

Leah Dorion Inspired Artwork

My class was taking part in the Willow Tree book awards and we were making our way through reading each of the books. One afternoon, I read my class the Giving Tree by Leah Dorion. After reading it, I discovered that Leah Dorion is a Métis artist and author, so I used the book again as a Métis prompt for role playing in drama. The students LOVED the art work and were excited to point out the details and the turtles hiding that were hiding on the pages. They were interested in the art, the second time I read the book it took forever as they were pointing out details on almost every page.

During recess, I opened the back of the book to see who this artist was and found out that she is from Prince Albert! That evening, I googled her name and found out that she has an amazing webpage and is a VERY successful Métis artist, teacher, filmmaker and published writer. I explored her website with my students and we took time to admire her artwork. We noticed Leah loves turtles and has connected with them through many pieces of artwork. She has a picture slideshow on her website of her and her family and friends building a huge turtle effigy on her land.

As I showed this to my students I noticed that they were very excited! I told my students that we were going to attempt to paint a picture using some of the techniques and colours that were in the book and on her website. We looked at her paintings and found one of a turtle that the students loved. In the following week, my students painted with acrylic paint on large pieces of white Bristol board. Students learned so much about colour, patience, line, more patience, and details in their artwork. I used a guided approach that still allowed for their creativity. We painted the background blue and then students could either put dots or swirls throughout. When the paint was dry, they traced on turtles with their pencils and then painted over the shape. Students were guided through each step and we focused on the four pieces of the turtle shell and how it relates to the common "four" found in many Métis and aboriginal symbols. Students were able to put their own symbols on their turtles. No two turtles were close to the same and all students created stunning turtles! I was so very proud of each student! We hung them in the hall for a few weeks and then wrapped up the artwork to give to parents as Christmas gifts.

I thought that this was the end of our Leah Dorion study...until I was starting to write letters with my students and I was brainstorming who we could write to. Santa and grandparents were suggested and then someone mentioned Leah Dorion. The students were ALL in favour and letters were written and mailed to her. I e-mailed Leah to give her the heads up of the package coming and even though it was almost Christmas, she was so happy and eager to get my 18

grade 2 letters. Leah wrote us back a wonderful letter and answered many of the questions that she was asked. My students were up on their knees on the carpet as I read the letter...they were so excited! She sent us a package of goodies that showed her artwork and made my students feel as though she was connecting with them personally. She even mentioned the possibility of visiting our school in the future. My students are ready to tackle another painting in Leah Dorion's style! They are such awesome grade 2 artists that have been inspired by an amazing and accomplished local artist!!



Utin – Grade 2



Devin – Grade 2



Jakob – Grade 2

~Pam Kellington