Arts Integration

In a co-taught fifth grade classroom

Mrs. Martell, Mrs. Boles and their students have been working hard to integrate art into their classroom this year. Thanks to all of the training and in-service provided by the Wharton Center, here is a sampling of what we have accomplished so far this year.

First we integrated art with our writing. Students wrote personal narratives. During the final stages of revision, we had them find the heart of their story, or an important turning point. We then read the book Crow Call by Lois Lowry. This book is an example of a personal narrative. Together we identified a pivotal scene and looked closely at both the sensory images in words and in the illustration. We looked at the clear descriptions the author used to help us mentally create a picture in our minds, and then we looked at those same minute details in the illustration. We also looked at colors the illustrator used to set the mood, the way the main character was centered on the page and how the reader’s eye was drawn there first. We also read Two Bad Ants by Chris Van Allsburg, specifically to look at perspective and how point of view is defined by who is telling the story. Students then reread their own scenes and added detailed sensory images and vivid description. Finally, by using this revised writing, they created illustrations of the scene focusing on color, placement and perspective.

Also in writing, we have been learning how to write opinion or persuasive pieces. Our major fifth grade project is integrating an opinion essay with visual art, graphic art, and performance poetry. That will be happening the end of March. However, we have finished our opinion essays and learned many strategies for writing a cohesive, persuasive piece. We then had students think of an event or a product that they would like to advertise (real or imagined.) Students created brochures paying close attention to the descriptive words they used and the persuasive verbs. They learned about and tried to apply text features such as title, headings, subheadings and bullets. We looked at brochures and identified the use of font, space and color as well so that students could reference these when doing their own work. Volunteers presented their brochures with the class on the overhead projector.

Our district just adopted a new reading curriculum for kindergarten through fifth grade called Reading Street. This curriculum is broken up into units. Each unit has five main selection excerpts, one read per week. The sixth week is a review week. Mrs. Martell and Mrs. Boles have been using that week to integrate art.

Tableau means frozen picture. It is a way for students to act out what they have learned through body placement and facial expression. Students learned about and practiced body control in order to maintain a frozen position for a given amount of time. We also looked at facial expressions and what emotions they portray as this is a key component of tableau. Students were able to perform tableau after reading the excerpts Ten Mile Day, A Day at the Beach, and The Chi’l-in purse. The reading objective was to retell the story in sequence. Each student was put into a group. Each group was given part of the story to perform. One person per group was the narrator. This person had to read aloud the scene being portrayed fluently and with accuracy. The other members of the group had to hold the tableau position for that scene.

After we finished reading all of units 1 and 2, we held a literary dinner party. In groups, students looked back on the ten selections we had read thus far and identified a list of the character in each excerpt. Independently they reflected on each character and answered questions about who they thought would get along and who might have some conflicts, who had things in common and who were very different. Each student then chose three characters to invite to a dinner party. They had to identify two character traits per character and support those choices with evidence from the text. Students then made an inference about what each character would wear to the dinner party, what dish he/she would bring to pass and what gift he/she would bring to the host/hostess. Next, students wrote a script of dialogue that would be held during dinner. Finally, students performed their dinner parties in groups of three.

We were fortunate to have Miss. Diane from Happendance come to our school as an artist in residence. Students had lots of fun on our stage learning about dance movements and dance directions. We learned about the use of space-high, medium and low, as well as body control. After we read Weslandia in our Reading Street text, we performed a silent retell. We watched a Charlie Chaplin short and analyzed how he was able to convey a message without talking. We paid particular attention to body movement and facial expression. This summer during the institute at Wharton, teachers were gifted with a performance by Doug Berkey. He does a lot of work with masks and he gave teachers resources that we could use in our classrooms. We tried them out with this silent retell. Students were put into groups of five. Each person in the group had to be one of five characters from the story: Wesley, Mom, Dad or the tormentors. Each student was given a packet of nine masks. They had to think about their character and how that character’s emotion changed during the story. They then had to choose two masks that conveyed those emotions. Next we watched a movie that Mrs. Shoup, our art teacher, told us about that teaches students the emotions of color. Students then colored their masks based on the emotion their character was feeling. In order to apply what we learned from Miss Diane, students were also given a dance requirement. Students had to incorporate a dance movement and a dance direction as a visual cue to the audience that a scene was transitioning. Students had to have three scenes in the retell: beginning, middle and end. In this one retell, we had elements of dance, theatre and visual arts, as well as the academic objective of retelling the most important parts in a meaningful sequence.

Last summer I was awarded a grant through our Eaton Rapids Education Foundation. I purchased two Ipads for my classroom. One of the great features of the Ipad is the video camera. We have taped our performances and watched them together on the “big screen” in our room. Students are able to critique themselves and each other with the format I liked….and I wish……Students love getting the chance to see themselves and each other perform, and I love how it allows me to document how we’ve been applying what we’ve learned. I am very thankful to the EREF for this ability.

Mrs. Martell, Mrs. Boles and our students would like to thank the Wharton Center and the Kennedy Peforming Arts Center for giving us the opportunity to learn about the visual arts, music, dance and theatre. Not only have we had fun, but it has also helped us to think differently and more deeply about the content we are learning in fifth grade.