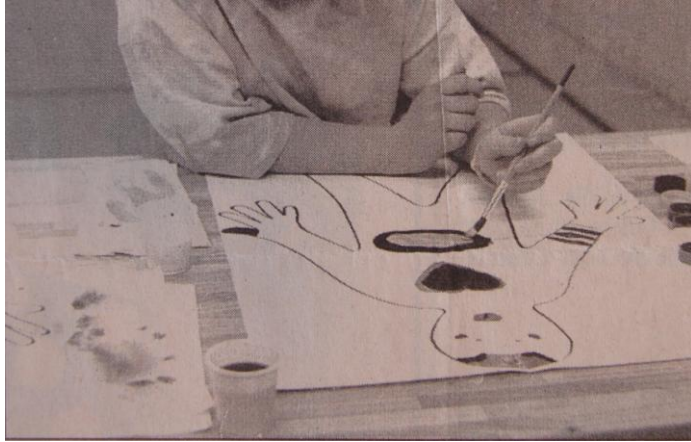




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## Kids talk through their art



*Monroe Elementary School student M.J. draws "sadness" where she feels it during Wayne Forbes' art class Tuesday afternoon.*

PEORIA – Twelve Monroe school students from different social and economic backgrounds are learning more about their individuality through art.

The fifth-and sixth-graders are a part of the Options in Health and Education Center's Creative Self-Awareness Project.

"image-making is an important process and we feel it is important for people to feel free to be creative," said project instructor Wayne Forbes. "What they are creating relates to them and how they are feeling about their circumstances and themselves."

Using art as the common denominator, he said, the program aims to create better understanding among the children.

The project consists of eight sessions over four weeks, with a variety of assignments.

The first week, for example, students were asked to make a mask that reflected the way they felt at that moment. They were given one hour to complete the mask and then asked to write a paragraph about what they were feeling when they made it.

"We had them write the paragraph so they would not forget whatever feelings they were having at the time," Forbes said. "Then two days later we had a feedback session where the student could discuss those feelings any significant images on the mask."

"Some students may have problems at home, school or elsewhere, and this type of exercise gives them the chance to get these problems out and better understand them."

In another exercise, the children used fingerpaints to visualize their emotional reaction to different kinds of music.

The children also will explore feelings about their futures.

"In the fourth session we will ask the children to draw a picture of the future – what it looks like and where they think they will be," Forbes said. "Children often...are anxious about the future and this gives them a chance to express these fears and anxieties."

He stressed the need for art in children's lives, which he said is often omitted from school programs today. But the student aren't the only ones who can benefit, said Forbes, who also is a professor at Illinois Central College. He has used similar exercise in his art introduction courses there and found them to be very helpful.

A lot of the students...haven't been in school for a long time and have a lot of fears and anxieties about what they are undertaking," he said. "...It helps to alleviate these fears and brings unity to the class.

"It has worked out very well."