



Pocantico Hills Highlights

A monthly newsletter of information and updates about the Pocantico Hills School community

March 2024

Eighth grade art project displayed at the Creative Arts Center

Guests visiting the David Rockefeller Creative Arts Center were in for a real treat when they had an opportunity to view the Eighth Grade Art & Textile Design Show on March 14. The artwork, consisting of paintings and aprons made by students, were hung throughout the gallery space.



The work was part of a combined project with their art class and Family and Consumer Sciences course. After visiting the grounds of the Creative Arts Center, on the property of the Rockefeller estate, Kykuit, students were assigned to paint an inspirational vista that they saw there.

For the aprons, students used fabric to not only design a functional article, but also one that represented the career they hoped to have in the future.

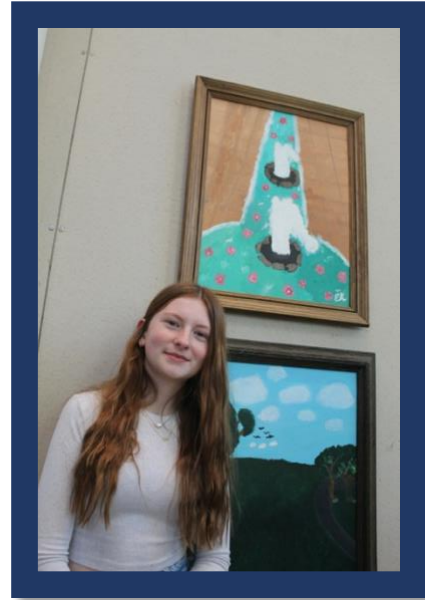
Art teacher Jolene Morotti said after she and FACS teacher Alyson Morilla visited the new art gallery she developed the idea for the project.

“Immediately I knew this could be the inspiration of the eighth-grade paintings,” Ms. Morotti said. “In September and November, we took the

eighth-grade class over and they took photographs while they were there. Back in the classroom students viewed and edited their photographs as they wanted. Thinking about changing the season, time of day, background. They spent ten weeks from start to finish.”

Throughout the galleries the artwork hung up for all to view and included a QR code which guests could scan to hear the artist discuss their painting.

“I painted a wall of trees,” Aurora T. said in her audio message. “I chose a reference image because it looked nice to me.”



Aurora, whose work was titled “The Wall from Kykuit,” said she’d like to continue doing art when she gets to high school.

In her audio message Rhea N. said, “the reason I chose this photograph is because I liked the buildings’ colors and its multiple intricate layers and designs.” Her work was titled “Kykuit.”

“I am always amazed at what students accomplish in my classroom,” Ms. Morotti said. “I am lucky that I get to see the starting point of an initial photograph, share ideas they have and see it take off from there.”

The school arranged transportation for families to view the show and as they walked through the gallery space, there were several compliments given to the students’ work.

“I’ve never done anything like this before,” student Emma K. said. “I thought it was fun.”

She said when she saw the fountain on the grounds, she was inspired. In her painting, “Kykuit Water,” she transformed it to look like it was on a beach.



Student Harland H. said he had to think about what he wanted to do, and in the end created a painting he called “The Valley.”

“It’s pretty cool,” he said of the project.

In addition to the fine art on display, guests were able to watch a video that documented each stage of the process. It showcased students exploring

the grounds, painting in the art classroom, as well as sewing in the FACS room.

The video was created by 8th-grade student Gianna D. “It’s a cumulation of the entire journey,” said Educational Technology Director Alana Winnick, referring to the looping video during the exhibit. “It provides a holistic view of the entire project, allowing viewers to truly appreciate all of the work that went into it.”

English teacher Andrew Irons facilitated a reflective writing assignment, which was later recorded for an immersive QR code experience. “It’s important to create authentic learning opportunities and integrate technology into the existing curriculum,” Ms. Winnick emphasized, highlighting the fusion of innovation with educational engagement.

“I thought my painting wasn’t going to turn out good,” admitted Philip S., whose piece “Under the Moonlight,” was among those on display. But in the end, he said he thought it came out well.

The Pocantico Center Manager, Elly Kelly, welcomed guests as they arrived.

“It’s furthering our mission to become a creative art force,” she said of the center that opened 18 months ago. “We want to be a community resource for the schools.”

“We were all so blown away seeing the space come alive,” she continued.

Ms. Morotti received a kind note from Ms. Kelly who shared what some of her staff had said about the students' work:

“Just a quick note to let you know how much Linda and I enjoyed looking at the children's art show at the DR Center when we stopped by to check on the orange trees. The cleaners were there, so we were lucky the studio was open, and we could see all the paintings. They are amazing! We listened to a few of the artist's explanations, and we were so impressed. We wanted to spend more time enjoying them. If you have the opportunity, please let the teachers and students know what a pleasure it is for us to see the Gardens through their eyes.”



Throughout the gallery space the students' aprons were hung up on large display boards that also included their photo. The textile project had students learning how to create a flat sketch, cut patterns and use the classroom Bernina sewing machine.

“I liked the process,” student Arielle B. said as she shyly stood by her apron while her mom took photos.

Her apron, she said, depicted her interest in botany as it had green birds and flowers on it.

As for her painting, “Rockefeller Greenery,” Arielle said painting is one of her hobbies and working on her piece was fun, although she admitted it was a bit nerve-wracking to have it on display for all to see.

“I looked at the colors and realized those are my colors,” Arielle's proud mom, Aliyah Simmons said when she saw her daughters' apron.

“I see as a family we connect in ways we didn't even know,” she continued.



Student Zoe A. said she has an interest in Greek mythology and incorporated that in her piece “Eclipse’s Embrace.” She incorporated her desire to be a biostatistician in her apron.

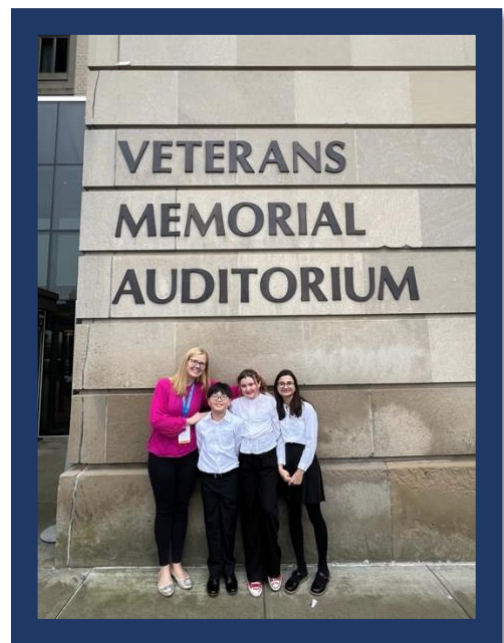
“I love all kinds of sciences,” she said, noting how she embroidered a purple double helix on her apron.

“It’s great as a class we got to do this,” Zoe said. “We set an example.”

Pocantico songbirds sing with special choir

Sixth graders Jinna H., Milana G. and Esme I., are all used to singing in the music room and the auditorium at the Pocantico Hills Central School. Recently they had an opportunity to not only extend their repertoire of songs, but also where they performed.

The three students were selected to participate and represent Westchester County in the American Choral Directors Association East Convention, in the Elementary Honor Choir, held earlier this month in Rhode Island. There they joined more than 100 middle school students from as far away as Maryland and throughout the northeast including New Jersey, Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Pennsylvania.





Esme explained that she and her classmates had the three highest NYSSMA scores at their school, which enabled them to participate in the special event. In addition, students' work was reviewed by a committee and letters of recommendation from their teacher and an adjudicator were submitted.

"It was really surprising," she said of the selection to the choir. "For

me personally, I've never been a part of a large singing group outside of my school."

"We also got to meet a couple of the composers of the pieces we sang," Jinna said.

Jinna noted that the group had the opportunity to practice with composer Francisco Nunez, who premiered his song "Space Hurricane" at the concert. The song incorporated five different languages including Spanish and Portuguese. Mr. Nunez lives upstate and was asked if he would visit their school, Jinna said.

There was also a piece that included poems, and Jinna explained, as a certain line from the poem/song was sung, choir members were asked to stand up when they sang a line that had special meaning to them. By the end of the song, they said, the entire choir was standing.

The event was held over the course of three days, and the students said they practiced for 16 hours, with a few breaks.

"We had to learn all the pieces," Milana said, adding that in the end they sang six songs.

Music teacher Sheila DePaola sent a note to the three singers in which she congratulated them on their hard work.

“Your concert was spectacular, and I was so impressed watching you model appropriate rehearsal behavior and make friends with other singers,” she wrote, noting that they were also recognized at a recent New York State Music Association's executive board meeting.

Next year, the three said they hope to do well enough to attend the national event in Texas.

Musicians of all kinds selected for All County performances

The weekend of March 9-10 was a busy one for a handful of singers and musicians at Pocantico Hills Central School. In all, a total of eight students performed in the 2024 All-County Chorus, Intermediate Chorus, Elementary Band, and Intermediate Band.

“It’s a good challenge for them,” Band Director Michael Murray said of the participants. “It’s something they will remember for the future. It’s also really good to meet kids from other schools with similar interests.”



Representing Pocantico Hills were Milana G. and Esme I. who sang in the Elementary All-County Chorus, Savannah D., Emma K., and Yusuf F. who were part of the Intermediate All-County Chorus. The Elementary All-County Band included Keer W. and Peter S. while Harry W. participated in the Intermediate All-County Band.

Participation in the annual concerts is dependent on a student’s NYSSMA score from the previous year and is something students decide to work on in addition to their typical course of study.



The respective performances consisted of singing or playing multiple pieces and was an all-day experience for the concerts that were held at the Performing Arts center at New Rochelle High School.

“It’s like the best players in the county and the music is good,” Harry, who plays clarinet, said, adding he hopes to join the band when he gets to high school.

“I think it’s great because if you are passionate about music, you get to sing,” Emma, who sings alto, said. “It’s fun to do.”

Harry explained that students were given the music they would be performing two weeks prior to the concerts. He said the selections had variety from quick fast paced pieces to others that were more challenging.

Peter, who plays percussion, said that is what makes the performances so exciting, that you don’t know exactly what the music will be until just before performance.

“With the clarinet, it has a lot of keys, it looked hard,” Harry said as to why he chose to play that instrument. “I wanted to challenge myself.”

Overall, the experience was enjoyable, Harry said, as everyone at the performances were great, he said, adding that it was also nice to be able to work with new conductors.

“You also learn new techniques,” Emma said.



A Message from the Superintendent

I want to wish all our families who celebrate a very happy Easter!

It is hard to believe that spring has finally sprung. We remain very busy in our classrooms and with our extra-curricular activities.

First, I want to give a massive “Congratulations,” to our eighth-grade students for their work that was part of the Eighth Grade Art & Textile Design Show! Their work, both paintings and handmade aprons, were on display at the David Rockefeller Creative Arts Center on March 14. The exhibit was phenomenal, displayed in a beautiful space and the student work was truly inspirational. Thank you to Art teacher Jolene Morotti and FACS teacher Alyson Morilla and the arts center for making this happen! It is something the students will never forget.



Thank you also to our staff, Co-Directors Allison O'Connor and Elizabeth Cireico, Stage Crew Advisor Michael Murray and Set Designer Alyson Morilla, not to mention our student performers for their delightful production of “Guys and Dolls, Jr.” They did an amazing job bringing this production to life. Our talented students really shined on the stage, and we appreciate all their hard work and dedication!

Congratulations also go out to sixth graders Jinna H., Milana G., and Esme I., who represented Westchester County in the American Choral Directors Association East Convention, in the Elementary Honor Choir, held earlier this month in Rhode Island.

In addition, our singers and musicians shone as part of the 2024 All-County Chorus, Intermediate Chorus, Elementary Band, and Intermediate Band. In all, eight students participated. Thank you to Choral Director Sheila DePaola and Band Director Mike Murray for working with these talented students and to the students themselves for their hard work!

I would like to bring your attention to our Audio Enhancement System that is now part of our classrooms. The system is an amazing product that helps

our students and teachers with their listening and learning in our busy classrooms. It also has special safety systems built in to assist our teachers and help keep our students safe. I would encourage you all to view the video on our website to learn more about it.

Finally, I hope our students have an opportunity to enjoy the upcoming total solar eclipse on April 8, a solar event that will not happen again until 2044! On that day, we will dismiss students early, at 2:15 p.m. for those who go home immediately after school. For the students who remain at school for after school activities, they will remain at school to have an opportunity to enjoy this special event. Certified safe viewing glasses will be distributed to students and staff.

Now it's time to enjoy your spring break!

Rich Calkins
Superintendent of Schools

“Guy and Dolls, Jr.” You can ‘bet’ it was a hit!

The Middle School production of “Guys and Dolls, Jr.” took place on March 22-23 and was a wonderful performance!





A Peek at POCO:

Pizza is great, but based on the smiles of our students, it may just be that Pizza Kabobs are better!



Upcoming Events

March 29, Good Friday, District Closed

April 1 – 5, Spring Recess

April 8, Early Dismissal for Solar Eclipse, 2:15 p.m. (Students participating in after-school activities will stay for them and view the eclipse)

April 11, Board of Education Meeting, 7:30 p.m.

April 16, Board of Education Meeting, 7:30 p.m.

For more information visit our website, www.pocanticohills.org

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