**August - Narrative Necklaces: The Perfect Lesson to Meet your New Students!**

Are you looking for a fun and creative way to start off your school year that will help you get to know your students better? Are you looking for a way to set your students up for success and build their self-confidence? Keep reading if you said Yes!

I love to start off the new school year with innovative and creative lessons to get my students excited quickly, AND to help me get to know them a bit better! This is a lesson that I have used with all grade levels and one that I have found works wonders to build confidence, teach collage skills and get a feel for who each child is individually…introducing the Narrative Necklace!

**These step by step instructions will help you begin to plan how you might use this lesson with your students!**

**Step 1:** Have your students brainstorm who they are by giving them a “Who Am I” sheet to fill in that asks a few specific questions. (see attached and perhaps you can give this sheet to the AOE graphic designer to artify!) I have always found over the years that our students honestly don’t care what we know, until they know that we care and by having them do a reflective sheet on their likes and interests, it shows that we care and are invested in them.

**Step 2:** Once students have had time to truly reflect by filling in their sheets, show them a few examples of necklaces, pendants, dog tags and various pieces of jewelry or accessories that people have worn for centuries. This is perhaps a wonderful time to share a few pieces of art history in that paintings and images throughout time in all cultures showcase the way people accessorize with adornments. I have found that it helps when my boys see dog tags and realize that these tags represent someone’s identity, which is the ultimate objective of this lesson! It’s amazing how excited my kids are to wear these beautiful art works that they create, BOYS and girls! Photo 1

**Step 3:** Once your students have had a discussion about necklaces, it's time for the art making to begin! Since this is usually one of my first lessons of the year, I tell kids about how cool is it to collage! When we collage, we are “drawing” with other images and symbols by cutting and gluing so most kids are really excited to not be judged on their drawing skills at this time. I do a quick demo by opening up a magazine (I have my community donate tons of magazines a year to my art department that are stacked in my collage area) and tearing out images, symbols, colors, textures, texts, etc… that I like. I call this an “aesthetic a-ha!” in that often I’m not sure exactly why I love the word, or the texture, but something about it makes me happy and so I tear it out and put it in my collage stack. I generally give my students a full art class or 2 to do their “collage search” so that they can really invest in the collection of collage pieces they find for their final necklaces. Kids today are so used to running to google images to find exactly what they’re looking for, so this little art adventure search is new for them and they are often amazed at their collections by the end of the class. They put their images into their envelopes for safe keeping. Photo 2

**Step 4:** Students are now ready to neatly cut all of their pieces and begin arranging them into an interesting story that showcases who they are. As students are cutting, I remind them that neatness counts and so they must pay attention to their edges. I don’t let them use glue until they have rearranged their pieces several times to come up with new compositions.

**Step 5:** And finally, I give students their tiles to begin to glue down their visual story. I use small laminate tiles that you can get for free from Home Depot or Lowe’s. These tiles are small, sturdy and have fabulous textures on them for negative space AND there is already a hole for stringing your chain to that these necklaces can hang. But I have also found that cut cardboard or matboard works great and also giving students the freedom to use any material they want works well too for more advanced students. Some students prefer to work a little bit larger and that is great too! I remind them to decorate both sides of their tile and often kids want to decorate several tiles because they have a lot to share, which is wonderful! Photo 3

**Step 6:** Students are ready to add their chain, yarn, string, raffia or any other cool material they can find to hang their tiles from and another wonderful extension is to add patterned beads or even handmade clay beads. The possibilities are endless when you give students some freedom and a box full of fun materials to get creative with! Over the years I have used various techniques to change the lesson up and most recently I had my students add a touch of oil pastel around the edges to soften the magazine images. Obviously if you have students use oil pastel you will then need to seal them since they will be wearing them so I have found that a triple thick sealer or a modge podge works really well – paint this on after they have added their hanging material so that they can hang to dry. Photo 4

I think what I love most about this lesson is how much my students enjoy it! I absolutely adore seeing them share a part of who they are with me. The smiles on their faces as they wear their art proudly around their necks shows me that it’s going to be another successful year in art – kids now know that I truly care about who they are!

**Have you incorporated jewelry making into your curriculum?**

**How do you get to know your students better in the beginning of the school year?**