figure laid out and were completing the marker work, I read the folk tale, *Cow-Tail Switch* (from *The Cow-Tail Switch and Other West African Stories* by Harold Courlander and George Herzo), which ends with the words "a man is not really dead until he is forgotten." The *Cow-Tail Switch* is a proverb of the Jabo people of Liberia, which illustrates the idea that a dead person lives on in the minds of those who knew him.

—Carla Getz

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tions: each group will have eight minutes for their performance. This performance must include the dramatic recitation of significant quotations from the migrants' journals. The group's collection of quotations should articulate clear themes from the journals. The students must be ready for a post-performance debrief where they will have to explicitly identify the themes they worked with and discuss how those themes were reflected in the selected quotations.

The students spent several days selecting quotations and discussing the themes that emerged from the journals. While the actual readers' theater production generated a moving experience, most of the student learning happened on the way to the production.

ARTS AND PROJECTS LEADING TO PRODUCTS

Student creation of artwork in the context of a compelling topic has the potential to deepen student understanding of content and concepts, increase motivation, and demonstrate both content understanding and the development of artistic skills. Students studying Lawrence and the Great Migration can create their own visual series, incorporating skills from learning in the arts and understandings about the migration from learning through the arts.

During this investigation, teachers ask students to develop a series of paintings, which portray the experiences of African Americans upon arriving in the north. Students choose a city and a theme (such as neighborhoods, work life, social life) to depict in their series. At the same time, teachers also ask students to make sure their artwork makes intentional use of shape, color, and balance.

Throughout the expedition the visual arts teacher has been doing parallel work with the students. The students study the work of Jacob Lawrence from an artistic perspective with a focus on shape, color, and balance. They not only learned how Lawrence used these elements and principles, they also practiced using them as a way to convey an understanding of complex events. This type of instructional scaffolding

helps students reach a point where they can demonstrate artistic understanding and craftsmanship as well as content understanding.

The finished product allows teachers to assess students' current level of artistic skills as well as certain aspects of the content. However, the product, by itself, cannot possibly reveal all that the student knows or does not know about the topic. In addition to a balanced variety of assessments of learning conducted throughout the investigation, the teacher adds an additional component to the product—an artist statement that will help the teacher understand the depth of content knowledge as well as the intentional artistic decisions students made around shape, color, and balance in creating their own series.

ARTS AND LITERACY

In many ways, the parallels between reading works of art and text are almost too obvious to mention. When we read art and text we are looking for deeper meanings than the author or artists are intending. We can assume that full comprehension rarely comes with the first glance or with knowing all the words in a text. The reader of art and text must employ strategies to truly comprehend meaning.

Students studying Lawrence's series were not just learning about the Great Migration, they were also engaged in a reading strategy study on inference. While these students were familiar with inferring while reading fiction, this was their first chance to apply the comprehension strategy to works of art.

In order to use the inference strategy effectively, a great deal of scaffolding took place before the gallery walk (described in the first paragraph). In pairs, students began to develop inferences from only one painting in the series. Those inferences, as well as background knowledge collected from primary and secondary source readings, created a base for students to bring to the gallery walk. With that base, student inferences in the gallery walk reflected a more complex understanding of both the time period and specific events surrounding the migration.

As students work on their own migration se-

They not only learned how Lawrence used these elements and principles, they also practiced using them as a way to convey an understanding of complex events.

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ries, they periodically engage in critique sessions where they use focused revision questions that reinforce their understanding of artistic elements, principles, and content. Questions such as: “Does the use of color, shape, and balance work to convey the meaning you intend?” and “Does the painting reveal the feelings and experiences of the migrants?” In the debrief, the teacher guides students to the insight that throughout the production, critique, and revision stages, they are working with elements that are analogous to the traits of writing (development of ideas, organization, style). This realization helps students connect the process of creating art to the task of writing.

In Expeditionary Learning Schools there are multiple opportunities to infuse the arts into teaching and learning. A particular artist, medium, or style can offer a window into expedition content and provide a specific context or case study for an investigation. A motivating learning experience for an investigation is an art project leading to a product. A well-designed product will require students to develop artistic skills, hone their craftsmanship, master

the elements and principles of the artistic medium studied, and represent significant content. Other learning experiences such as readers’ theater and role-plays offer a way for students to live with and in significant content as well as to represent the meaning they draw from that content. On a daily basis, arts-enhanced instructional practices such as tableaux, or sketching that requires close observation, keep the learning active and engage critical thinking. The explicit teaching of comprehension strategies to “read” art provides students with access to the multiple meanings that art affords. Through content, practice, and product, Expeditionary Learning Schools make learning happen in and through the arts. 

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