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Subconscious ART

South Side school students complete 4-week creative project



D. Y., 10, listens to music that will influence her artwork while B. T., 10, puts the finishing touches on his piece. The two fourth grade students at South Side Catholic were participating in a four-week creative self-awareness project.

You are what you eat, and maybe you are what you paint – in your subconscious that is.

Getting to know what is tucked away in the subconscious, getting to know yourself is the purpose behind a creative self-awareness group project at South Side Catholic Community School; Wayne Forbes, art instructor at Illinois Central College and on the staff at Options Center in Peoria Heights was the instructor.

The four-week project, funded by a grant from the Peoria Area Arts and Sciences Council's Arts Regranting Award, involved the 15 fourth graders at the school. The youngsters met with Forbes for an hour on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons.

The first two weeks of the project, explained 49-year –old Forbes, was spent "finding yourself. Who do you relate to? What are your emotions – fear, anger?"

The group then moved on to discover their: feelings zone. We used a cut out human form, and they drew what their feeling looked like and where they are located in eh body."

The drawings were done during one class period, and the youngsters discussed their feelings at the next.

And week three," Today," explained Forbes, "we're going to paint to music. You interpret what the music says to you."

For the project, Forbes and Julie Hall, 4th grade teacher, squirted six different colors on the youngsters' paper-plate palettes. "If you ever want to get out of teaching," Forbes commented to Hall, "you can go into food service."

Each child picked up a brush, paper cup and napkin to complete their supplies; the papers on which they would be painting had already been divided into three rectangles and were placed on brown-paper covered tables around the room.

"Don't start painting until you hear the music," cautioned Forbes. "today, you're going to stand up to pain; that way you can move around -dance if you want."

The latter message was well received by a couple of fidgety boys in the group.

"If it's slow music," continued Forbes, "you may want to lean over. Also, if you stand up, you're less likely to pill pain on yourself," he said noting some in the group had forgotten their pain shirts.

Forbes, a graduate of Illinois Wesleyan University with a degree in art received his masters in fine arts from the University of Illinois, taught a Eureka College before joining the ICC faculty in 1977. Since 1984, he has been a professor of art at ICC specializing in sculpture and drawing.

It was art, he said, that saved his life, admitting he was not a good student. Through art he was able to express himself.

Forbes had only three rules for the young artists posed with brushes read to go.

"you can't share ideas until Thursday. No talking and don't pay attention to what others are doing.

"second, try not to mix paints on the palette...you can mix paint on the paper. And three, keep your compositions within the rectangle.

"Now stand quiet; take a couple deep breaths and close your eyes."

Taking the breaths was the easy part. Fourth-graders don't stand quietly too well nor is it easy for them to keep their eyes shut.

After a few moments of listening to the musical selection, the youngsters began to pain. Believe it or not, the only sound in eh room as the rustling g of paper; however, Forbes said he could hear the squeaking of his ankle brace as he walked around checking the students' work.

The youngsters listened more intently to the second musical selection; stood more quietly and had an easier time keeping their eyes closed. The soothing sounds were also reflected in their artwork – calmer, less frightening than the dark, mysterious colors most used for the first selection.

The final piece evoked giggles and a lot of movement from the youngsters. It would be the happiest, most cheerful of the children's' three paintings.

"I did an artist in residency in Downers Grove for a month," said Forbes, 'half a day in school and half a day in the student in the school. That's when I learned admiration for teachers. After that half day with the students, I was too exhausted to work in the studio" unfortunately, he said, by the time students who are not art majors get to college, their creativity has been stifled. They are afraid to make mistakes. "Sometimes we have to make mistakes; experimenting and making mistakes are the keys to creativity."

Through the classes that will also be held at St. Bernard's and St. Mark's, "We are tapping into what is going on in the inner world of these students. A lot of information comes out in artwork. I don't like to call it art therapy/; this isn't in-depth psycho therapy, but a way for them to become aware of who they are."

When next Forbes and the students met to discuss their artwork, the similarities in the colors, images and what they said they felt were obvious.

The first piece of music most agreed was mysterious, dark and scary – reflected in their paintings by dark, somber colors, thunder clouds, dark forests, graveyard.

How would they feel if they were inside their paintings? Lost, confused and scared.

The next piece affected the youngsters differently. While some saw it as happy, cheerful, others felt sad and scared. Two girls were reminded of the deaths of grandparents; a boy feared his mothers would be kidnapped; another boy thought of rain on a "shiny day' While a girl painted a waterfall that expressed her mixed feelings of happiness and sadness.

The accentuated beat of the third musical selection resulted in upbeat paintings. No one raised a hand when Forbes asked if any felt sad while the music was played.

Most of the youngsters related their feelings to movement of some kind, and one girl even thought it was "like a volcano – the music stopped and then it exploded."

Drawing, concluded Forbes, comes from the unconscious. Draw the monsters in your and then decide what you want to do with them – change them or destroy them. He chose to destroy the monsters that had been disrupting his sleep for years. He painted them away, and they have never returned.