



For Immediate Release
May 7, 2021

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Media Release

NCCAES hosts movie premier for Ms. Tarpley's fifth grade class

North Charleston Elementary School

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Charleston, SC – Creativity abounds when it comes to learning at North Charleston Creative Arts Elementary School (NCCAES). Arts integration is a critical component of the curriculum. A recent example of that is the creation of a silent movie called [Westward Bound](#) by Erin Tarpley's fifth-grade class.

The class partnered with the Gibbs Museum of Art and teaching artist Marielena Martinez to create the silent movie during their study of the Westward Expansion.

Art and art-infused education has long been a cornerstone of the Gibbs Museum of Art's engagement with the community. Art to Go is a program designed to send teaching artists into the schools to collaborate with classroom teachers on art projects related to their curriculum and works on view at the Gibbes. Usually, this program culminates with a school visit to the museum and student exhibition in the Gibbes Education Center. However, this year that was not possible. Martine arranged for a movie screening for the students instead. Art to Go is made possible by the Jerry and Anita Zucker Family Endowment and the Gibbes Womens' Council.

Martinez and Tarpley are friends and former colleagues and began collaborating on this project over the summer. They wanted to find a creative way to teach the Westward Expansion curriculum.

They chose to do a silent movie that the students would perform in and produce. Martinez's role was to bring in the art integration while Tarpley taught the academic standards. This type of collaboration with the Gibbes Museum of Art is designed to bring art to students and integrate it into their lessons.

The painting "American Progress" by John Gast was used as the initial inspiration and analysis for the Westward Expansion project.

"The students analyzed and looked at what the artist was trying to portray," said Martinez. "The overarching theme was the search for prosperity."

The class studied travel, compared it to today's forms of travel, and used math equations to estimate how long it took to journey west. They studied measurements to determine how big a wagon travelers would need and how many items and people the wagon could accommodate. Mixed in with those lessons was information about the history of silent movies and how to create them.

"The students started building the wagon using what they had learned in class," said Tarpley. "We studied materials they would need to build the wagon. Many of my students are engineering-minded, and others create beautiful art. In tandem, the class created the props and a silent movie all while learning the curriculum."

Martinez said the students easily got into the theme and became one with the concept.

"We were able to spark a real understanding because we gave them the tools to do so," said Martinez. "The result was this beautiful movie that tells the story of a westward-bound journey."

The class finished the project in April and presented it to families at a movie premier and dinner in the school auditorium. Heritage Pools sponsored the event dinner. A drive-in theatre night featuring the silent movie is also being planned for the entire school community.

"This project brought students out of their shell, and they were able to shine in ways they normally wouldn't have," said Tarpley. "This is going to be something they will never forget."

Martinez agreed. She said the experience will allow the students to showcase their knowledge in many ways.

"This project allowed them the freedom to think outside the box," said Martinez. "We're all different types of learners, and this was a great way for them to connect history. It was a very real-world opportunity for the students to collaborate on a project."

"This project was truly an authentic experience in Arts integration," said Principal Robert Grant. "Tarpley and Martinez's collaborative efforts were textbook execution in the realm of cooperative teaching. The duo's efforts ignited student engagement and fostered a level of rigor within the classroom that I was proud to witness. Great teaching inspires students to see infinite possibilities within themselves. This Westward Bound movie production is the manifestation of that inspiration."

For more information contact the NCES at (843) 745-7101.

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About the Charleston County School District

Charleston County School District (CCSD) is a nationally-accredited school district that is committed to providing equitable and quality educational opportunities for all of its students. CCSD is the second-largest school system in South Carolina and represents a unique blend of urban, suburban, and rural schools spanning 1,300 square miles along the coast. CCSD serves more than 50,000 students in 87 schools and specialized programs.

CCSD offers a diverse, expanding portfolio of options and specialized programs, delivered through neighborhood, magnet, IB (international baccalaureate), Montessori, and charter schools. Options include programs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); music and other creative and performing arts; career and technical preparation programs; and military.