Art inspires Character Education

Art in the North Carolina Museum of Art inspired the creation of a storybook designed to teach North Carolina students about courage, kindness, good judgment, perseverance, integrity, discipline, respect, and responsibility. Last March, students and teachers from eight high schools across the state convened at the NCMA for a three-day residency workshop to write and illustrate a story for elementary and middle school students. For many of the students—who came from as far away as Bryson City, Danbury, and Charlotte—this was their first trip to the NCMA and their first time away from home.

This teen residency workshop and book publication were federally funded through a Character Education Initiative grant awarded to the English and Language Arts section of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. DPI brought the NCMA in to help with the project.

While at the Museum, students explored the permanent collection and studied works of art that exemplified each of the eight character traits they were charged with depicting. The Museum's masterpieces helped students visualize how artists through the ages and across cultures portrayed character values in their works of art.

In looking at Monet's serene view of the Seine enveloped in early morning mists, students learned how, in his serial paintings, Monet tirelessly painted the same scene from different points of view and at varying times of day to capture the transient effects of light and color, a feat requiring great perseverance. With insight from Museum educators, a portrait of founding father Benjamin Franklin illuminated integrity, an African helmet mask represented responsibility, and Michael Richard's gilded sculptural ode to the famous Tuskegee airmen symbolized courage.

After the gallery activities and discussions, the students—eight writers and eight artists—worked with professional writer Susie Wilde and artist Marguerite Jay Gignoux to develop the concept for the book, write the story, and create the accompanying pictures. While the student writers crafted the tale of a small bird exploring its identity, the student artists wielding sewing machines and irons created beautiful fabric collage illustrations.

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