

Andrew's Art

Susan Striker

"So close your eyes for that's a lovely way to be aware of things your heart alone was meant to see."
—Antonio Carlos Joabim



This texture collage project was inspired by *Lucy's Picture*, a charming story about a child who makes a multi-textured collage for her blind grandfather. Andrew was our expert in seeing with his fingertips and gave the class suggestions and encouragement. It was a very positive experience and helped Andrew's classmates become more sensitive to his needs and special abilities.

Andrew is a very intelligent and sensitive seven-year-old boy. He has a terrific sense of humor and is usually the first to laugh at a joke or recognize a funny situation. When he walks, he bounces. He is a good friend, works well with his classmates, and is always eager to help. He is very imaginative and loves to tell stories about his adventures. He loves to play chess and climb on the outdoor play equipment. Andrew was born blind.

I have defined myself as a teacher of the visual arts for most of my life. Suddenly, I have discovered that I would be responsible for teaching art to Andrew. How do you teach the visual arts to a child with absolutely no visual abilities? And why? As a reviewed by first-grade curriculum, with its emphasis on color and drawing, I worried that Andrew would be left out of important learning experiences. Yet, I wasn't ready to discard it since it proved invaluable to students in the past. Clay was the first things that popped into my mind, but I never

enjoyed working with it and considered my expertise in this subject to be limited. Then I met Andrew.

A Breakthrough

Andrew is so gifted in social skills, so eager to learn, and so willing to forgive those of us who have trouble understanding his needs, that he made my success teaching him inevitable. One of my favorite lessons integrates the first-grade math unit on patterns with an art lesson inspired by the story *Hide and Snake* by Keith Baker. I wondered how I could possibly adopt this drawing lesson so as not to exclude Andrew.

The story *Hide and Snake* relies heavily on visual tricks and was not particularly interesting to a blind child, but Andrew listened politely and got an understanding of a concept of repetition of shapes to create patterns. Only minutes before the class was ready to begin, I had my inspiration. While the other children drew linear patterns with markers, I gave Andrew self-adhesive stickers in assorted shapes.

He created his linear patterns with his stickers and could feel their raised surfaces as he worked. As a line drawn by his classmates separated each pattern, Andrew drew lines with white glue and his aide then helped him place yarn in the glue. This project was so simple and successful that it gave me the confidence to proceed to work with Andrew in a much more relaxed and productive way.

Texture Collage

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seeing with his fingertips and gave the class suggestions and encouragement. It was a very positive experience and helped Andrew's classmates become more sensitive to his needs and special abilities.

Lessons from Andrew

When we made our name designs for the covers of our portfolios, Andrew's aide brought his Braille typewriter. Having never seen one in operation, I asked Andrew if he would show me how he used it. Within five minutes, the whole class was gathered around Andrew's table while he proudly displayed his talents. The children had been very curious but were afraid to seem nosy. Andrew took delight in being the center of attention and made an ART label for the door.

Andrew was also my inspiration to deal with my ceramic phobia. When the Arts in Educa-



Andrew teases me by smelling my silk sunflowers, but his powers of observation were as effective in rendering them in chalk as any of his classmates.



When the Arts in Education Committee came to me and asked me to recommend an experience for the children that would have a lasting value, I requested that they hire a potter to teach the children how to deal with clay and to familiarize me with the kiln. The potter did a different ceramics project with each of the six grades, and Andrew participated with every grade. He will be encouraged in the future to use clay to express himself.

tion committee came to me for a recommendation, I requested that they hire a potter to both teach the children and familiarize me with the kiln so that I could continue these experiences for the students. The potter did a different ceramics project with each of the grades, and Andrew participated in all of them to learn how to work in all six ceramic techniques. He will be encouraged in the future to use clay to express himself. ☺

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