

Fresh Perspectives

Pam Stephens

Fresh perspectives bring new insights. As art educators we see fresh perspectives in each art assignment our students complete. With no two finished products exactly the same, our students are a constant source of new interpretations no matter how often we teach a lesson. Keeping our minds open and looking beyond what we envision end products to be opens the door to seeing new perspectives in what we teach. A perfect example of seeing new perspectives occurred when I taught a professional development program for the Tennessee Arts Academy in Nashville.

As usual, preparation for this professional development program included creating detailed lesson plans to be shared with participants. I knew exactly what I would present and had predetermined expectations for the outcomes. What I hadn't prepared for was a pleasantly surprising unexpected outcome.

A Three-Dimensional Timeline

Knowing that I wanted participants to explore ideas of how art can address issues of ecology, my goal was two-fold. First, I wanted teachers to walk through a comprehensive lesson plan and to collaboratively decide upon a thematic approach to the art-based ecology lesson. Second, I envisioned each participant creating a decorative recycled paper birdhouse.

After the introduction and discussion of topics and themes, the group unanimously agreed that they would like to decorate their biodegradable birdhouses with elements that best represented either a style of art or a favorite artist. Keeping with the ecol-

ogy component, teachers chose media that would not harm the environment and proceeded to design the exterior of the birdhouses.

A wide variety of styles and designs emerged as the participants settled into their work. Among the many ideas that materialized were large sunflowers, art nouveau swirls, abstract shapes, techno designs, cow skulls, and landscapes. The afternoon flew by as the teachers worked on their designs. When it was

time to clean up, the birdhouses were placed on a shelf and I was left alone to admire the day's labors. Much to my astonishment, an entirely unintended perspective suddenly came forth. There, on the shelf, was a three-dimensional timeline! With only a little shifting of the order, the birdhouses quickly tracked about 200 years of art history.

Seeking New Outcomes

This unintended outcome reminded me that as art teachers we should be

ever vigilant in allowing our students to seek their own artistic outcomes. Looking beyond what I had expected brought about an entirely new perspective—a rich layer to an already rich lesson.

What shifts in perspective have helped you or your students to look beyond the expected? Please share your story with us on the *SchoolArts* Facebook page. 

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WEB LINKS

www.greenbirdhouse.com

Left: Birdhouse with tempera paint.

Right: Birdhouse with tempera paint and water-based marker.

