

Kids join hands in lesson on poverty and activism

Wood Gormley students learn about poverty as they create artwork for fundraiser exhibit

By John Sena

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When Susan Yanda was invited to a Canyon Road gallery opening in December, she didn't expect to get ideas for her sixth-grade class at Wood Gormley Elementary School.

But she did, and it turned out to be a great way to teach her students about poverty in the world.

What Yanda saw at the gallery was a cradle made to be part of the Empty Cradle Project, an art installation scheduled to open Saturday at The Banque in Albuquerque.

The project will feature more than 500 cradles and cribs made from recycled and scrap materials from around the world. The cradles represent the "lost potential of an estimated 48 million children orphaned by disease and poverty in sub-Saharan Africa," according to a news release from the project.

Yanda met Naomi Natale of Albuquerque, the project's founder and director, at the opening and saw making a cradle as a way to teach her students about poverty while helping them realize they have the power to make a difference. Natale sent Yanda a curriculum to go along with the project.

"It's amazing and frightening how many people are in need of help," said Soren Brown, one of Yanda's students. Soren said building the cradle and studying about poverty made him realize how lucky he and other Wood Gormley students are.

Devin Horne, whose artist father helped with the project, said the students decided each would make a model of one of their hands out of wire and newspaper and make the cradle from the models.

The hands, Yanda said, represent both the plight of poor children and the ability to comfort. "The symbolism of the cradle was really important," she said. "Hands can beseech; hands can cradle."

Students also decided one side of the cradle would represent pain and the other hope.

Natale came up with the idea for the Empty Cradle Project after a trip to Kenya more than five years ago. There she saw firsthand the suffering of millions of orphaned children. "I came back, and it was kind of a response to my experience there," Natale said.

Two years ago, she started telling people about her plans to put together an exhibit where artists would make cradles and cribs and submit them with a \$100 sponsorship. That money, along with the proceeds of any cradle sales, will go to The Firelight Foundation, a group that awards grants to organizations addressing the needs of children affected by HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa.

Yanda, who coupled the cradle building with lessons of activism, said the class started building in February and completed the cradle in April.

The project, Yanda said, was a good way to show students how they can help and is much better than simply talking about it. "It's very different than just book study," she said.

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IF YOU GO

What: Empty Cradle project, an exhibition of handmade cradles

When: 1 to 5 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays from June 7 to June 28

Where: The Banque, 219 Central Ave. NW, Albuquerque

Opening reception: 12 to 5 p.m. Saturday