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Grant Exposes Young Artists to Field of Sculpture

Around Town Written by Heather Zimar



Students in Ithaca High School Art Teacher Jackie Richardson's sculpture class were recently tasked with solving a problem—gravity—with art. Given limited supplies of only tape, newspaper and wire; they were encouraged to create a standing four-foot structure.

"The challenge is to take this material with no structural integrity on its own and make it stand up," said visiting local sculptor Ann Reichlin.

The spring 2015 project was part of an Ithaca Public Education Initiative (IPEI) Red and Gold Grant awarded to Richardson and Reichlin. Red and Gold Grants are one-time awards of up to \$500 for projects that enrich learning in the Ithaca City School District.

"The purpose of this project is to introduce the idea that making art often responds to a problem that needs to be solved," Richardson and Reichlin stated in their grant application which also included the second purpose of introducing the idea of limitation. "Creative solutions are often triggered by narrowing the options that one has to work with."

While students wrapped, rolled and curled newspaper into various shapes and sizes, Reichlin encouraged them to experiment. "No one is going to judge you. It's something that can be done in a spontaneous way. It's the element of surprise that makes it interesting to do this."

One student's structure resembled a pinwheel, while others looked like versions of cubes, pyramids, and towers. In the final phase of the program, students developed their structures using plaster gauze, editing and transforming them in the process. Reichlin noted that this underscores the third objective of the project that students learn that often "artists begin an artwork with a simple premise and then tease out and develop the potential of that idea as they go along."

"It was wonderful to see my students respond to the visual challenge that was presented to them," Richardson said. "Inspired by Ann's work, students created individual sculptures where only size and material parameters were given. Work evolved into architectural and organic forms."

While the grant program focused on the idea of structure, creative process, abstraction and scale, it also included a presentation by Reichlin about her career as an artist. Students were offered real-world information about the field of sculpture and the opportunities available to artists.

"We were very fortunate to have had a sculptural artist present her work and collaborate with students as they embarked on their individual pieces," Richardson said. "She offered so much valuable insight and feedback to students. They in turn created these really engaging pieces that were spontaneous and visually dynamic."

Lucy Randl, a sophomore, expressed, "I thought it was interesting to have a class where you can take art and make it into a real job. She has interesting projects underway and it was awesome to see her passion for them when she talked. It's also cool that sculpture can be applied to many different fields."

Reichlin said she likes to introduce this project to young artists who quickly realize how to create art without stringent guidelines. "I like the spontaneity. You recognize that you can make something out of nothing. It's fundamental to sculpture."

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