VISIONARY ACTIVITIES FOR THE CLASSROOM

El Martillo by Arthur Hammer

AMERICAN VISIONARY ART MUSEUM // 800 KEY HWY BALTIMORE MD 21230
INSIDE MY HEAD:

GRADES 3-8

inspired by Wayne Coyne

Artist and musician Wayne Coyne has an incredibly vivid imagination. In his colorful sculpture, *The King’s Mouth*, Coyne describes how viewers are invited into the mouth of the king to look into the “stars, storms, swirls, and other worlds that have become part of his great mind.”

In this activity, students will create a collage that explores the inside of their mind on their most creative, imaginative day.

Objectives:
Students will define and appropriately use the term “active imagination.”
Students will explore the depths of their imagination and present their ideas in a visual art project.

Critical Questions:
What is imagination?
What experiences or situations stimulate your imagination?
What are some ways you might tap into your imagination?

Activity:
1. Challenge students to define the term imagination in their own words. Brainstorm ways that your imagination might get inspiration. For example, books, movies, art, and other creative outlets.
2. Have students use a mind-mapping technique (see resources below) to explore their imagination.
3. Students will then draw a silhouette of their head onto posterboard.
4. Using their mind-map as a guide, students should find pictures in magazines and books that represent their ideas to create a collage inside their silhouette.
5. Students can present their final project to the class.

Standards:
Maryland Visual Arts: 1.2, 1.3; 2.1; 3.1
Language Arts: Speaking and Listening SL 3-10.4; 6-8.2

Resources:
http://www.mindmapping.com

Above and Beyond:
*adaptable for students in grades 3-12
Students can use their imagination to produce an original solution to a problem/topic of your choice in the following lesson plan by BrainPOP.
Dream House: Grades 3-7

inspired by Jackie Sumell and Herman Wallace

Herman Wallace had a very vivid vision of what his dream house would be. Unable to make this dream a reality, he relied on a special friend, Jackie Sumell, to build his dream house based on his descriptions.

In this activity, students will brainstorm ideas for their own dream house, and will create a written and visual depiction of this dream house.

Objectives:
Students will learn about the styles of various types of architecture.
Students will describe their own dream house through creative writing.
Students will use mixed media to create works of art that represent their dream house.
Students will compare needs and desires to make their house a dream house.

Critical Questions:
What would your dream house look like?
What are some important functions within the dream house?
What items will you need for basic survival?
What items are personal desires?

Activities:
1. Present various styles of architecture to the students. Be sure to highlight lines, shapes and details as well as functionality. Discuss aspects that are needed for basic survival, and which are aspects/items are personal desires.
2. Using inspiration from traditional architectures and their own imaginations, have students write a paper that describes their dream house. Students should include descriptions of its visual appearance as well as the functionality of important and original aspects of their dream house.
3. Have students create a visual representation of their dream house. Projects can be 2D, using drawing and collage techniques, or they can be 3D using mixed media. 3D projects can be created by using a box and/or cardboard as the main structure.

Above and Beyond:
Using the Creative Educator’s Lesson Plan, students will combine Math And Visual Arts to create a 2D blueprint of one room in their dream house. This lesson explores length, width, surface area, perimeter, and basic measurement skills.

*includes Common Core standards for Math and Language Arts

http://www.thecreativeeducator.com/v03/lessons/Dream_Room_Design

Standards:
Maryland Visual Arts: 1.1, 1.2, 1.3; 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4; 3.1
Language Arts: Writing W.3-7.3; W.3-7.8
Many works of art have a story. Different details within the artwork help tell that story. In a life-sized found object sculpture, *Self Portrait of My Health History*, Philip Carey tells the story of his “ongoing adventures” with multiple illnesses using actual items from medical procedures, drawings, prescription packaging, and other hospital themed objects.

In this activity, students will create a 3D collage that uses mixed media and found objects to tell the story of a significant life event.

**Objective:**
Students will use art to interpret, organize, and represent a story in original artwork. Students will describe how art can communicate what they see, know, feel, and imagine.

**Critical Questions:**
Is there a specific event that has happened to you that you will remember for the rest of your life? Where and when did this event take place? Who was involved? What made it significant? How might art be an effective way to communicate the details of a significant event?

**Activities:**
1. Begin with a discussion on how art can be an effective way to communicate what people see, know, feel, and imagine.
2. Have students think of a specific event in their life, and write a list of the significant and interesting details that made it memorable.
3. Using this list, students should highlight 5 details that they feel would best tell the story of this event. These details may be of the environment, characters, or actions.
4. Have students gather objects (or fabricate them) to visually represent those 5 details in a container of their choice (box, jar, frame, etc). Remind them to consider the background before adding the 3D materials.
5. Present and describe final projects to the class.

**Standards:**
Maryland Visual Arts: 1.2, 1.3; 2.1, 2.2; 3.1, 3.2
Language Arts: Speaking and Listening SL 3-10.4; 6-8.2, 11-12.1
THE HOPE PROJECT: GRADES 9-12

inspired by Lisa Revson’s *The Lost Earring Project*

Lisa Revson is a filmmaker that has focused on the stories behind lost earrings and our desire to hold on to that one, lone earring. She has engaged the community in a project that explores the ritual of hope behind this lost – or found – habit, allowing people to share their personal stories with each other.

Collaborative projects, such as this one, can be an effective way to engage the community in a meaningful way. In this activity, students will come up with a project that explores hope.

Objectives:
Students will define the term hope in their own words.
Students will evaluate different methods of expressing hope and determine whether some methods are more appropriate or useful than others.

Critical Questions:
What is hope?
What is a community?
Do you think your community emits hope? If so, what are some examples of hope within your community?
What are ways of expressing hope towards a community or individual?

Activities:
1. As a group, discuss what it means to have hope. What are the benefits of having hope? Are their any risks with having hope? Does hope come naturally?
2. What are some communities and/or individuals that might benefit from a little hope. Some examples include: hospitals, areas that have experienced natural disaster, families that have experienced loss, individuals that are going through a hard time.
3. Show examples of different ways of expressing hope within different communities. Some examples include: invite guest speakers who have overcome adversity, create banners and signs with words of hope and support, raise awareness through advocacy events. Have students discuss whether some methods are more effective than others and why.
4. Break students into small groups. Each group will develop a hope project based on a deserving community or individual of their choice. Students will present their final projects to the class.

Standards*:
Maryland Visual Arts: 1.1, 1.2, 1.3; 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4; 3.1, 3.2;
Language Arts: Speaking and Listening SL 3-10.4; 6-8.2
History/Social Studies: Reading RH.6-8.7, 11-12.7
*different standards may apply based on the context of final projects
Sister Helen Mrosla submitted her story “All the Good Things” to Proteus, A Journal of Ideas in 1991. Her teaching story is found on many websites and has inspired educators around the globe. The students in the story treasured the positive things written about them, by their classmates, for years. Their experience in doing the simple exercise may have changed their lives. Try the exercise with your students! It may leave a lasting impression.

After teaching for thirty-five years and encountering numerous students from all walks of life, I know now that I'll never have another Mark Eklund in any of my classes. Mark was the "one in a million" kind of student who was very neat in appearance, had that "happy to be alive" attitude, and who was mischievous in such a delightful way. He was in my first third-grade class when I was teaching in a wonderful town in western Minnesota. That was the year I had thirty-four students in the classroom; that was the year that I made some distinct changes in my methods of teaching as well as in the way I approached students. All of the students were the usual eager-to-learn type; all of them were very dear to me. No student stood out as much as Mark Eklund.

Mark talked incessantly. I had to remind him again and again of the classroom rule that talking without permission was not acceptable. What impressed me so much was his sincere response every time I had to correct him for misbehaving---"Thank you for correcting me, Sister!" I didn't know what to make of it the first time I heard it but before long I became accustomed to hearing it many times throughout the day.

One day my patience was growing quite thin when Mark talked once too often, and that was when I made the mistake most novice teachers make. Mark was talking to Chuck who sat behind him. I looked at Mark and said, "Mark, if you say one more word, I am going to tape your mouth shut!" It wasn't ten seconds later when Chuck blurted out "Mark is talking again." I hadn't asked any of the students to help me watch Mark, but since Chuck made the announcement so the entire class could hear it, I had to respond. The class reminded me that I had said I would put tape on Mark's mouth if he talked again. That was my mistake. I had stated the type of punishment in front of the class so now I had to act on it.

I remember the scene as clearly as if it had occurred this morning. I walked to my desk, very deliberately opened the drawer and took out a roll of masking tape. Without saying a word, I walked over to Mark's desk. He sat in the third-last desk in the second row by the cloakroom. I proceeded to tear off two pieces of tape. The only way I could make it stick was by putting the tape on so that it looked as if Mark had a big X over his mouth. Again without saying a word, I turned and walked to the front of the room. I picked up the reading book and glanced at Mark to see how he was doing. At that moment he winked at me. That did it! I melted and started laughing. The entire class cheered as I walked back to Mark's desk, removed the tape, and shrugged my shoulders. His first words were, "Thank you for correcting me." This time I had to turn quickly so Mark would not see the tears in my eyes.

At the end of the year I was asked to teach junior-high math and be in charge of the ninth-grade homeroom. The years flew by and before I knew it, Mark was in my classroom again. He hadn't changed. He was more handsome than ever but just as polite as he always was. His work was good, always in on time, and as neat as one could expect from any boy that age. Since he had to listen carefully to my instruction in the "new math," he did not talk as much in class as he did in third grade. As he left the classroom each day, he still made it a point to walk past my desk, smile and say, "Good night, Sister. Thank you for teaching me."

I can't recall what happened one particular rainy day, but I do know that things just didn't feel right in the math class. It was Friday; we had worked hard on a new concept all week; but that day I felt that the class just wasn't with me. Inwardly I was exasperated but outwardly I smiled sweetly and told the class to close their books and take out two clean sheets of paper. I asked them to put their name at the top as usual, then list the names of the other students in the room, leaving a space between each name. After that was accomplished, I told them to think of the nicest thing they could say about each of their classmates and write it down. No one questioned the assignment. Perhaps too they were feeling more antagonism than love in the classroom at that particular moment. It took the remainder of the class period to finish writing about their classmates but by now I was a seasoned teacher who could easily make adjustments in lesson planning. As the students left the room, each one handed me the two sheets of paper. Mark and Chuck handed me their papers at the same time. Chuck smiled; Mark said, "Thank you for teaching me, Sister. Have a good weekend."
As soon as I could, I got started on my assignment. I decided to write the name of each student on the top of a paper, then go through the twenty-eight papers and write down what each student had said about the individual. (I didn't have my own typewriter so it took me almost all day Saturday to complete the task.) At the very bottom I wrote what I thought was the most outstanding characteristic of the individual. On Monday I taught the class as usual, let them get started on their homework, and then gave each student the paper with the complimentary remarks on it. Before long I saw smiles on the faces of the students and heard whispered remarks of surprise such as, "Really?" "I never knew that meant anything to anyone!" "I didn't know others liked me so much!"

No one ever said anything about the exercise after that class period. I never knew if they discussed it with one another after class or if they mentioned it to their parents. It didn't matter. The exercise accomplished what I had hoped it would---the students were happy with themselves and one another again.

That group of students moved on. Since our school did not go beyond junior high school, the students transferred to the local high school after ninth grade. It was at that time I was assigned to teach high-school math in an inner city school in St. Paul. My efforts now were spent on my new students.

In August 1970, the mother of one of my former students gave me an all-expenses-paid trip to the Bahamas. I remember that so clearly because my parents met me at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport when I returned. I was planning to spend a few days with them before I returned to my teaching in the inner city. As we were driving out of the airport area, Mother asked the usual questions about the trip, the weather, my experiences in general. There was a slight lull in the conversation, and I noticed that Mother gave Dad a sideways glance and simply said "Dad?" Dad cleared his throat as he usually did before saying something important. "Eklunds called from Morris last night." "Really?" I said. "I haven't heard from them in several years! I wonder how Mark is." Then, as only my Dad could do it, he responded rather quietly, "Mark was killed in Vietnam. The funeral is tomorrow and his parents would like it if you could attend the funeral." I am sure I answered something to the effect that it would be nice if the three of us could attend the funeral. To this day I can still point to the exact spot on I-494 where Dad told me about Mark's death.

The next morning, Mother, Dad, and I started out early knowing that it would take us at least two hours to drive to Morris. We had hoped to get to the funeral parlor before mass so we could view the body and greet Jim and Pat Eklund before the funeral services. Even though we had to drive slowly due to heavy fog, we arrived at the funeral parlor in plenty of time.

I had never seen a serviceman in a military coffin before so I was not prepared to see Mark almost "stuffed" into the coffin which was covered with a glass. He looked so handsome, so mature; he even had a neat mustache. The only thing I could think of or wanted to say at that moment was "Mark, I would give all the masking tape in the world if only you could talk to me." I was going through an agony of my own right then. If Mark could have talked to me at that moment, he might have said that he had completely forgotten about the incident. I hadn't forgotten and I know that I never will.

The Mass was beautiful as I knew it would be. The church was packed with Mark's friends of all ages. I don't remember many of the particulars of the service itself other than the fact that Chuck's sister sang "Battle Hymn of the Republic." That was powerful!

Why does it rain on the day of a funeral? It was difficult enough at the graveside, and the rain didn't help in any way. The pastor said the usual prayers; one of the military personnel played Taps; one by one those who loved Mark took a last walk by the closed coffin, blessed it with holy water, and then went to their cars and on to Chuck's huge farmhouse for lunch. I recall how sensitive Dad was at the graveside. He said he and Mother would walk to the car and wait for me there. "Just take your time," he said.

I was the last one to bless the coffin. As I stood there in the rain, one of the soldiers who had acted as a pallbearer came up to me. "You were Mark's math teacher, weren't you?" he asked. I nodded as I continued to stare at the coffin. "Mark talked about you a lot." Just then someone called to the soldier to go to the car with the other military personnel. Before he left he asked if I intended to talk to Mark's parents before I left. I said I wouldn't dream of leaving without having a visit with them. "Good," he said. "Ask them about Mark's personal effects."

Most of Mark's former classmates were at the farm when we arrived there for lunch. Marks's mother and dad were obviously waiting for me. "We want to show you something," Mark's dad said. He took a billfold out of his pocket. "They found this on Mark when he was killed. We thought you might recognize it." He carefully removed and opened up two worn pieces of notebook paper which had obviously been taped, folded and refolded many times. I knew without looking at the writing that the papers were the ones on which I had listed all of the good things each of his classmates had said about Mark. "Thank you so much for doing that," Mark's mother said. "As you can see, Mark treasured it."
Marks's classmates started to gather around us. Charlie smiled rather sheepishly and said, "I still have my list. It's in the top drawer of my desk at home." Marilyn looked at him and said, "I have mine too. It's in my diary." Chuck's wife spoke up and said, "Really? Chuck made me put his in our wedding album." Jim, who was always the shyest boy in class, looked around at the group, put his hand in his back pocket, took out his billfold and showed his list to the group. It too was worn and terribly frazzled at the edges. "I carry this with me at all times," he said without batting an eyelash. "I think everyone saved theirs." That was when I finally sat down and cried. I cried for Mark, for all of his friends who were here now, and I cried for myself knowing that I would never see Mark again.

Now as thousands and thousands visit the Vietnam Memorial each year, I hope they will know that "MARK EKLUND" is not just another name on the wall. He gave so much to all of us!