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Accomplished Teaching Artists Introduce Students to Urban Storytelling, Cultural Landscape Painting, and Blues Music



The 2016-2017 Artists from Left to Right: Helen Pafumi, Michela Mansuino, and Curtis Mailloux.

Fairfax County, VA – The Arts Council of Fairfax County has placed three Fairfax artists at middle schools throughout Fairfax County as a part of the **Artist Residency Program**. The artists are connecting theatre, visual art and music with the core study areas of language arts, civics, social studies and creative writing to offer students engaging, unique and innovative learning experiences.

- Playwright, director, actress, and educator **Helen Murray Pafumi** engaged Key Middle School drama students in *“Urban Storytelling: What I Wish I’d Said.”* Her residency promoted empathy and self-realization through theatre writing and performance with cross-curricular connections to language arts and civics.
- Award-winning landscape, portrait, and en plein air artist and teacher **Michela Mansuino**’s residency, *“Cultural Landscape: Past, Present, and Future”* at Kilmer Middle School is investigating how visual art communicates a sense of time and place with cross-curricular connections to social studies.
- Multi-instrumentalist, roots musician and arts integration educator **Curtis “Mr. Blues” Mailloux** will conduct his artist residency *“You Can Write a Blues Song!”* at Glasgow Middle School later this spring. He will use songwriting in the American blues styles to integrate music, social studies and creative writing.

Pafumi's residency program offered students an opportunity to define and explore the act of bullying by using their own words and stories to create an engaging Urban Storytelling Vignette that was performed like a monologue as part of a collective Listening Party. This residency challenged students to use writing and theatre to better understand themselves and others as well as to approach bullying in an empathetic way. Pafumi and students created a podcast that summarized their residency experience and reflections on the subject of bullying.

"As an educator, I strive to instill a love of story and language in young people," said Pafumi, who has previous experience with middle school-aged children. "Through this residency, I hope students acquire a voice for their own passions, an improved understanding of themselves and an increased respect for the feelings of others."

Mansuino's residency program inspired students to consider the cultural landscape of the United States from a historical and personal perspective by researching recognized artworks that interpret aspects of American landscape in creative ways, composing an original landscape painting representative of a particular time and place in the United States, and developing an artist's statement to explain the connection of their piece to the American experience.

"As a teaching artist, I lead students to a deeper understanding of their place in the world," said Mansuino. "This residency provided the opportunity for me to share my observations of the world with young artists, enabling them to see the creative possibilities in making new connections to their environment and develop their artistic skills."

Mailloux's residency program will show students how American roots music of 1910-1945 reflected the changing lives of Americans, particularly African Americans of that era, and students will be challenged to compose song lyrics that reflect personal experiences or describe the experiences of a historical figure of their choosing. Completed lyrics will be matched to blues rhythms in a culminating performance where students' original songs are accompanied by the artist.

"Introducing blues songwriting as a communication tool to young people gives them an opportunity to express themselves in an honest, creative way," said Mailloux, who has more than 20 years of experience in creating and presenting educational performances for all age groups. "Facilitating this process of self-discovery and creative expression is artistically fulfilling for me."

The Arts Council, in collaboration with Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) and an anonymous funder, launched the Artist Residency Program in 2014. The program is designed to create opportunities for professional artists to share their expertise through unique arts education programming that supplements the FCPS curriculum. Students are engaged in cross-curricular learning through the arts, enhancing their skills in creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration. To date, nine Fairfax County artists have been trained and placed in FCPS middle schools through the Artist Residency Program. These artists are available for additional residencies, private and public school funding permitting.

"Thanks to the vision of our lead funder and FCPS, we began this program to benefit both middle school students and artists," said Linda S. Sullivan, President & CEO of the Arts Council of Fairfax County. "Generous support from additional funders is helping us to grow this top-quality arts education program, which benefits the schools, helps students experience

imaginative and interdisciplinary projects, and enables students to work directly with professional artists. It's a win-win for everyone.”

This program is funded in part by the Carnival Foundation, the Dominion Foundation, Jean Schiro-Zavela and Vance Zavela, Virginia Commission for the Arts, and one anonymous funder with institutional resources committed by the Arts Council and FCPS. To learn more about the program or to host a teaching artist for your middle school, visit <https://artsfairfax.org/resources/opportunities/artist-residency-program>.

About the Arts Council of Fairfax County

The Arts Council of Fairfax County fosters a dynamic and diverse arts scene throughout Fairfax County. We ensure the arts thrive by providing vision, leadership, capacity-building services, advocacy, funding, education, and information. The Council distributes over \$500,000 annually through competitive grants and awards to arts organizations and artists of all disciplines. The Arts Council of Fairfax County is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and Fairfax County's designated local arts agency. It is funded in part by Fairfax County, corporations, foundations, individuals, the Virginia Commission for the Arts, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

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