
An excerpt from the February 2011 issue of **THE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL'S TIS NEWS**

Kindergarteners turn Picasso lessons into help for Portland's homeless

As Maestra Adela talks about her Spanish Kindergarten's recent unit of study, her enthusiasm is obvious. She's hardly seated before she jumps up to point out photographs of the kids and pull out examples of their work. Her anecdotes clearly show how the children were equally enthused.

The unit focused on the central idea "painting is a way to express ideas and feelings," one of six International Baccalaureate (IB) units that the class will study this year. Throughout the unit, Adela's students conducted an inquiry into the materials and techniques painters use, personal preferences of different types of painting, and the influence of a painter's background on his or her work.

It is that last line of inquiry that really caught the students' attention. "I was surprised to see that the kids really, deeply understood how a painter's feelings and life influence his art," says Adela. While the students studied many different artists and styles, they focused on learning about two Spanish painters in particular, Joan Miró and Pablo Picasso.

"Picasso was a favorite for the kids. They were fascinated by him and so was I." Adela brought in books about Picasso and the kids poured over them. She describes how they became captivated with his painting *Weeping Woman*, wanting to figure out why the woman is crying. The class studied Picasso's different periods of painting and analyzed how the events in his life influenced the mood and subjects of his paintings. "The kids became really deeply involved in learning about him. In a way, he became like a friend to them."

In addition to studying Picasso, the students had guest speakers and field visits including trips to the Portland Art Museum, a local gallery, and CHAP Art Factory where they practiced painting with different materials. As with every IB unit, projects connected math, science, and social studies to the unit's central idea. The students voted on their preferences for different styles of art and graphed the results. They practiced units of measurement by comparing the size of different paintings. A discussion on Picasso's famous

Guernica painting depicting the Spanish Civil War turned into a history lesson. They even hypothesized as to what happens when milk is mixed with food coloring and soap, then conducted an experiment to test their ideas.



The IB promotes turning knowledge into action. To finish the unit, Adela's class turned the classroom into an art gallery full of their original work and invited parents to participate in an auction. All of the proceeds were donated to Portland Homeless Family Solutions, an organization that the children had chosen. "The kids loved the auction. And they were very conscious of the cause, very connected to the idea of donating money to families without a home."

"Learning through the IB is so different," says Adela. "The kids investigate and discover the information for themselves. I don't tell the kids 'the woman in the painting is crying because....' the kids research and make discoveries on their own. As early as preschool, they are learning to reason and analyze. It's a much deeper way of thinking and studying that makes connections with everything - math, science, social studies."

And Picasso? He's still very much a part of the class even though the students have moved on to a new unit. "His name pops up all the time," laughs Adela. "The other day I asked the kids for an example of a city and a country and they gave me Malaga, Spain - Picasso's hometown."