

The Arts at River Rock School

At River Rock School, children are the producers of thoughts and ideas, rather than the consumers of them. To help them make meaning in their work, the school has a well stocked art studio, a block room, a woodworking area, and a dramatic play and/or dance space. The students spend at least one uninterrupted hour daily exploring materials and experimenting with techniques. A balance of teacher instruction and free choice helps ensure mastery of materials. Children become proficient in a wide range of media, and have the freedom to explore their preferred mode of expression. For example: one child dances for 10 days in a row; another builds with blocks for weeks; another creates structures or machines using found objects, cardboard, tape, and the glue gun. Teachers are trained to perceive when children need help learning how to extend their technical prowess. Experts are called in from time to time. Last spring, a parent volunteered to teach children how to build small solar cars – extending the children’s skill in pursuing their interest and providing instruction in basic mechanics and scientific concepts. All children receive basic instruction in painting, printing, sewing, and clay.



Children draw every day: they draw during activity time, while they listen to the chapter book read to them each day by a teacher, or when they are waiting for others to finish their lunch to go outside. Drawing is a vital part of the culture at River Rock. It is seen as a primary language for all people. It is the child’s earliest venture into the realm of storytelling.

All the children’s work is saved and housed in a collection. This archive of work serves as a portfolio of the whole person for the teachers. To assist in this endeavor, teachers and other community members make use of the descriptive process called “A Description of Work” developed by Patricia Carini of The Prospect Center for Education and Research. This process gives everyone access to a particular piece of work. Through a series of “rounds” in which everyone describes the elements in the piece, the work gains depth and meaning. It gives insights into the artist that inform the teachers’ practice. It gives new ideas and new ways of seeing the person, which are not accessible through other venues. The teacher gains a deeper understanding of the person, and is better able to assist in that person’s growth and learning.



In addition to the daily “activity time,” other art related activities occur on an ongoing basis. Children prepare masks and costumes for two parades that support our environment. One parade celebrates our local river, and the other celebrates the rite of spring. Our masks are of animals related to the river or the birth of a joyous season. We sing every week and have an extensive RR songbook and do two all school productions every year. This year we did a series of fables and poems for our Solstice Celebration. The end of the year play was “How to

Eat Like a Child,” a rollicking musical performed for our school community and the general public at a church in downtown Montpelier.

We value an education that develops imaginative, flexible and tough-minded thinking. The arts powerfully nurture the ability to think in this manner.