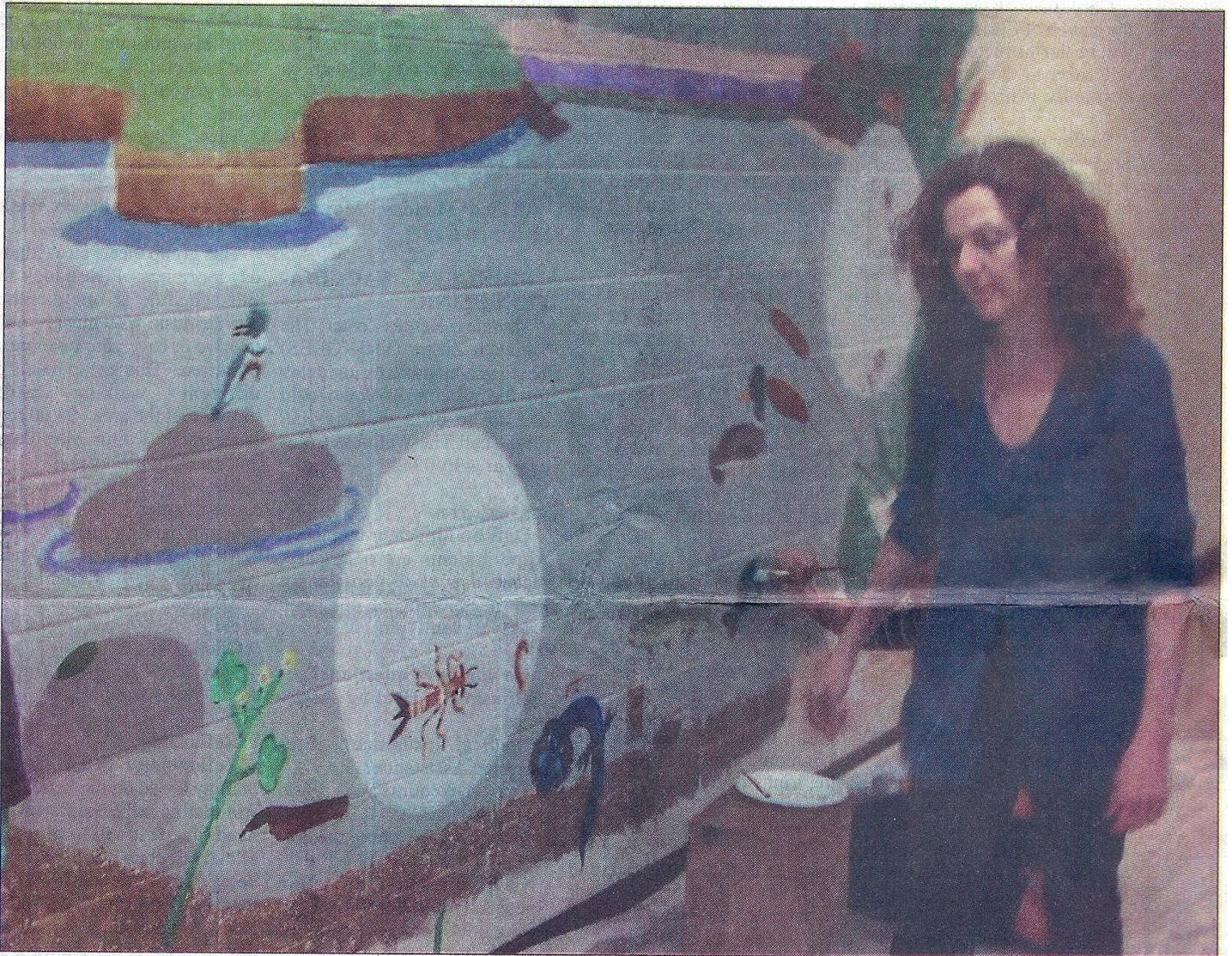


Environmental Mural at Coventry High joins art, science together



Jessica Selby/Daily Times

Artist Beth Drainville helps students in Peter Stetson's environmental science class paint an ecosystem on a wall at the school. Students decided what they would draw and are doing the painting with assistance from the artist. See back page for more photos.

Students learn through art about ecosystems

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COVENTRY — Normally they spend their time learning about different animal species, their habitats and their way of life, but as a special project, the students in Peter Stetson's applied environmental science class are painting them.

Stetson, one of the science teachers at Coventry High School, applied for an Arts Talk grant through the Rhode Island Council of the Arts along with several other teachers at the school and managed to secure the funding to do their special arts projects.

Stetson said he thought painting a mural that would incorporate a native ecosystem complete with native habitat and species would be a nice way to incorporate art into his typically artless science class.

He said that he pitched the idea in the grant proposal and was thrilled to learn that he along with several other teachers in the school had received the funding which would allow them to move forward with their projects.

In total the school was awarded \$3,000 from

the Rhode Island Council of the Arts. Stetson used his portion of the funding to hire a Rhode Island Council of the Arts sponsored nature artist and illustrator, Beth Drainville, to come to the school and get the kids going with the project.

Stetson said that so far he is thrilled with the work that the artist has done with his students.

"The artist arranged for the students to take a tour of the Botanical Gardens at Roger Williams Park and Zoo and she did some sketching with them there which they incorporated into their nature journals for my class," Stetson said. "That turned out great and acted as a kind of transition to this larger mural project."

With the initial sketching skills already under their belts, the students were then guided by Stetson through the selection of an appropriate ecosystem for their mural. Stetson said that together he and the students opted to do a water landscape.

Drainville said that she then worked with Stetson on guiding the students through the selection of appropriate habitat and species that could be found locally in that type of setting which they would incorporate into the mural.

"The students had to find references from their classroom material and proof that it would be appropriate for the ecosystem that

we chose and then I would work with them on incorporating it into the mural," Drainville said.

The mural, not yet completed, stretches 16 feet wide by eight feet high. It is of a pond setting and has various pond life species. There are water bugs floating on top of the water, fish species in the water, deer walking along the shore and mallards swimming along.

The students, many of which admit to have little to no artistic abilities whatsoever, said that they are surprisingly pleased with the turnout of the mural so far.

"I am not an artist at all and have not really taken any art classes and most of the other kids in this class haven't either, but we are all amazed at what we are doing with the mural," Ashlee Poku, a tenth grader in the class said. "I think it's a really creative way for us to express what we are learning about the animals and the wildlife and I really do think it is coming out good too. I did the deer."

Poku said that she thinks that having the reference point, a reference picture from their classroom material, has helped her to recreate the image of the deer that she did in the mural.

"I definitely don't think that it would have looked like a deer if I didn't have that, but I do really like the way it ended up coming out,"

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Mural enhances students learning experience

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Poku said.

Drainville does as well. From a professional standpoint, she said, she is extremely impressed with the work that the students have done. In fact, she said, she is “really pleased and pleasantly surprised with the progress that the students have made.”

“Even though we are not completely finished with the mural, we have got the basic design down so even if we don’t finish before the grant runs out, I think that these kids will do a fine job on their own complet-

ing it,” Drainville said. “So far the work they have done has turned out great. Even many of the students who are not in this class that walk by when we are out here say that the ‘mural is really cool,’ and that ‘it’s coming out great,’ and that is all really good feedback for these kids, and they deserve it because it really is coming out great.”

Drainville said that she has two more working sessions scheduled with the students. Typically, she said, she works with the class one day a week. She said that there are two applied environmental science

classes that are working with her on the mural and that the classes typically run back to back. So, she said, she usually invites about six students at a time from each of the classes to come out and work on the mural.

The actual paintings, she said, are completely done by the students. She said that she is there purely for guidance and support only and that because of that the students have gained the confidence needed to carry out the project just in case they don’t finish in their next two sessions.