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Miniature Art is a Big Hit at Bedford Hills Elementary

Bedford Hills, NY — “Miniatures have delighted me since childhood,” said Bedford Hills Elementary School art teacher Sarah Gilchrist. “Over the years, I’ve noticed that many of my students are as drawn to them as I am.”

Gilchrist took the idea of creating itty bitty works of art and transformed it into a way for students to safely collaborate as an artistic community and show their artwork in a unique way: a miniature art gallery. Classes and cohorts at BHES proposed themes, voted and created their very own small-scale art show.

“Tiny art always organically happened in our choice-based art studio, alongside large works of art, of course,” Gilchrist said. “In the past, we have had discussions over the feelings and differences in how we saw art that has an exaggerated size — whether very small or large. I think the real appeal of miniatures or a dollhouse is that they provide safe play and a safe place that is easy to control. This is, after all, what I think so many of us are craving during this pandemic, especially children.”

To introduce the project to students, Gilchrist wheeled the empty gallery into classrooms on her art cart — something that immediately elicited exclamations of intrigue and excitement. She was just as excited as her students.

“You wouldn’t believe how wide my smile gets under my mask when I flick the tiny gallery lights on with a hidden switch on the back and hear their gasps,” Gilchrist said.

To get the project started, students raise their hands to propose themes and then vote in multiple rounds to narrow down the ideas before choosing a winner. Once a theme is picked, students can create whatever they want as long as they can explain how it fits the theme. Participation in the mini gallery is a choice, but Gilchrist said that most students were enthusiastic participants.

“We regroup occasionally to look at what everyone has made for the ‘collection’ and for students to decide what they need more of to fill out the space,” Gilchrist said. She also asks their preference for placement once all the art is made and ready to be installed.

Gilchrist creates a video — a walk-through of the mini gallery with each student’s artist statement — which is shown to the class and also published to each Google classroom in the school so that all of their peers can see what they’ve created.



“It is a magical moment to see them listening and watching so intently,” she said.

The art that comes out of the project is also pretty magical. Recently, a class of fifth graders chose the theme “Dots.” Projects ranged from a wooden polka dot chair to an interactive sculpture that could be moved into different shapes to a piece called “The Pink Bubbles” that was made out of painted googly eyes.

Some of the works of art were the result of happy accidents.

“I was painting on my canvas when I accidentally dropped it,” one student said. “I had a bunch of paint on the bottom of the cardboard box and I thought ‘Oh no, it’s going to ruin it!’ I picked it up and it was beautiful.”

A second grade class used baseball as a recent theme, creating a gallery with a wide range of baseball imagery: a painting of baseball players walking off the field at night, a swinging chair in the shape of a baseball and an installation that looked like a baseball flying through the air with lots of mini balls strung up on a pipe cleaner that hung across the gallery.

Upcoming themes include: mythical creatures, food, cool colors, galaxy and animals.

“I knew I needed to provide safety, consistency and ownership for my students and this proved to be fun and engaging for all,” Gilchrist said. “The mini gallery also gave the students an opportunity to have a school art show, and in a more tactile way than just through a virtual collection of images.”

You can see the videos mentioned here: bit.ly/3cBIddF

Gilchrist’s student works on miniature art gallery

