



Madeira Board of Education, 7465 Loannes Drive, Cincinnati, OH 45243
Kenji Matsudo, Superintendent
Dave Bergan, Assistant Superintendent
Diane Nichols, Public Relations
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Madeira Sixth Graders Connect Globally Through Art

Madeira Middle School (MMS) sixth-graders learned first-hand that art has no language barriers.

In a recent cross-curriculum unit, Language Arts classes read *Pay it Forward*. In the story, a teacher challenges his class to come up with a plan to change the world for the better by doing a good deed for three people, then asking each of them to “pay it forward” to three others. The novel motivated the classes to take part in a community involvement activity – painting rocks with sayings of kindness, hiding them, and encouraging the finder to pay it forward. The unit also focused on the concept of ‘perspective taking’ while reading the book *Refugee*, a novel that tells the powerful story of three different children seeking refuge.

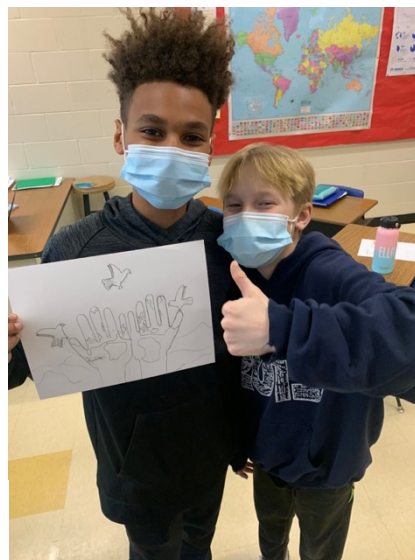
The unit was incorporated with sixth-grade art classes where the students participated in The Global Art Exchange – a K-12 program dedicated to breaking cultural barriers and building a kinder world while creating feelings of international friendship and solidarity. In a one-to-one exchange American students engage in artistic peacebuilding by sharing handmade, heartfelt artwork with kids from countries that are culturally very different from the USA - Russia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Syria, or Nigeria. Identities and locations of all children are kept confidential, and only first names are used.

Each student MMS sixth-grader created a piece of art to exchange with a child from Pakistan. Teachers were sent a link to a resource page about the children and the country, and an informational video. Students were shown a photo of the child they’d be creating their art for, and given prompts such as “What do you see when you think of peace, friendship, or kindness,” “Paint or draw a picture of your family or friends,” and “Picture a place or a thing that makes you happy.” After completing their personalized piece of art, their pictures were sent to Pakistan.

Students were elated when they received the art created for them by the students in Pakistan. “I think the Global Art Exchange was really cool because you are sending something across the world and someone actually touched their own hand to this paper and we then get to hold the paper in our own hands,” stated Henry Gravlee. “It’s cool to think about what the kid would feel like when they got my artwork.” Eli Stuff said, “While taking part in the Global Art Exchange, you really get to see and notice the difference between countries and how other people live.”

Another component of The Global Art Exchange is that students trace an outline of their hand on the back of their artwork, which allows all participants to symbolically touch hands across the world. In the words of MMS sixth-grader Chloe Kauffman, “I learned how even if we are thousands of miles apart, we can connect through universal language which is art, and we can experience what they are going through even if we aren’t personally with them.”

MMS sixth-grade teachers Jami Couzins, Elizabeth Rossi-Riel, and Kara Foley put together the cross-curriculum unit, which was facilitated by sixth-grade teachers Laura Halonen, Brandon Opichka, Natalie Wildfong, and Rebecca Durkee.



Pictured with the art they received from Pakistan (left) Theo James & Hank Crehan (right) Parker Bodley