



ART REACH
share the experience

Art Fights Violence in a Colorful Match

Dear Reader,

To understand what occurred on December 15th, please paint this picture mentally. You will need to use your imagination and follow the instructions!

It is the week before Christmas. A group of about thirty youth from the Philadelphia area, grades five through nine, are gathered in InterAct Theatre's newest performance space, called Upstairs at the Adrienne. They are sitting quietly, eating pizza, chatting and chuckling with friends. Be prepared to use some varied hues from your palette and some unusual applications from your repertoire to create this picture because this is not your everyday inter-city youth gathering....



Teaching Artist Ben Volta engages students in the project

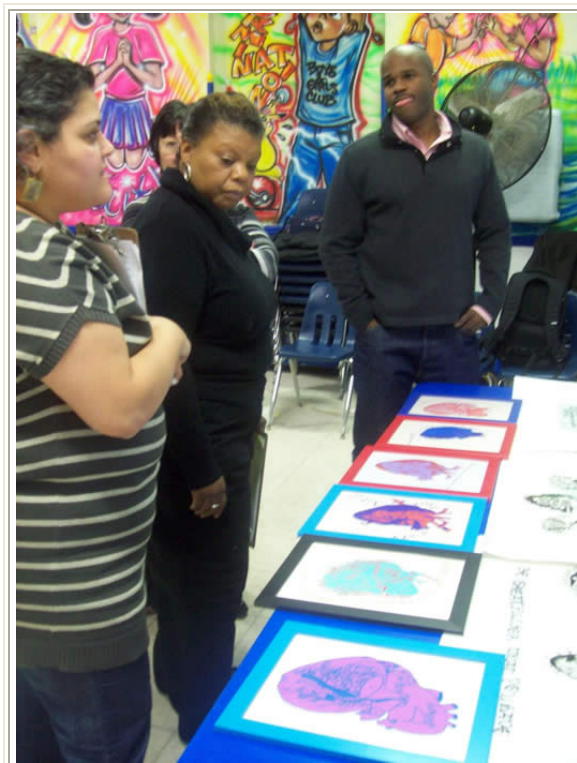
For your background, consider a wash of luminous pigment--maybe yellow or gold—because what we see here will result in inspiration. Tonight represents a special event planned exclusively for students participating in Art-Reach's Anti-violence T-shirt Project. As explained by Project Manager Christina Jackson, tonight's program is the culmination of a series of experiences planned for these voluntary participants. Indeed, their creativity has already been stimulated by visits to the Fabric Workshop and Museum and the trauma ward of Temple University Hospital through the Cradle to Grave Program, and by instruction about mission statements, marketing, entrepreneurship and public speaking. But tonight is an electrifying piece of the whole: it is live theatre!

Unfortunately, you may need to introduce some sinister shapes in red and black paints. The subject matter of the play is violence and its consequences for both victims and perpetrators. *City of Numbers*, written and performed by Sean Lewis, is a composite of interviews with inmates at Graterford Prison. These are criminals...convicted murderers and rapists...in most cases incarcerated for life. Adding depth and breadth to these interviews are tragic stories, often dramatized simultaneously by slides, of the victims and their families. You get the picture, and it is suddenly not so pretty.



Students participate in a post show talk-back following the performance of City of Numbers

Now, add to your painting the soothing shades of green and blue to oppose those unsettling shapes and mitigate their power. These colors represent the influence of art and theatre used to subdue and maybe even transform that negative energy of violence. Understanding the therapeutic power of the arts through self-expression, the Mural Arts Program of Philadelphia took its healing salve to Graterford Prison. Here, their team of artists helped inmates design and paint a mural that would later be transferred to a city building and enhance the streets of Philadelphia. During the process of making the mural, playwright and actor Sean Lewis was invited to watch, listen, and then dramatically interpret his experience, which became the play being performed tonight. Through this medium, these kids will be inspired to create their own versions of Anti-violence T-shirts. Winning designs will be chosen for silk-screening; the shirts then mass produced and sold at Villa retail stores, but all designers will be rewarded with some very generous prizes!



Judges evaluate student's T-shirt designs

Now that your main colors and forms are in place and balanced, you need to

add some interesting figures to your picture. Representing both the Martin Luther King Center and the Wissahickon Boys and Girls Club, the audience members explain why they volunteered to come to this event. One ninth grade boy says "I like art, and I hope I can be motivated [for my t-shirt design] by seeing this play." Marquis, a fifth grader, recognizes that it is "bad to do bad things", but he hopes to "make things better" by creating art work and "getting the word out." Sixth grader Briyon has a slightly different motivation in coming: he has come to see the show! "I like theatre. Acting is my favorite thing", he admits. Seeing a play is more enticing "than the subject even!" In a reflective and insightful comment, sixteen year-old Zak acknowledges that "Killing is a bad thing in Philadelphia." He reveals that he has "an interest in seeing that it stops. This program helps tell people to not do these things---and then these people can tell others." The adults in the audience add additional perspective. Supervisor Mr. Moses from the Philadelphia Department of Recreation notes that "Kids are curious." For most city youth, "The streets are a detriment. This program keeps them off the streets by offering new and creative ways to find enjoyment." He hopes that those present "will boost their interest in the arts" and be encouraged "to express themselves to their community." Another adult observer, Brooke Whitaker, an Art-Reach Ambassador (volunteer) who works regularly with school groups at the Kimmel Center, is impressed with this group. "They seem to understand theatre etiquette almost intuitively. They are affected, respectful, simply by being in the space." Is your picture becoming more animated?

Time to add a few controversial details to your painting that might result in evaluative discussion. The event culminates in a "Talk-back" session, stimulating thoughtful questions and informed responses. Joining Sean on stage are Seth Rozin, Artistic Director of InterAct Theatre, and Robyn Buseman, Restorative Justice Program Director at Mural Arts Program.

To Robyn:

"Wasn't it dangerous to let inmates use paintbrushes?"

To Seth:

"How do we reach kids not in a structured program like tonight's?"

To Sean:

"How did the inmates react to your play when they saw it?"

"Did any of the inmates seem to change during the playwriting?"

"Did you exaggerate some of the characters?"

"Did the inmates make more impression on you than you made on them?"



A student presents their T-Shirt design to the judges

Your picture of the evening is now complete, much like the mural that inspired this theatre event and much like the t-shirts that these teens and pre-teens will soon create. All that remains for these young artists is for their individual voices to be fully realized. Hopefully, the colors, shapes, figures, and details of the evening will enhance the final shirts emerging from each designer as a persuasive statement against violence in our communities today. Thanks to the resources provided by Art-Reach, our youth will help to convert the dark and formless smudge of animosity and hate into an appealing portrait of cooperation and respect.

Thank you, Reader, for envisioning this vibrant and victorious experience!

This program culminates next week when the winning T-shirts are unveiled for the first time and sold at Villa stores during a catered event. Attend one or both of these free Art-Reach events. Shirts cost \$10 each and proceeds benefit MLK Recreation Center and Wissahickon Boys & Girls Clubs of Philadelphia Programming.

Tuesday, January 11, 2011
Designs by Youth from

**Martin Luther King Recreation Center
Villa Retail Store
1231 North Broad Street
Philadelphia, PA 19122**

**TBD- Rescheduled due to Inclement Weather
Designs by Youth from
Wissahickon Boys & Girls Clubs of Philadelphia
Villa Retail Store
5700 Germantown Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19144**

6-8pm for both locations
Kindly RSVP to
Stephanie Borton at 215-568-2115 x3
or sborton@art-reach.org

By Barbara Speece

Barbara serves as **Special Projects Ambassador** through **Art-Reach's
Ambassador Program**