

The following narratives document the experiences of art teachers from four different schools in New Orleans, Louisiana as they collaborated with Young Audiences, Crayola, and the National Art Education Association to create inspiring murals that reflect the cultural heritage of New Orleans.

My New, New Orleans

Fischer Charter School, Teaching Artist: Natalie Cooper

The concept of a “My New New Orleans” drove students at Fischer Charter to their creative designs. “It was not easy to choose just one symbol of New Orleans, as we all have our own different views” said Natalie Cooper, art teacher at Fischer Charter School. “We had to let everyone give their ideas and use them on the panel.” Students broke into smaller groups so that they could discuss their ideas and concentrate on what meant the most to them. Shotgun houses, steamboats, jazz instruments, fleur de lis, musicians and the St. Louis Cathedral are all extremely visible and well-known symbols of New Orleans that the students think

of most. One student, Anthony, was extremely excited to work with this project and use his favorite symbol of the St. Louis Cathedral. Brianna and her sister Maryann both liked the riverboat because it reminded them of trips on the ferry that takes them across the river with their grandmother. Most of the boys thought of the Saints’ symbol as their favorite, which Natalie explained had a broader meaning to the city. Students also liked the shotgun house as they see them all around in their neighborhoods as a classical style of living in New Orleans. It brings sentiments of community and togetherness that they all appreciate.



The Second Line

Kate Middleton Elementary School, Teacher Artist: Kyle Bravo

The memories that stick with a child are the memories made when their senses are excited. The sights, sounds, smells, and emotions that the students at Middleton remembered brought them to their choices on the panel. The Second Line parade, a tradition in celebrations in New Orleans, is holding up the fleur de lis. The representation of rebirth and connectivity to the city is exactly what this project was all about. “When I asked the students what they thought of when they think of New Orleans, they shouted out everything from

seafood and gumbo to Mardi Gras, to the Second Line,” said Kyle Bravo. Students chose items and themes that are not found in any other city in the world. These symbols are unique to New Orleans and are cherished by all who witness them. Nashan, a Middleton student said that he chose the Second Line because it was familiar to him and reminded him of his neighborhood. It is a great spectacle to watch as students choose what means the most to them. “You get to learn a lot about them when you set their creativity free.”

Bridge Over Muddy Waters

Tubman Elementary School, Teaching Artist: Haitham Eid

The West Bank of New Orleans may be “across the river,” but the students and their ideals about New Orleans are as strong as the mighty Mississippi itself. “The fleur de lis spanning the bridge that connects the west and east banks is symbolic of the rebuilding and recovery after Katrina” says Haitham Eid, art teacher at Tubman Elementary. It means a lot to these kids that the city is returning to its original state. They also wanted to step away from the serious concepts of New Orleans and remember their favorite season, Mardi Gras, represented by theatrical masks. It is a sign of renewal that students can go back to enjoying what meant the most to them before the storm. The fleur de lis is the symbol that touches a place in every New Orleanian’s heart. It is a symbol of respect for the culture and the communities that comprise New Orleans, and it evokes pride and delight in the students who displayed them on the mural panels.



A Bouquet of Fleur de Lis

Martin Behrman Charter School, Teaching Artist: Chris DiOrio

Art teacher Chris DiOrio, working mostly with the second grade at Martin Behrman Charter, asked students what one thing embodied their idea of New Orleans. Instantly, like most New Orleanians, the image of the fleur de lis came to mind. Most students associate this symbol with the NFL team, the New Orleans Saints. The city is well enveloped in their favorite sports team, proudly displaying the Saints’ symbol on bumper stickers, t-shirts and flags. “It was an easy choice for these kids,” says Chris, “they see the symbol everywhere.”

Students did not want to make any ordinary fleur de lis, but one with as much character and energy as they had. They chose bright colors and a border of fleur de lis surrounding a larger one as a way of showing their New Orleans pride. As a part of the experience, Chris taught students about the history of the fleur de lis and its meaning. Students were also extremely proud of their school and insisted that the name be included in the piece. ☺