

The Chihuly Experience

Jennifer Maille

It all started when I received a pamphlet from Franklin Park Conservatory (FPC), a botanical landmark located near Columbus, Ohio. The pamphlet was filled with beautiful images of Dale Chihuly's colored glass pieces that I had never seen before! Judging from my own reaction, I could only imagine how my students would feel about experiencing these beautiful glass artworks up close.

The glass artistry of Dale Chihuly is fascinating both in its process and its end product. His ability to work with a team of people reminded me of Warhol's Factory and how art can be a team effort. Sometimes the media we use lead us to surprising results, and sometimes the collaboration between an artist and his or her media is the real artwork.

The Field Trip

The Chihuly experience started out as a school-wide field trip for grades three and four. To make the most of the experience, our goal was to tie in the organic glasswork of Dale Chihuly with the science and natural world of the FPC greenhouse. Before students went on the trip, they watched and discussed a presentation that included photos of Chihuly's work and video clips of his work process and installations.

Prepped, excited, and equipped with cameras, students were ready to experience Chihuly. The FPC staff led individualized tours that focused on either Chihuly or nature (the classroom teachers focused on nature). The FPC also provided activities that related to plants, habitats, and even a Chihuly "Hot Shop" experience.

My original plan was to end the experience with the field trip and Chihuly presentation. However, with the amount of excitement shown for this newly discovered art, I decided to add

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one more element to my students' experience.

"Sketching" Like Chihuly

I decided that since I couldn't have students actually blow glass, I would focus on how Chihuly "draws" his ideas before the glass is blown. For this, I moved all of my art tables to the side of the room, covered the floor in tarps, and bought





Left top: Chandler Cargill, grade four.
 Left bottom: Jaren Howard, grade three.
 Right top: Raven Hamilton, grade four.
 Right bottom: Jamie Robson, grade three.

took a few minutes, but they all found it to be extremely enjoyable.

Writing Connections

As a follow-up and part of the assessment of this experience, I asked students to write a letter to Dale Chihuly that included their feelings about his work and their experience with both the FPC and their sketching. After the letters were collected, I sent a group of them along with some pictures to Dale Chihuly's studio in Washington.

A second activity was the use of a Venn diagram to compare and contrast Chihuly's work to that of the artist Andy Goldsworthy and installation artists, Christo and Jeanne-Claude. With this, I showed students a variety of slides and discussed how each artist worked with nature in a unique way. It was a great way to experience artwork that may sometimes be difficult to work into a classroom project.

Assessment

Because of the variety of cross-curricular connections in this experience, I had several different points of assessing student learning along the way. After the field trip and sketching experience, students completed a rubric that focused on their sketches as well as the original Chihuly presentation. The writing connections (such as the letter to Chihuly) also allowed me to informally assess student understanding of the experience. ☺

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NATIONAL STANDARD

Students use different media, techniques, and processes to communicate ideas, experiences, and stories.

WEB LINKS

www.chihuly.com
www.fpconservatory.org



mend watching a clip. He lays large pieces of paper on the floor and uses squirt bottles and brooms as "writing tools" to create colorful sketches which he then shows to his glassblowing team.

When each class came in, I did a quick demonstration of this sketching technique (they had already seen the video clips).

a variety of mops, brooms, and discount buckets of paint. I filled squirt bottles with a variety of tempera paints and spray bottles with watered-down tempera.

If you have never seen video of Chihuly sketching, I would highly recom-

I asked them to use spray bottles or brooms to create a background layer and then use squirt bottles to form shapes they could envision being turned into glass towers, reeds, floats, or chandeliers. Students loved this activity! The actual "sketching" only