



Combining literacy & visual arts in a fun & proven program for your students: A guide for educators.

Below is an outline that can be used with students of various ages and abilities to create a memorable experience in reading, writing, and visual arts creativity. This particular project was carried out over the fall of 2009 by Judy Jester, English teacher, Maryanne Uhl and Juanita Gaspari, art teachers, Kennett Middle School, Chester Co. PA, in collaboration with Jane Flitner at the Brandywine River Museum and Jen Bryant, author. The following describes their preparations and process in a series of steps that are adaptable to your own goals, student population, and interests.

Piecing Together “*Pieces of Kennett*” –a project outline & summary by Judy Jester, 8th grade English, KMS.

Are you looking for a way to leverage students’ interest in visual art while also furthering their literacy? Kennett Middle School recently did just that by centering our work around Jen Bryant’s novel *Pieces of Georgia*. Students were each provided with a copy of the book, as well as bus transportation and admission to *The Brandywine River Museum* in Chadds Ford, PA: <http://www.brandywinemuseum.org/> Then, they created their own works of drawing, painting, or sculpture as well as their own pieces of writing based on these experiences. As a culminating event, all of the participating students were featured in an art exhibit attended by faculty, parents, administrators and the book’s author. The exhibit concluded with a presentation by Jen Bryant about the process of writing *POG* and her other books, a Q & A, and a book signing.

In order to participate in the program, aspiring artists and writers agreed to read the book and to complete some artwork and writing inspired by it. We called the project “Pieces of Kennett”, and if it sounds like something you’d like to try at your own school, read on!

“To do” list for putting on your own “*Pieces*” project:

- ☐ Find other teachers to help with the project. It’s very useful to have both a language arts and an art teacher spearheading this together. Decide how many students will participate and how you will coordinate working with those you don’t teach.
- ☐ Obtain permission from your principal to pursue the project. Include plans for how you’ll cover expenses (cost of books, author’s visit, food for the reception). You may need to write other grants to cover this from your PTO, etc. Also work out your timeline for introducing the project, reading the book and sketching prior to

going to the museum, rendering a more fully polished piece of art and writing after the trip, and the date of your exhibit/presentation by Jen.

- ☐ Complete grant application for the *Brandywine River Museum*. Email Jane Flitner at jane@brandywine.org for this application. It will cover the cost of museum admission and transportation to and from the museum. This year the grant covered up to \$1,000. Please remember the intent of this Comcast Foundation grant to allow access to the arts for underserved students. You do not have to prove individual need to participate, but knowing how many reduced or free lunch students you have will be helpful.
- ☐ Once you have been approved, order copies of *Pieces of Georgia*: http://www.jenbryant.com/books/inprint/bk_piece.html We found Amazon had the best prices. Check around. Don't forget to book Jen well in advance, too: http://www.jenbryant.com/teachers/tc_teach.html Be sure to say that you are requesting her in conjunction with a BRM/POG school project as this gets you a big discount on her speaking fee!
- ☐ Introduce the project to your students. We introduced it at the Opening Day of School Assembly. Alternatively, you can do this before school closes the previous year so that the kids could do the preliminary work (reading and sketching) during the summer. Or, you can do it during English classes or Art classes, or whenever it suits you best.
- ☐ Distribute permission slips (which include everything the students agree to do in order to participate) to those who show an interest. At KMS, we also drummed up interest in our classes over the next few days. The first fifty students who returned their signed slips were handed a book.
- ☐ Set the date for the book to be read by. Generally, kids had two weeks to read the book on their own. Some teachers allowed this to be read in class for SSR. One even read it aloud to her learning support class. On her website, Jen provides a downloadable discussion guide, which is optional but very useful, for the teacher who uses it in a classroom or library group situation.
- ☐ During this time, students also had to make two preliminary sketches from their lives, just as Georgia did in the novel. These did not need to be fantastic/masterful, but must show some evidence of effort. These sketches had to be shown to one of us in order for them to be cleared to attend the trip.
- ☐ At the museum, Jane will give a brief introduction to the group and then students split into groups of eight to ten for a guided tour with docents. (Suggestion: split the groups ahead of time and put their group number on their name tags. This cuts down on confusion at the museum.)
- ☐ Students should then choose several pieces at the conclusion of this tour to sit in front of and to and sketch. We allowed about forty-five minutes for this.
- ☐ Once back at school, give them invitations to several afternoon sessions of Open Art Studio if possible. They could choose to participate in these or work at home or during lunch on their artwork.

- ☐ Provide them with a handout, outlining several options for completing the writing that will complement the artwork. Choices included a straightforward artist's statement (i.e. what they were thinking or trying to do/show in their art piece); a poem that supplements the visual work; an essay or a narrative about their piece, etc. They will see many examples of this at the Museum.
- ☐ Check in with students often about their progress during the month they have to work on the art and writing. We asked that everything be turned in ready to mount several days before the exhibit. This gave us time to edit the writing if necessary as well as to catch up with some students if changes were needed.
- ☐ Be sure to arrange for food, invitations to parents and honored guests, publicity, etc. well in advance of the exhibit. (Of course, this is all optional, and you may design the final event in any way you wish. However, our experience is that the students were very proud of their work and eager to share it with as many people as possible. The adults who attended were amazed at what they saw and thoroughly enjoyed the exhibit and Jen's book presentation.)
- ☐ Try to make the exhibit as true to life as possible. We allowed guests to munch on cheese and crackers, etc. just as you would at a real art exhibit opening for about forty-five minutes, take their pictures with the student artists/writers, meet Jen, etc. Then we moved to the cafeteria for Jen's PowerPoint slide presentation and Q & A. Students brought their copy of the book for Jen to sign at the conclusion.
- ☐ Decide what is the best day and time for the exhibit. We opted to have the exhibit just after the school day ended to better insure guests for the exhibit with faculty support. We feared that not enough parents would be able to come back at night to make it a success. Poll your students early to determine what would be the best time to hold the exhibit.
- ☐ Enjoy the amazing results. Don't forget a follow-up survey for participants (a few easy questions about what they liked and what might be improved) to generate quotes for grantors, as well as to plan an even more successful project the following year.

Everyone involved found the work to be worthwhile. One student said, "I loved the creativity and imagination of combining ideas from the book, the museum, and our own thoughts." While the students certainly enjoyed being stars for the day, they also reported learning new art techniques, losing themselves in a great book, seeing links between their reading and what they experienced at the museum, and understanding more about the nature of creativity.

Sold? If so, the above should provide you with almost everything you'll need to carry out a "PIECES" project at your school. However, if you'd like more info., contact Judy Jester at jjester@kcsd.org, Jane Flitner at janef@brandywine.org or Jen Bryant at jen@jenbryant.com.