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Students create a kingdom where diversity reigns



CORY YOUNG / TULSA WORLD

Photos are on display of the preparation process of Jefferson Heights Elementary School students whose work will be displayed at the Gaylord-Pickens Oklahoma Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City.

By **MATT GLEASON** World Scene Writer
3/24/2008

The giraffe is clad in a jungle king's skin — right down to the lion's regal mane. As for the snake, well, if that serpent weren't made of papier mache, it would slither in a tiger's striped coat.

So if those lifeless art pieces, all created by the hands of local children, could roar or hiss, they might just see their differences are only as deep as the flesh atop their bones.

That's the point of "Peaceable Kingdom," an art piece created by fourth- and fifth-graders from Jefferson Heights and Washington Elementary Schools in Sapulpa.

Inspired by Edward Hicks' series of "Peaceable Kingdom" paintings, a gaggle of students worked on the piece in art class, after school and for a handful of them, even during spring break.

"Peaceable Kingdom" is a part of the annual Respect Diversity Art & Poetry Contest, a project of the Respect Diversity Foundation.

The 100 collaborative works of art and poetry entered in the competition will be on display at the Gaylord-Pickens Oklahoma Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City from Tuesday to May 8 in the Tulsa World Gallery.

Other area schools featured in the exhibit include Mark Twain, Chouteau and Freedom Elementary Schools.

Now look closely at the "Peaceable Kingdom" beasts. Hidden in each of them are words like tolerance, fairness and respect, which lurk in the oddball skins to convey a poignant message.

"If you have respect and tolerance for other people," said Nancy Toomey, elementary art teacher for the Sapulpa school district, "you could imagine living life in their skin."

Now that "Peaceable Kingdom" is ready for display, Toomey hopes her students learned a lesson far greater than how to simply papier mache.

"I really think that it will help them to have an open mind," she said, "and try to see things from other people's viewpoints."

An opening reception for the exhibit will be Tuesday.

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Respect Diversity Foundation or Art & Poetry Competition, call (405) 359-0369 or visit www.tulsaworld.com/respectdiversity.

The event begins at 5 p.m. with an awards program. State Superintendent Sandy Garrett and Lyn Adams, director of the Oklahoma City Children's Theatre, will present awards to the winning schools.

The Gaylord-Pickens Oklahoma Heritage Museum is located at NW 13th Street and Shartel Avenue in Oklahoma City.

The museum is open Tuesday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Saturday from noon to 5 p.m. Admission is \$7 for adults and \$5 for seniors and students.

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