



Benazir O, grade four.

BE CALM & HANG ON

Megan Giampietro

For many children who attend large urban schools, there may not be opportunities to travel the world. The art teacher is in a unique position to bring the world into the classroom. The children at Loesche Elementary School in Philadelphia became part of a very special unit after I visited the Sloth Sanctuary of Costa Rica, situated right in the center of a lush rainforest. This unit endeavored to bring awareness to the plight of sloths in their rainforest habitat, which is being increasingly decimated.

Invitation

We were invited to develop arts integrated lesson plans and activities that portrayed the sloth in its natural environment: the rainforest. Sloth Sanctuary founder Judy Avey-Arroyo and managing director Gerald Richardson of the Dallas World Aquarium, along with consultant Susie Walker of the National Aquarium (USA) and freelance designer Pamela Dadgar, worked directly with me and Loesche Elementary students to launch this groundbreaking unit for the Sloth Sanctuary of Costa Rica.

The lesson plans, activities, and student artwork would be presented on the Sloth Sanctuary's website under their Overview: Curriculum tab, to be viewed by a worldwide audience. The unit became a large collaborative effort and all 900 students at Loesche participated, including students who have special needs. The artroom motto became "Be calm and hang on," just as sloths do quite naturally!

Inspiration

For inspiration, the Sloth Sanctuary sent us a link to *Ocean Mysteries*

with Jeff Corwin, which did an entire episode on the rescued sloths at the Sloth Sanctuary. We also decorated the artroom with sloth stuffed animals

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and photos of sloths hanging in trees, eating, and caring for their babies. Students each received a sloth calendar for their participation in the unit.

Projects for Every Grade Level

Each grade level from K–5 worked on a specific art project. Kindergarten and first grade produced creative drawings of sloths wearing colorful patterned pajamas, which they learned that baby sloths wear at the sanctuary as they recover from uncomfortable skin conditions. Students used colored pencils and markers for their drawings.

Second-graders created baby sloths who had crawled into flower pots, and

third-graders made sloths hanging about in buckets, after they learned this is how sloths are safely transported at the sanctuary. When fourth-grade students learned that almond leaves are an important part of a sloth's diet, they carefully constructed fuzzy sloths lazing about in their favorite almond trees. All students worked with construction paper, scissors, glue, colored pencils, and markers for their lively mixed-media creations.

Fifth-grade students dubbed their drawings "Doodle Sloths" and filled their intricate drawings of sloths with a variety of patterns, including stippling, zigzags, interlocking forms, shape repetition, swirls, stripes, checkerboards, nesting squares, triangles, and more. Each drawing became as individualized and unique as the rescued sloths at the sanctuary, who come in many colors, shapes, sizes, and textures.

Reflections

This unit was a yearlong effort culminating with the lesson plans and images of student artwork published on the Sloth Sanctuary website, just in time for fifth-grade

students' graduation. Two of the artworks received the Philadelphia World Heritage City Award.

There were countless lessons learned during this unit, including drawing skills and techniques; cutting, gluing, and construction; use of foreground, middle ground, and background; blending; and using mixed media.

The "big picture" lessons included conservation of species and habitat, science, collaboration, geography, biomes and, of course, all there was to learn about sloths! The most important lesson was that art can change the world, and that when children work together, they can have a tremendous impact. 🐼

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NATIONAL STANDARD

Connecting: Relating artistic ideas and work with personal meaning and external context.

WEB LINK

Sloth Sanctuary Curriculum: bit.ly/2KdCdtD

Anastasia S.



Sloth illustration, grade five.

