



Fourth-grader Shivani Kishor's rendition of a Florida Highwaymen project. SPECIAL TO THE DEMOCRAT

INSPIRED 'COVIDEO'

From Highwaymen to Picasso, teacher's art projects keep kids engaged

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Billy Penn is well known around Killearn Lakes Elementary School as the teacher with the coolest classroom.

Aside from its unique architectural features, it's bursting with artworks and life-sized caricatures of famous artists. He's also splashed his creativity onto several of the walls around campus and painted colorful murals for students and staff to enjoy. Penn is deeply connected to the physical space, but since the pandemic shuttered schools, he's expanded his footprint to the digital realm.

During the two-week transition from in-person to online instruction, Penn developed his own YouTube channel and his "(co)VIDeo" series provides his art students with a sense of continuity. He recorded himself working through a variety of lessons for different grade levels.

Each video showcases Penn's progress on a new school mural and introduces a different



Killearn Lakes Elementary school art teacher Billy Penn's classroom with circular window and life-sized cutouts of artists like Frida Kahlo and Vincent Van Gogh. JOSEPH PENN

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Penn

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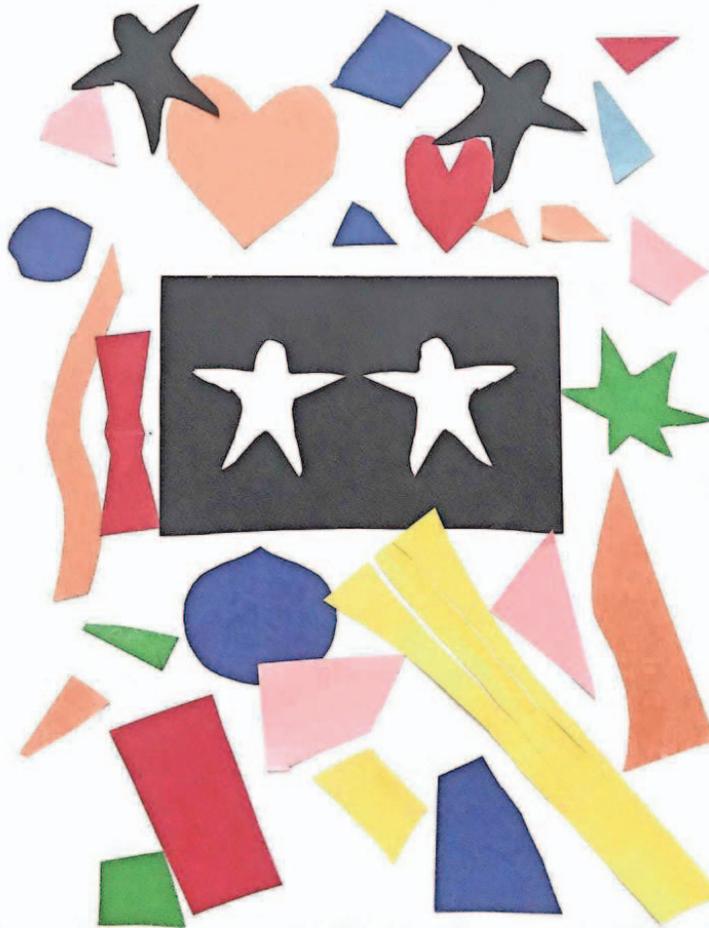
art activity. The videos also include a pro-tip, a bonus points segment, and clever reminders on how to stay safe and help out during the pandemic.

Penn challenged students to apply concepts and techniques they learned about in class. The Florida Highwaymen landscape project is a continuation of a lesson that began before school closed. It's one of Penn's favorites "because it always turns out so well."

He's especially pleased with its cross-curricular connections. "It deals with a little social studies and history as well as environments unique to Florida which ties into science." For this watercolor activity, Penn talks about compositional elements like foreground and background and describes the difference between the words transparent, translucent, and opaque.

The (co)VIDeos asked second and third graders to explore Egyptian art while fourth and fifth graders designed a personal seal inspired by the state of Florida's. Fifth grader Lilhian Wallington's seal highlights her love of dance and serves as the focal point of her personal flag. Her mom, Heather Marks appreciates Penn's videos. "It's been nice for kids to still have art to break up the other curriculum. Lilhian has truly enjoyed the lessons both in and out of the classroom," she said.

Penn recognized that some students may not have access to the same kind of art supplies they're used to at school, so he asked them to think



First-grader Aasr Abdelfattah created a Matisse-like collage while sheltering in place. TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT



Lilhian Wallington showcases her dance-focused personal seal as the centerpiece of a personal flag. SPECIAL TO THE DEMOCRAT

about Pablo Picasso. "His style changed more than any other artist's style changed in his lifetime. He could make artwork out of anything," explained Penn, encouraging kids to use whatever they had on hand.

Kindergartners and first graders learned how to create collages in the style of Henri Matisse. Penn reminded them to use "any scrap paper you have, old magazines or grocery labels from your



Kindergartener Halle Pennington channeled her inner Picasso for this self-portrait. SPECIAL TO THE DEMOCRAT

recycle bin. You can cut that up and glue it together."

Henri Matisse is an especially good artist to study during quarantine because he was often housebound due to ill health. "There's a picture floating around of Matisse stuck in bed. He's got a 10-foot pole and he's drawing on the wall from his bed. He wouldn't let a silly thing like a quarantine stop him from making art," Penn said.

Though Penn and his students have adjusted well, he admits it's been difficult as all teachers have had to gain mastery of unfamiliar technologies and instructional practices. He said the hardest part has been "learning something new on such short notice." However, he fully embraces the increased

freedom. "The artist in me always enjoys a little less structure to my days."

To see Billy Penn's "(co)VIDeo" series and try some of the art projects yourself, visit his YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC-ConFPR6jL-M96xX7-7AY8A>

As part of COCA's *Creativity Persists* collection, this article highlights how area arts educators have used distance learning to teach and inspire during the COVID-19 pandemic. Amanda Karioth Thompson is the Assistant Director for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).