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SWEETHEARTS

Sue Liedke

My pre-kindergartners have had the pleasure of hosting local street artists in our art studio, and it's been an awesome opportunity for them to connect with artists in our community. One such collaboration was with the wheat-paste artist Amber Lynn “Amberella,” who visited us and shared her methodology and messages of love, empowerment, and solidarity.

Power Hearts

Amberella’s work can be seen on walls and buildings all around Philadelphia and other major cities. As I began introducing her art to my students, I found that many of them had seen her work in their own neighborhoods; they were excited to have this personal connection! For this lesson, we specifically focused on her *Power Hearts*—giant paper hearts inspired by the famous Val-

entine’s Day candies with messages of love and positivity inscribed on them.

Using projected photos of her installed work, we read the words together (“Wake Up,” “I Believe in You,” “You Are Not Alone,” and others) and considered who the audience would be. Students quickly picked up on the idea that the messages in the words were meant for the artist *and* the viewer. Amberella speaks to this in an artist statement:

The *Power Hearts* are about self-love and positivity toward others. They become messages of encouragement, hope, and love for everyone. Once my work hits the streets, it’s no longer just mine, it’s yours as well.

Messages of Love

Students imagined what kind of person could benefit from hearing these

messages—someone who was feeling tired, sad, or lonely. With the audience in mind, students came up with their own messages of love for Amberella’s consideration: “B My Sister,” “I Love Your Cape,” and “Give Me a Rainbow” were all contenders, but ultimately “No Matter What,” (a favorite phrase from a favorite book) was selected for this collaboration.

Preparation

As I couldn’t take students out to actually wheat paste walls in our community, Amberella and I decided that we could apply the same methodology to prepared canvases. The art classes leading up to her visit were spent applying gesso and painting canvases with monochromatic color schemes. We had canvases of all sizes and painted with acrylic, using the easels, tabletops, and even the floor as workspace. Some



Street artist Amber Lynn “Amberella” visited pre-k students to plan, create, and paint messages of love and positivity.

students really have a ball attacking a canvas! Our efforts resulted in a rainbow of prepped canvases ready for some powerful messages.

Meeting Amberella

On the day of Amberella’s visit, she showed images of both her street art and design collaborations featuring

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her *Power Hearts*. She introduced students to the tools she uses—her images printed on big rolls of paper, scissors to cut them out, a bucket for

her wheat-paste mixture, and a large brush for applying her hearts to city walls. My students were a bit star-struck and asked her lots of questions about her work and process. I love when students get to meet real artists and know that being an artist could be their job someday!

Wheat-Pasted Positivity

After Amberella’s introduction, we got to work and mixed a batch of wheat paste in a large bucket. Some students poured the powder, some poured water, and others stirred. A classroom teacher was on hand to help cut out the paper hearts. The “readers” in the class identified the phrases, and collaborated to decide which hearts should go on which canvases.

Amberella showed students how to paint on the wheat-paste mixture:

Smooth the paper onto it, and cover it with another layer of wheat paste. My sensory-friendly artists got up to their elbows in wheat paste as they smoothed the papers. After much handwashing, Amberella left with many hugs and thank-yous. Our canvases set over the weekend and were ready to hang the next week—a whole rainbow of positivity for visitors to our school! 🌀

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NATIONAL STANDARD

Connecting: Relating artistic ideas and work with personal meaning and external context.

WEB LINK

Artist Website: www.amberellaxo.com