

Community Based Project: Urban Renewal and the Art of Kenny Williams

The community outreach project is a new endeavor for the Beverly Arts Center. Our hope is to use this project to reach students in schools that may or may not have art programs. The idea springs from the artwork of Chicago artist Kenneth Williams. Kenny looks at run down areas of communities and draws what he thinks would be better. We have used this idea as a foundation and developed a plan for students to apply these same ideas in their own communities.

It is imperative for children to have opportunities for creativity. Creating, being active, and being imaginative are part of the learning process. This project will assist students as they investigate the world we live in. It encourages students to understand the artistic process as they collaborate and dialogue about what they can do to improve the world around them. This helps them to recognize that art is not only a means for self-expression, but also a way to learn about each other and the world as a whole.

Much like other projects we've done through the Beverly Arts Center, the community outreach project encourages "common sense", a sense of community and of commonality. Children are taking part in a common adventure by participating and sharing a common experience within their own community with the knowledge that this shared experience is occurring through the global community unrestricted by language or cultural barriers. Comprehending the needs for peace, hope and social change are not individual needs, but collective needs.

Students will have the opportunity to create their own individual projects inspired by the art of Kenneth Williams and work as a class or community on a final project that they will exhibit and present to the rest of the school or community.

Project Overview

Ideally students will have nine days to work on and develop this project.

One Day: On the first day at the beginning of the community based project, there will be an introduction and discussion with the students about Kenny Williams and how they might make a difference in their community.

Two Days: The students will begin drawing their ideas about how they could change something in their community (build better housing, create a new park, etc).

One Day: The students will present their completed drawings expressing their own ideas about how to make a difference in their community. The class will vote for one idea that they will develop into a class project.

Four Days: For four days the class will work on the final project. The class may decide to make a model, a mural or both to represent their idea. Each individual student will also further develop their own original ideas and create a final marker drawing of their individual proposals. Students may also write a letter to a city official to have their work considered for an actual project in the neighborhood.

One Day: On the last day, it will be a closure in which the school can present all the final projects that were done by creating an exhibit or having an assembly and inviting the school and/or community to come see their work.

Day One: Discussion and Reflection

1. Background information on Kenny Williams:

Kenneth Williams (b. 1969, Chicago, IL) is in his late twenties or early thirties, and is a lifelong Chicago resident. In his artwork he has a very specialized agenda. Using only colorful magic-markers with no preparatory drawing, the artist will look at an existing vacant lot and draw it as he envisions its development. Each street corner identified in his pictures is a real Chicago location, and Mr. Williams has imagined its development with various chain stores and their signage. Kenneth Williams has been making these drawings for as long as anyone can remember, and he hopes to have a long career.

(http://www.jsaslowgallery.com/artists/williams/williams_index.html)

(<http://www.accessliving.org/index.php?tray=content&tid=top624&cid=373>)

2. Show sections of the Video Sun Always Shining: The Art and Life of Kenneth Williams

3. Talk about Kenneth Williams' Quote:

“Art is the very blueprint of life itself. It creates lives and places where there is none and God made it so. Everything we use and everything we wear is created by art itself. Without art we wouldn't have our clothes, homes and businesses. It comes from the drawings.”

(<http://www.projectonward.org/kennethwilliams/>)

Kenny says that our homes and communities comes from art, do you think that is true?

Why or why not?

4. Discussion on Kenny's work:

What do you see?

What colors do you see?

Are there darker or lighter areas, or darker and lighter colors?

What kinds of lines do you see? (thick, thin, straight, curvy)

Do you see details- what kinds?

How would you describe this art? (line, shape, space, color and texture)

What does his work make you think of?

What does it make you feel?

Does it look like a real place?

Why or why not?

Can you think of a place in your city that looks like this?

Why do you think Kenny draws improvements into his cities?

Why do you think he uses so much detail?

Is there any part in this city that you can draw like him?

5. Discussion of Local Community:

Does his work remind you of your neighborhood?

What is similar?

What is different?

How do you think you could improve your neighborhood like Kenny Williams does in his drawings?

What would make your neighborhood better?

Or, what would you like to be changed or added in your neighborhood?

Why would you like that to be changed or added?

Why would that make it better for everyone in your neighborhood?

How are you going to draw that improvement?

The next time we meet you will be given the opportunity to create your own drawings about how you might improve your own neighborhood.

Day Two and Three: Individual Proposal Drawings

1. Class brainstorming on areas in their community that need improvement.

This will give students a number of choices to choose from to create their own proposals. For instance, the kids could have a list containing areas such as...

- Park
- Recreation Center
- Sports Complex
- school facility addition
- better housing

Depending on the area that you are presenting this topic and what the area needs will change the recommendations on the list. Also, if you are in a community where no improvements are needed (if there is such a community), the suggestion to help a less fortunate community could also get the students involved in a community based lesson.

2. Review what they saw in Kenny Williams video and art work:

The way that Kenny Williams sees an area, with bright colors and vivid signs, is not typically the setting that he has grown up around. To get the kids more involved here are a series of recommended questions for the students after the video...

- What colors do you remember from Kenny's drawings?
- What do you think the material was that he used?
- Why do you think he choose the material that he did?
- Where do you think Kenny gets his inspiration?
- Do you remember him saying whether or not he grew up in the city?
- Do you feel that others were motivated by Kenny's pictures and his attitude?
- Does Kenny use reference material or does he work from memory?

3. Individual Proposal Drawings:

In this portion of the assignment students will be able to use their own ideas and skills to brainstorm about the final result of this project. After collectively brainstorming about their ideas, students can individually examine what they would like to see built in their community through sketches. With pencil and paper the kids will be able to brainstorm and create a drawing illustrating their idea on how to improve their community. This may take one or two days to create a drawing that they can present to their classmates.

Day Four: Individual Presentations to class and Vote

This class period will give each student the opportunity to present their ideas to the class. Students can talk about appropriate and exciting ideas. This would also be a selective process the students could partake in. Students could participate in a private vote for a proposal or during a discussion they could narrow it down to three possibilities, talking among themselves, and then take another (more private) vote. Perhaps one on paper would be more appropriate for this vote.

Days Five –Eight: Group Project

After students have voted and decided on one community project. The class will also discuss and decide the best way to represent their idea. The class may decide to build a model, paint a mural, or both. Students will begin working on constructing a physical model and/or mural, taking turns working in small groups. Students who are not working on the model will continue to develop their own ideas into a finished drawing inspired by the art of Kenny Williams.

The instructor and the student who's idea was selected will create a drawing and plans for how they will execute the project and decide if they will create a mural, model or both.

Steps:

1. Instruct students that they all had great ideas to improve their community and they will have an opportunity to create their own finished drawing that will be on display with the class project. These drawings will be their own original ideas they proposed to the class and will be finished in full color with markers inspired by the art of Kenny Williams.
2. Students and instructor will decide how to represent their idea in a model and/or mural.
3. Students will brainstorm on ideas and sketch ideas for the community model and/or mural.
4. Selected student and instructor will create a drawing for mural/and or set a task list and supply list for model.
5. Set aside a specific area in which students will be able to work in small groups at a time on constructing the community model and/or work on mural.
6. Call small groups of students, about 4-5 students at a time, to work on building the community model and/or painting the mural, make sure each student within the class has had the opportunity to work on the project at least once before having groups repeat.
7. Instruct the remaining class that while the modeling group is working on building the model, they should be working on their individual detailed drawings.
8. Once students have completed their detailed individual drawings and the community model/mural, inform them how community plans get developed through the writing of a public proposal.
9. Talk to students about what a public proposal consists of.
10. Ask students who they should invite to see their project that might be able to help them make a difference in the community.
11. Show students handouts of what a letter to a city official might consist of.
12. Students will each write their own letter to their city official.

(Sample Letter to city official)

Date:

Our School

Address

Our City Official

Address

Dear City Official:

Our class has been working on a project to illustrate our ideas about how to make our community better. We think we have come up with a great idea. Although we are sure that the city has some plans of ideas in the works, we still believe that the children in the community would be thrilled to participate in the development of the community. I am not certain that this approach would meet your needs but allowing students in the community to be a part of something big would be a treasured experience.

We looked at the art of Kenny Williams, who has done numerous paintings of the city of Chicago. He took real places, real intersections, and constructed works of art that are viewed by so many people. His theme is thinking big and thinking better. In any given space, he visualizes what could be there, what remarkable building or signage should be there. Our project was inspired by his work and we would love to have you come see our work.

If you are available, we are presenting our work to our school on_____at_____. We would love to have you consider our project as a proposal that you may actually develop in our neighborhood. Even as children, we hope to make a difference in our own backyard.

Sincerely,

Student Name

Day Nine: Group Project Presentation

In order to close this community-based project, students will present their work through an exhibit and/or presentation to the school. The class may decide to invite the school board, principle and administrative staff, other classrooms and students, parents, or city officials to see their work.