

Art enlivens language lessons for second-graders

By MACKENZIE ISSLER

NORTHAMPTON — Livia Shelasky, a second-grader at Lander-Grinspoon Academy on Prospect Street, held up a piece of paper she just cut out, excited about what she had made.

It's a person, one student said. Nope. It is an orange snowman, she said. She smiled, and glued the piece onto her Matisse-inspired collage.

The project is part of a new arts curriculum being used by teacher Ryan Pickard, who is incorporating lessons about 20 famous artists into her language arts studies this month and next. Lander-Grinspoon, former called the Solomon Schechter Day School, is a private, Jewish elementary school.

Students learn about the artists' lives through books read aloud to them. They also discuss art elements, such as line, color and texture, as well as identifying subject matter, emotions, ideas and stylistic choices in the artists' work. After a thorough lesson and discussion, students express what they have learned through a hands-on art project inspired by the artist's style.

"We don't have art classes here, so it is a purposeful effort to put as much art in the classroom as possible," Pickard said.

Pickard studied art history at Williams College, and has brought her love of art to her classroom. "We try to put it in the curriculum as much as possible, but I like to get it in even more," she said.

On Thursday, as students filed into Pickard's classroom for their first class of the day, they each went to a bookshelf to pick out books about various artists. Huddled on the carpet, two second-graders discussed Andy Warhol, and another sifted through the shelf trying to find her favorite artist.

The students continued their discussion on Matisse, and finished the lesson with an art project in which they "drew with scissors."

Using Matisse's collages as inspiration, students created their own collages using various colors of construction paper and glue.

Livia Shelasky said she really enjoys working with bright colors, so she liked using all the bright-colored papers in the Matisse project.

Pickard said she brings art into the her classroom not to just stress creativity, but also to push the children to think critically, use their imaginations and take chances. It also builds character, she said.



Students Jordan Kuhr, 7, of Haydenville, Livia Shelasky, 7, of East Longmeadow, and Maya Staples, 7, of Northampton, choose paper for a project that is part of a unit on Matisse being taught by Ryan Pickard, the second-grade teacher at Lander-Grinspoon Academy.

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"Artists show you that different is good," said Pickard.

Students not only discuss the artistic elements of the artwork, but also go into detail about the history, comparing and contrasting art movements. While discussing Matisse, the students made comparisons between him and other artists they have studied.

They have already discussed Impressionism and the Renaissance. "I like learning about artists because both of my parents are artists," said Ezra Norris, one of the students in the Pickard's second-grade class.

On this morning, the students worked together, sharing their ideas about the project.

"We can help each other with other ideas," said Rose Cole-Cohen, after a classmate pointed out that triangles would be a great addition to her collage.

When asked why they felt art was so important, students offered an array of answers. "It gets your brain going," said Cole-Cohen. Others really enjoyed having a break from other schoolwork.

"You get free time off from just working hard," said Maya Staples.

The students also learned about Jacob Lawrence, a 20th-century African-American painter, in celebration of Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Lawrence often portrayed important periods of African-American history in his artwork.

Pickard said she will next introduce the works of Leonardo da Vinci, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Jackson Pollock to her class in the coming weeks.



Teacher Ryan Pickard works with student Maya Staples.

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