

Windows on My World



Lou Ann Vidmar

What do you do when you decide to get replacement windows in your home? You make an art project out of it. These portals that allow light in, provide a view outside, or give the viewer a look into the lives of others, became the medium for high school students at Covert Public Schools. The purpose of this project was to provide students a way to let others see into their worlds.

A number of old casement windows removed from residential homes were donated to the school. We wrote a grant to the Jordan Fundamentals Grant Foundation for funds we needed to rehabilitate the donated windows. Originally the grant was written to fund a project with twenty-five participants, but it ended up funding a total of forty-eight students. The donated funds were used to purchase Plexiglas, a clear plastic, and window putty. Plexiglas is much safer to use than glass and students can use materials that bond well with the clear plastic.

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Preparing the Windows

To begin, students choose windows from a selection of sizes and number of panes. They learned how to safely remove old caulk and glazing points

to get out the old glass. They sanded the window frames and measured the spaces for replacement acrylic. When the Plexiglas arrived, students

were shown how to put the pieces into the window frames, use glazing points to hold them in and how to roll the caulk

and smooth it out with a putty knife. Students used paper masks when sanding and safety glasses during the prepping of their windows and worked together to help each other get through the process more quickly.

It was fun to hear the excitement of one student who replaced a broken window at home, using his new knowledge. He was so proud that he could do something his parents didn't know how to do.

Art-Making

Some students approached their windows from the viewpoint of an insider looking out and created images of how they see the world, picking social issues or commentary such as the war in Iraq and the destruction of Hurricane Katrina. Others chose to allow the audience to look in the window to get a glimpse of the student's life. One



student put her feelings into a self-portrait as she struggled with the pain of watching her father fight a losing battle with a brain tumor.

Students brainstormed ideas and drew out sketches of their ideas. When the windows were ready, students used their sketches and transferred their ideas using grease pencils to draw on the Plexiglas. Students used acrylic paints, transparent and opaque glass paint, glitter, glue, and other materials on their windows. One student even sewed a curtain and added a curtain rod to the window.

Exhibition

Students used sawhorse brackets and wood pieces to create a display system. The sawhorse legs were painted to complement their project. At a school-wide celebration, the windows were installed and opened to the public for viewing. The project was a big hit with over 500 people viewing the exhibit. The project was documented from beginning to end for purposes of the grant and advertising. Information about the project was sent to various institutions around the state to establish exhibition sites.

Reflection

Reflection papers from the students expressed the frustration of working with such an unusual medium, yet they were excited about the outcome of the projects. At the beginning, students were unsure how they would turn out or if they would be successful in transferring their ideas. The process took a full marking period due to the ordering of specific sizes of acrylic and the addition of creating display stands.

Without the grant funding, this project would have been impossible due to the cost of materials outside the normal art budget. The donation of the windows from various sources allowed the students to learn skills towards home repair and possible job opportunities, as well as giving them a voice to express their concerns when words are not enough.

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NATIONAL STANDARDS

Students conceive and create works of visual art that demonstrate an understanding of how the communication of their ideas relates to the media, techniques, and processes they used.

WEB LINK

www.covertps.org/teachers/vidmarl.htm