



Barbara Pfeiffer

"The most important thing is getting the kids to own the art for themselves and tell what they think about it—for them to give their ideas and put their mark on the paper."

This is the primary mission for Barbara Pfeiffer—who one day recently taught a second and a fourth grade class at one area school and followed with a first and seventh grade class at another school. It is a schedule requiring flexibility and travel, and represents the culmination of a long journey for Barbara: founder and director of Art Aware, an art appreciation program for inner city elementary school students in Camden, New Jersey, and Philadelphia.

Barbara's journey, even at its earliest stages, cultivated an appreciation of other cultures and how art can represent that appreciation. "Born and raised in Manhattan, I attended Marymount School, across from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Music, art, theatre, and literature were integral to my upbringing. A BA in communication from the University of Michigan led to an administrative assistant job in New York City at Franklin Book Programs, a publisher of American classics in foreign languages.

"Then I went to Tokyo for three years and taught English Conversation at Futaba Girls School (famous for Empress Michiko's attendance). English was a vehicle for teaching about American culture—as I knew it from multicultural New York City. I also began a life-long study of Japanese culture and language.

"After Japan I did administrative assistant work at the East West Center on the University of Hawaii campus, teaching English conversation on the side and studying Japanese. My father's health brought me to Cherry Hill where I discovered the Art Goes to School program and fell in love with it. Through reproductions of art, ancient to modern, 700 volunteers bring multicultural perspectives into the lives of 125,000 elementary students in Delaware Valley suburban schools each year.

"After my father died, I moved to Camden to start a pottery business and to start Art Aware for inner city students with the forty-year organizational model of Art Goes to School. Art Aware differs due to a lack of city parents able to volunteer. Basically, the program is the same. A few volunteers and I each partner with an art teacher in a particular school, offering interactive art appreciation presentations to that teacher's students. In our twenty-two-year history, we have been to approximately 40 different public, charter and parochial schools in Camden and in Philadelphia— and to some schools many, many times.

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"For several years in the mid-90s the Camden County prosecutor's office produced 10,000 copies of a calendar with kids' artwork. It was wonderful! Then the committee, of which I was a member, decided they couldn't do it any more. I said 'That's terrible! Everyone loves it so. Let Art Aware take it over.' And so we did—for a few years. "I mixed the calendar art from the kids with pieces from well-known artists. There was this wonderful peace figure, with a cross and a peace sign, but no head. The artist was a first grader. It was a perfect segue to Picasso! Then another, by a young girl, was of a road lined with flowers, and that was a good segue to Monet. "The calendar was a great project but it took so much time to raise funds and distribute the 10,000 copies we had little time in the classroom. So in 2002, I changed from an Art Aware calendar to a yearly poster of "Camden Children at Peace Doing Art." We produce different sized color posters and distribute about 300 of them yearly to the schools and the communities that put them on display. They have been in the schools, post offices, supermarkets, City Hall, Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, and even at a special, very large, ten-month exhibition at Cooper Hospital. The 2008 poster represents student artwork, initiated by their art teachers, from 17 schools.

(NOTE: You can explore the posters and projects of Art Aware at their website: artaware.org)

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"The goal of Art Aware is to celebrate art, individual creativity, and the accessibility of art—for elementary school kids—so that they can put their mark on the page. I'm very interested in peace in the world, in people getting along; and I think that, as Americans we have a unique perspective on that. Although we are two or three generations removed from our native countries, we are always looking to get back to our roots, so I love to examine the human condition and get that idea across to inner city kids. And the kids—whether they are from Cherry Hill or from the inner cities of Camden or Philadelphia—they all love the artwork. When you draw a square with four lines and then draw another square on top of it—it is still just flat. Then you draw the diagonal lines which connect one square to another and suddenly it's magic! It's not just flat anymore. From there we talk about how a painting is made on a flat canvas. How do artists do this?"

One of Barbara's favorite assignments for children involves a painting by Vincent van Gogh of his bedroom. She uses the idea of the diagonal lines from the drawing of a cube to show how he uses slanted lines to create perspective. "There's a picture frame. You have slanted lines on the picture frame." Her students draw variations on van Gogh's bedroom. In fact, "what they love is seeing variations famous artists have done on the masters of the past, and the connections artists have made with history. That's important for kids to see—that we're always learning from the past. Roy Lichtenstein did a variation of van Gogh's bedroom, and the kids see it right away. Also African American artist Horace Pippin did several variations on Edward Hicks's *The Peaceable Kingdom*." "This year has been a year of exhibiting the kids' artwork, especially when the Governor's Symposium on Community Transformation came up and a third grader's "Motivating Music" from the Art Aware '08 poster was used for the logo, and with all those paintings at Cooper Hospital. It's important that people see. The kids work so hard."

The spirit, holy and otherwise, that is the human, universal experience

I want to be a part of that and to leave behind a message that

I have been a part of it

It will take the rest of my life to figure out how.

—from a poem by Barbara Pfeiffer

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