

Arts Across The Curriculum
A Cross-Age, Integrated Language & Visual Arts
Poetry Writing & Bookmaking Project
Anderson Valley Elementary School
2015-2016

An ongoing arts partnership established in the Anderson Valley Unified School District with artist and arts educator Cathleen Micheaels, this cross-age, integrated arts project has enriched the Anderson Valley Unified School District's elementary and junior high school communities for the past ten years, bringing poetry writing, decorative papermaking, printmaking and bookmaking to students, teachers and families. This year's *Arts Across The Curriculum* project builds directly on past years and is an example of how carrying out an ongoing partnership like this year to year can grow, making rich connections to the curriculum at each grade level and building on skills from one grade to the next.

The 2015-2016 *Arts Across the Curriculum* project carried out integrated poetry writing and bookmaking with 286 K-6th graders, with 5th-6th grade students serving as Art Buddy mentors for the K-1st graders and family and staff volunteers along with junior high and high school student *Arts Leaders* and *ReThink Your Drink* team students helping bring together the annual *Family Arts Night*. The project engages students in eight sessions January-May and culminates with a school-wide book display and poetry presentation at Open House in May as follows:



- ❖ In the K-2nd grade, writing odes to fruits, vegetables, animals and trees inspired by the great Chilean poet Pablo Neruda's odes. In K-1st grades, making decorative paste papers and accordion slat books with cut paper cover collages of fruits, vegetables or animals, with three Art Buddy mentor visits from the 5th-6th grade students to help K-1st graders write odes and make books. In 2nd grade, making decorative paste papers, accordion balance books with hand lettering and miniature print cover labels.



- ❖ In the 3rd grade, writing tribute poems about birds students are studying in class, using Christopher Smart's poem *For My Cat Jeoffrey* as inspiration then making dos á dos (or back-to-back) book structures with hand lettering, miniature prints, bird nameplate collages and cover labels.



- ❖ In the 4th grade, writing *Where I'm From* poems inspired by educator Linda Christensen and drawing on cultural/family traditions and characteristics then making more involved dos á dos book structures with hand lettering, inside photo and paper collages and cover labels.



- ❖ In the 5th grade, writing poems about states students are studying in class, using Walt Whitman's poem *I Hear America Singing* and Carl Sandberg's poem *Chicago* as inspiration then making triptych (or tri-fold) broadside books with hand lettering, inside paper collages and miniature print cover labels.



- ❖ In the 6th grade, writing tribute poems to current and historical figures, leaders, thinkers and artists students are researching in class for biographies then making more involved dos á dos book structures with hand lettering, hand sewn pages, miniature prints, biography nameplates and cover labels.



Along with deepening teaching and learning, the project also strengthens connections to the home through a *Family Arts Night* which brings families together to make art while enjoying an affordable, healthy dinner. This very well attended and successful annual event is a true cross-program collaboration involving family and staff volunteers along with junior high and high school student *Arts Leaders*. This year's *Family Arts Night* in April built on *The Food We Eat PhotoVoice Project* at the high school to engage families and students in making poem mini-print collage flag banners all about food while enjoying a delicious Mexican posole dinner.



This year's tremendously successful after school event was held on Thursday, April 21st and brought together 110 families, students and staff volunteers for a fun, art-filled evening which featured an opportunity for families to write poems, make mini-prints and then create collage flag banners all about food to put on display in the school's cafeteria as part of an effort to liven up the cafeteria space.



Additionally, the project brings families together with an end of the school year exhibit of all the completed K-6th grade poem books which are on display in classrooms at the school-wide Open House where two students from each grade are selected to read their poems aloud as part of the Open House program presentations for families. This year's Tuesday, May 31st Open House was a sweet culmination to the 2015-2016 integrated arts poetry writing and bookmaking project, with students proudly reading their poems aloud in English and Spanish as part of the program followed by students and families visiting classrooms to read poems from the completed books.



As noted in end of project evaluations by participating teachers the *Arts Across The Curriculum* project supports teaching and learning which connects with students and teachers of all experiences and backgrounds and brings a tremendous sense of accomplishment and pride to students across the K-6th grade span:

"Our first grade students are required to write reports about animals as part of our curriculum. Ms. Micheaels builds on with that by having students write odes about their animals. Ms. Micheaels is so organized and calm with the children [and shows how] this not so easy project can be accomplished by six years olds with time and patience. It is worth it all to see the pride the children have in their finished poem books. My students love having their fifth grade "art buddies" come to help them write their odes and make their books. Ms. Micheaels' training of the older students really shows in their ability to gently guide the "littles" through the process. It is lovely to see the older children working with my younger students in the same calm way Ms. Micheaels models." – Elizabeth Wyant, 1st Grade Teacher

"How is it not [connected to the curriculum]? Reading, writing, editing, finding synonyms, interviewing families and a biggie . . . public speaking! I am always amazed at Cathleen's gentle, loving but firm teaching style—she helps all our students get amazing products (finished poem books) regardless of their ability!" – Vickie Brock, 4th Grade Teacher

This year's *Arts Across The Curriculum* project received funding from Anderson Valley Arts, the Arts Council of Mendocino County and the Mendocino County Office of Education *Get Arts in the School Program (GASP)*, the Anderson Valley Education Foundation and the Anderson Valley Elementary School arts program—this matching of funding sources is an excellent example of how funding is leveraged to extend and expand the project to serve all 286 K-6th grade students and their families through collaboration with the 14 K-6th grade classroom teachers and the Special Education, Family Literacy and AmeriCorps HealthCorps programs.