

Young Students Get Inspired by Art

Wendy Siegle for Houston Public Media (PBS NPR) 2010

Elementary students from a few Houston area schools have been given a unique opportunity to connect with art. From the KUHF NewsLab, Wendy Siegle reports on a new project aimed at inspiring students to get creative and start writing.

“What kind of art did he make? What kind of materials did he use? Well, we’re going into the galleries and we’re going to find out.”

Houston-based art critic Susie Kalil is touring an art exhibition at The Menil Collection with second and third graders from Edgewood Elementary.

“Now what kind of mask would this be? Look there’s—he drilled a hole again, what would that hole be?”

Kids: *“A door? An eye?”*

Kalil: *“An eye, it would be a single eye.”*

Kalil and the students are part of a project launched by non-profit organization, Writers in the Schools. For this, the organization teamed up with the Menil Collection to give students a hands-on approach to thinking about art and how it relates to them. The goal is to actively engage young students with the artwork in order to stimulate their creative imaginations. Jack McBride is the organization’s program manager.

“Most of these kids probably never have the opportunity to go to an art museum. The Menil collection is a free museum, open to the public, but these kids don’t necessarily have access to it. And so, this is a great chance to bring lots and lots of kids to a space they’ve never seen before and to be among these wonderful pieces of art.”

As Kalil guides the students through the Joaquin Torres-Garcia exhibition titled, Constructing Abstraction with Wood, she explains each piece and asks the students questions. She says she’s enthusiastic to be a part of the project.

“Rather than spend more time preaching to the converted through high end art magazines, I really wanted to help children learn how to enter a work of art.”

She says the Torres-Garcia exhibition, which is full of shapes, symbols and wooden figures, is perfect for sparking interest in young students.

“All the children immediately lock into the symbols. And all of them are raising their hands to name the symbols and also just, it becomes like a domino effect about what each symbol means to them.”

After the tour, the students take about ten minutes to write a story based on symbols they connected with from the exhibition. Cassidy Sapon chooses the heart. She’s the first to read her story to the rest of the group.

“Two people loved each other they talked to each other. They got married, they bought a house...”

For phase two of the project, Houston artist Nicola Parente will visit the schools to help the students create abstract wood pieces using inspiration from their own writing. The Writers in the Schools program has been around for twenty-six years and provides creative writing workshops for students throughout the. Robin Reagler is the Executive Director of Writers in the School. She’s been with the organization for twelve years and says the program is invaluable asset to the community.

“I can remember when I was a child. I didn’t have ways to express myself, and I think the joy of being a part of this organization is that thousands of kids get to sit down and write and draw and paint and tell their story.”

After visiting the Menil Collection, the students at Edgewood Elementary will have even more to add to their story.

From the KUHf NewsLab, I’m Wendy Siegle.

Audio:

<https://www.houstonpublicmedia.org/articles/news/newslab/2009/12/24/18566/young-students-get-inspired-by-art/amp/>