

Blue Sheep

“Blue sheep!” gasped one excited 4th grader as I picked up a large, fluffy, blue rolag for the spinning wheel demonstration during a presentation at the Lynbrook Elementary School in Springfield, Virginia.

Introducing fiber arts to elementary school children can be a fun and rewarding experience. Most kids can run circles around us when it comes to operating a computer but wouldn't have a clue about how to use a potholder loom and a handful of loops.

Waterford Weavers Guild offers an annual grant to Fairfax or Loudoun County schools to encourage teachers to include fiber arts education in their curriculum. A 2004/2005 grant was awarded to art teacher Julie Sagatov at Lynbrook Elementary to fund an ambitious program, which included a Fiber to Fabric demonstration followed by a hands-on program in dyeing, weaving, and kumihimo.

Dressed in a colonial costume, I introduced the 4th grade to the equipment and processes involved in turning wool into fabric in the colonial times. Students participated in hand carding, guessed what those little grey things in the bag labeled cochineal were, and learned how I got the "blue fleece" for spinning.

The 45 minute introduction to fiber processes was followed by a Kool-ade dyeing workshop in the art room. Each of the three classes participated in the dyeing process. Students selected colors and added them to large pots on hot plates. The results were very colorful and the students were anxious to begin the next step, weaving.

Teachers Julie Sagatov, Calli Scheppelmann-Couch, and I warped 19 Beka rigid heddle looms with enough Kool-ade dyed warp for the three classes to weave the planned project, a small bag with a kumihimo tie. While one class wove on the looms, the others learned kumihimo braiding. During the final class students shared what they had learned and wrote in their art journals.

The entire project lasted several months and culminated with an exhibit of the finished projects in the school's gallery space. The students followed up by sending me wonderful thank you notes. One student wrote: "Mrs. Hutten, you are a dream person. You never said 'no'. Also you gave us a lot of fun. It was fun to use the loom, but I got to say it takes a lot of time to get the hang of it. But you kept teaching us. I also want to give you special thanks for letting me use the dye. I will never forget it."

Joan Rothenmeyer Hutten

MAFA Scholarship Winner 2005