



Response-ABILITY: Empathy in Action

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Few people recognize or understand the conflict and crisis that result in refugee populations, and fewer still know what challenges refugees face in their adopted country. Students had an opportunity to intimately learn about the refugee experience and demonstrate empathy in action. They read autobiographical narratives, listened to refugee guest speakers, and conducted in-depth interviews of high school-aged refugees in San Diego county, then utilized that knowledge to create professional quality art, spoken word poetry that culminated in an arts and poetry festival. Refugee students shared their testimonies, HTHNC students performed their poetry, and their artwork was auctioned to the highest bidder. All of the proceeds from the silent auction were donated to the International Rescue Committee's Peacemaker Scholarship Program.

Teacher Reflection

I can honestly say that this project has been the most meaningful of my career. It involved transformative learning for all participants, and fostered visible and lasting empathy among students. This was a special project because pride literally emanated from the room the night of our exhibition. There was not a dry eye in the room, including mine. Students knew that their work had an authentic purpose, one that affected real people, which impacted their motivation.

Student Reflection

Before this project I wasn't aware that there are refugees living in San Diego. I always assumed that San Diego was full of middle-class people, not refugees from war-torn countries. During the exhibition, I purchased one of the paintings of the refugee I interviewed, Myo, and gave it to him as a gift. I've given tons of gifts in my life but none felt as good as giving the painting to Myo. I learned a true sense of what it means to give and I think that is more valuable than any factual knowledge out there. —Grady

To learn more about this project and others, visit <http://thedifferencemaker.weebly.com/response-ability-empathy-in-action.html>