



TLHLIFE

Art with a purpose

Students find a special way to say thank you

Takayla Johnson, 7th grade, selects a clear stamp of a butterfly for her card project. SPECIAL TO THE DEMOCRAT

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To keep herself artistically engaged during the COVID shutdown, Jeanne Schroeder turned to crafting. She began creating hand-made greeting cards to stay connected to loved ones. "Everybody loves getting a greeting card," she said. As the art teacher at Swift Creek Middle School, she'd tried to make cards with her students before using stamping techniques but

found the old fashioned, wood-backed, rubber stamps difficult for them to use. Stamping is an ancient printmaking process that dates to at least the fifth century. Designs were carved into wood, then inked and pressed upon textiles or paper, effectively creating a stamp. Modern innovations make the art of stamping accessible to individuals of all ages and abilities. Many stamps are now made from clear plastic, allowing the artist to see though

the block to ensure that the design is properly aligned. During quarantine, Schroeder experimented with this new style of stamp and realized they'd be perfect for her art students. She also recognized the renewed significance of a hand-made greeting card as a safe way to spread love during a difficult moment in our shared experience.

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Cards

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Schroeder was determined to acquire these stamps and other printmaking tools for her students so they could create their own expressions of compassion and gratitude in the form of greeting cards. “I just thought, it’s time for kindness to happen,” she said.

With no money in her classroom budget for this purpose, she applied for and received an Arts Education Grant from the Council on Culture & Arts (COCA). This year, the grant was made possible through philanthropic support from the Duke Energy Foundation’s Powerful Communities program. At a time when schools are struggling to adapt, young artists and their teachers need this kind of support more than ever.

“The grant allowed us to get enough stamping tools that I could have one per table and, during COVID, that meant every kid could have their own,” said Schroeder. “We bought so many different varieties of stamps, inks, and markers. They were so proud of all the different techniques they could incorporate together. We’ve done stamping, punching, embossing, and they learned how to hand blend ink. It’s been a very creative process for them.”

The first order of business was to create thank you cards for the Duke Energy Foundation. Students were also encouraged to create additional cards to recognize special people in their lives. “A lot of the kids had specific people in mind that they were making cards for and we talked about how great it feels to get real mail,” said Schroeder.

Julianna Averett is an eighth-grader who said “I did a card for one of our teachers who was retiring and a military themed card for my grandpa.” She was especially excited about the embossing tools used to create raised textures. “It was cool to learn about that because we’ve never done anything that professional before. It added a nice touch to our cards,” she said.

Eighth-grader Logan Anderson also used emboss-

ing techniques to great effect. He explained “the embossing tool I used made the paper stand out and then I added some ink on top of it. Then I hand drew on top with pens, markers, and pencils.” Logan enjoyed making the cards and shared “it shows that you actually care about a person and you’ve made it just for them.”

Schroeder is proud of how well her students took to the unit. “They really delved in and did such a good job making sure they took care of the stamps well. I’m going to set up a card making section in the room that will always be an option to them. Hopefully, that will keep them in communication with folks, other than through texts.”

Eighth-grader Fionna Dickey echoed that thought and said, “kids should know how to write a letter. I think you can talk more in a letter than in a text message, you can write it all down. It’s fun to make cards yourself for people you care about.” She enjoyed expressing her sentiments through the process and experimenting with different tools and techniques. She said “we got to try new stuff that we haven’t tried before in art.”

“I really did not expect them to so fully embrace a broad scope,” said Schroeder. “I showed them techniques like hand inking their own paper to create the background and they loved it. They tuned into things that I really didn’t expect them to tune into. There was a lot of attention to a lot of details and they’ve asked to keep doing this.”

Beyond being able to create cards themselves, Schroeder wants her students to remember how meaningful a simple greeting card can be to someone. “That simple act of kindness, a handmade card, just to let someone know you’re thinking about them can really make a difference. I want my students to remember to let people know that you’re grateful for them in your life.”

This article is part of COCA’s Creativity Persists collection and highlights how area arts educators are continuing to teach and inspire during the COVID-19 pandemic. Amanda Karioth Thompson is the Assistant Director for the Council on Culture & Arts.