

Student-led HMS mural installation inspired by kindness and joy of learning

Inspired by kindness, curiosity, courage, and the joy of learning, students in Hampton Middle School teacher Lisa Woods' 8th-grade "Draw, Paint, Print" class conceptualized, designed, and installed a brand-new mural in the HMS cafeteria.

The images in the mural—such as butterflies, flowers, a dog, and a fawn—represent the Portrait of a Talbot and what Hampton Middle School stands for. The 8th-grade elective students played a key role in leading the project, taking charge of the drawing and painting process.

"I wanted them to have a really meaningful experience that would empower them to create something for our school that brings joy and is going to be a part of our school for years to come," said Mrs. Woods.

Students in the class worked with California-based artist Amandalynn to brainstorm and develop the mural's design. This process involved communication, collaboration, and perseverance as students worked together through various iterations of the design during visioning sessions with the artist. Students displayed leadership as they provided critical feedback on each design in deciding what imagery would be included in the final design representing the competencies.

"The students were the ones who really had ownership of the project," said Mrs. Woods. "The project itself unfolded as a great example of all the skills the Portrait of a Talbot encompasses."

The 24 students in the "Draw, Paint, Print" class worked together with Dr. Melissa Survinski (Enrichment Facilitator) to create an artist's statement describing their interpretation of the Portrait of a Talbot:

The **butterflies** symbolize curiosity, which we have the freedom to explore at HMS.

The **dog** represents the joy of learning, because we are the Hampton Talbots.

The **hands** in the center symbolize our openness to communicate with each other and a tolerance to appreciate diverse perspectives.

The **book** represents how we need to keep an open mind and grow a learner's mindset.

The **grasshopper** stands for the courage and confidence we need to keep trying and persevere.

The **fawn** represents kindness and empathy, because these are important to show to others.

The **flowers** are all different colors, but growing together in the same place, to show collaboration among our students.

The **bee** presents happiness and harmony, and the **sun** represents peace and calm.

"Every part of the mural represents the things we love about our school," the students said. "We are proud that so many students helped design and paint this mural, because it shows how much we cared to make our school a happier place. We did something that we did not think was possible, and we hope this mural reminds everyone that our school has many different people in it, and we all need to work together to make the world a kinder place."

Over the course of two days in November, students helped paint the background, sketch the design, and install the mural. Any students in grades 6-8 with an interest in the project had the opportunity to sign up and contribute to the painting.

This mural was generously sponsored and funded by the LIGHT Education Initiative—which aims to inspire, prepare, and empower students. Dr. Marlynn Lux, HMS Principal, says that the middle school partners with the LIGHT Education Initiative to provide students with leadership opportunities to empower them to cultivate positive initiatives that bring joy to the school community.

"Giving middle school students leadership opportunities is vital to their growth and development," said Dr. Lux. "Oftentimes people underestimate what young teenagers can accomplish, and I was blown away by this project in what our students were capable of accomplishing."

Mrs. Woods added that it's important for students to have these types of experiences in school that "are beyond being in the regular classroom setting."

"Those are the real strong memories that they are going to carry with them," she added.

HMS also worked with the LIGHT Education Initiative on the "Butterfly Project" which began last year. In this project, 8th-grade students, during their Holocaust unit in English Language Arts, created ceramic butterflies to honor stories of children who passed away during the Holocaust. The ceramic butterflies are part of a permanent display at HMS which serve as a reminder of the importance of standing up for others and fighting against hatred.

