

Artist in the Classroom: Partners for Learning

When you meet actress Holly Adams, you view energy in motion. Holly Adams, an actress, director, clown, playwright, and Hangar Theatre teaching artist, is full of ideas, juggling a schedule that changes each week and is always on the go. From stage to the classroom, Holly will tell you she loves both. "I personally LOVE teaching and find it improves my work as a performer and playwright. I do a combination of teaching master classes in certain aspects of theatre performance and creating arts-based academic curriculum for alternative learning strategies in k-12. It's wonderful and so inspiring! I worked hard to become an excellent teaching artist, including taking teaching courses and being an apprentice to a master teaching artist; every year I make sure to take at least one class to grow my artistry and one to grow my teaching skills."

In 2011, Holly was the artist in residence at Caroline Elementary School, partnering with the third grade team of teachers to improve literacy, particularly inference. This Hangar Theatre pilot project was funded by grants from IPEI and the Fine Arts Booster Group. The residency goal was to use theater techniques to navigate inference and help students uncover meaning. Theater scenes, acting out text and using the language of theater (character, scene, setting) were all tools for investigating inference. Teachers saw an increased level of comprehension and concept use, and used the ongoing evaluations of core content knowledge, creation of icons to better dissect paragraphs, and identification of types of paragraphs as strategies to expand the types of inferences students make.

When you meet dancer Lisa Tsetse, you are taken in by her eyes. She uses those eyes to really see what is going on in the classroom, and she is a master at using that knowledge to get students to move. Lisa worked with all preschool students in 2008-10 with "D is for Dancing", a dance residency focusing on the alphabet. She expanded her Teaching Artist work with kindergarteners in "Dance and Love Those Letters" residency, a collaboration with Carol Cedarholm and the Love Those Letters project of the district and the Family Reading Partnership. These projects had IPEI and Fine Arts Booster Group grant assistance, as well as support from many others. Pre and post residency assessments confirmed student progress. Students were engaged in multiple levels of learning. According to former Program Leader Diana Levy, "The integrated nature of the curriculum engaged the children in all areas of their development: cognitive, social-emotional, language and physical. The project made outstanding use of creative movement, dance and music as a means to approach the children's cognitive and language/literacy training". Lisa notes, "To see children as they are and to use the arts as a creative tool to enthusiastically support who they might become - this is truly joyful and lifelong work".

The Fine Arts Booster Group, as an IPEI affiliate, seeks to connect community resources to the schools. Ithaca is blessed with talented artists eager to connect to our schools. Lisa and Holly bring passion to their art and to their work in the classroom. These artists become collaborators with the classroom teacher, partnering on new paths to learning. These partnerships have proven to invigorate all, the students, the teachers and the artists.