

The Arts in Every Classroom: A Workshop for Elementary School Teachers
Handout

Kingsbury Elementary School
Memphis, Tennessee

Instructional Choices

Kingsbury Elementary School, located in a low-income section of Memphis, has almost 600 students in kindergarten through grade six. The school has a longstanding relationship with the Center for Arts Education, which is part of the Memphis Arts Council. At the center of this partnership are “works of art” that are used as the basis for instruction. Professional teaching artists create hands-on, exploratory lessons around these works of art, which include musical and dramatic presentations from several genres. Teachers work collaboratively with the artists to integrate the concepts explored in the works of art into their curricula.

During the summer workshop, the Kingsbury team focused on the first work of art that their school would be attending, an opera version of Dr. Seuss’ *Green Eggs and Ham*. Later in the year, Principal Brett Lawson decided to bring the entire faculty together to develop units of study around a ballet that the children would be seeing — the Ballet Memphis performance of *Giraffes Can’t Dance*. The ballet is based on a children’s book of the same name and is set to music by Igor Stravinsky.

Program 7 shows the faculty developing an enduring idea around which to organize instruction. They use the backward design process of curriculum development explored in Programs 5 and 6. Program 8 includes three classes exploring different aspects of the ballet: kindergartners researching animals to design costumes for them, third-graders exploring movement and vocabulary as they relate to the animals in *Giraffes Can’t Dance*, and a fifth-grade music class exploring a theme by Stravinsky. In this way, the multi-arts nature of a ballet is explored through lessons from a variety of perspectives.

Role of the Principal

The principals at each of the Learner Team schools played important but different roles in ensuring that the teachers could experiment with the ideas from the summer workshop. Principal Brett Lawson took an active role in deciding how the work of the summer would apply at Kingsbury. He brought the whole faculty together to create an enduring idea that would guide student learning for the ballet. He facilitated and coached the faculty’s design of units through the backward design process. He participated with the teachers and students in one of the lessons given by a visiting dance artist. Brett’s vision of the importance of the arts is the guiding force behind the role they play in his school.

Role of the Teachers

Teachers took a proactive role at all of the schools, understanding that they had to be actively and wholeheartedly involved to make the effort work. At Kingsbury, the endeavor became schoolwide, as teachers dealt with the challenge of designing arts-based units that would be relevant to their classroom goals. Together, the teachers worked through the process of developing an enduring idea and essential questions related to the ballet. They then divided into groups containing grade-level teachers, specialists, and special education teachers to develop performance tasks suited to their students’ individual needs.

Role of the Specialists

Kingsbury has only one arts specialist, music teacher Thomas Raphael, who was a member of the Learner Team from his school. But he is not the only expert in the arts that the children at Kingsbury meet. For the work on *Giraffes Can't Dance*, visiting artists played a vital role. Dance artist Anne Delautre and other visiting artists from the Center for Arts Education came to the school to work with each class three times over a period of about one month to prepare students for what they would see in the ballet. She returned to the classes after the students saw the performance to discuss what they had seen and help them reflect on their experience.