

Connecting to Artists with Skype

Frank Juarez

This past summer, I attended an educator residency at the Kansas City Art Institute in Missouri.

About midweek, the instructor and participating art teachers talked about how we connect with the art world outside of our classroom. We went around the room and shared how we connect with artists, museums, arts centers, and so on. When my turn came, I knew exactly what I wanted to share.

The Midwest Artist Studios Project

Since 2014, I've been Skyping artists into my classroom who I've worked with through a project I call the Midwest Artist Studios Project. One of the project's goals is to provide a way for art teachers and students to interact with these artists via Skype. Through this platform, artists and students have the opportunity to talk about the work they've created or are in the process of creating. This exchange results in critiques, Q and A sessions about each other's work, or just the opportunity to talk "art shop."

I observed that my students are comfortable and confident speaking with an artist who they don't know. It's a magical experience to be a part of and watch unfold!

Enlisting Artists

How does one create a series such as this? It all begins with approaching artists who you know. I'm fortunate to know a lot of artists from across the U.S. and beyond through multiple projects I oversee and a gallery that I manage in Milwaukee. Not everyone has this type of resource readily available, but there are ways to tap into the art world, such as seeking artists who are living in your community, visiting local arts organizations, visiting artist's websites, attending receptions, or connecting with them on social media.

We teach our students that art has value both intrinsically and extrinsically. We know that sometimes art-



A tarp installation from contemporary artist Jason Rohlf. Image courtesy of Frank Juarez.

ists are taken advantage of, and we try to prevent this from happening to our students. Not all art programs have a budget for bringing artists into the

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classroom. This is the beauty of social networking via Skype. If paying artists for their time is the main obstacle, then I wouldn't worry so much. You'd be surprised how many artists would be more than happy to share a half hour of their time to speak with aspiring artists.

Making Connections

At Sheboygan North High School, our focus is to prepare our students to be college- and career-ready after graduation. This will look different from one teacher to another. For our art department, it's about connecting our students to artists who are doing what they love—making the world a better place through art. Through this interaction, students develop their own questions, listen to constructive

Essential questions that we address to prepare for Skype discussions:

- What conditions, attitudes, and behaviors support creativity and innovative thinking?
- What inspires people to make art?
- How do artists determine what resources and criteria are needed to formulate aesthetic investigations?
- How do technologies influence how we share and experience images and works of art?
- What criteria might be considered when selecting a work for a collection or portfolio?
- How do images influence our views of the world?
- How do life experiences influence the way we relate to art?
- How does learning in the arts help us build relationships with others?

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The advertisement features a white spray bottle of Kiss-Off Stain Remover with a red label. The label includes the brand name 'KISS-OFF' in large letters, 'THE ORIGINAL' at the top, and 'Stain Remover' at the bottom. Below the label, it lists 'Removes: Oil Paint, Grease, Makeup, Blood, Lipstick, Coffee, Red Wine, Grass Stains & More'. To the left of the bottle is a yellow starburst graphic with the text 'Before you throw it away... try Kiss-Off!' inside. At the bottom, there is a circular seal for 'ACACIA' and the text 'Ideal for Classroom, Travel & Art Studio'. The website 'KissOff.com' is also mentioned. An American flag graphic is in the bottom right corner.

Beautiful Stuff from Nature

More Learning with Found Materials

Following in the tradition of *Beautiful Stuff*, this book tells stories in which children and teachers explore the beauty of their local environments all around North America. Through their explorations, collections, creations, displays, and stories, children discover the beauty and variety of their own natural worlds. Principles of the Reggio Emilia approach guide the explorations and documentations of found materials from the natural world, providing inspiration for a beauty and wonder that surround



NATIONAL STANDARD
Connecting: Relate artistic ideas and work with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding

WEB LINK

Midwest Artist Studios Project: *midwestartiststudios.com*

DavisArt.com/BeautifulStufffromNature

