

# Bringing Fiber Arts into the Classroom

Nancy Wilson

Camp Verde Llamas

Camp Verde, AZ

I became involved in the Artist in the Classroom (AIC) program after I retired. The program is sponsored by the City of Sedona to provide art education to Sedona students. There are 26 participating artists from a wide variety of genres. My genre as you might guess is fiber arts.

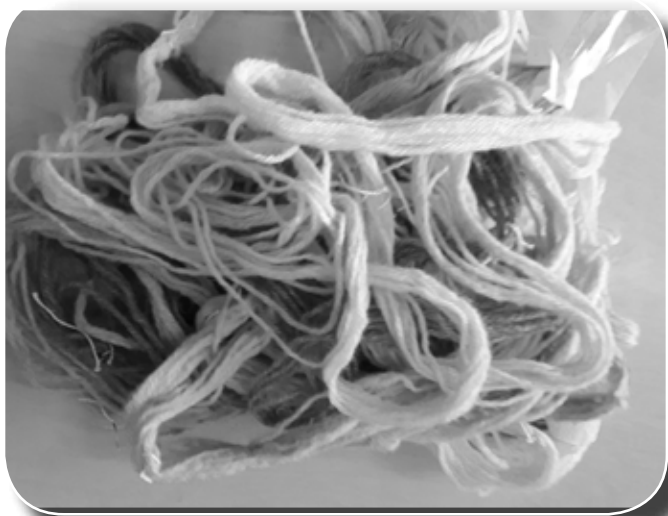
Teachers are provided information about the program at the start of the school year and then they contact the city's program coordinator when they are interested in having an artist come to their classroom. Assignments can last a few weeks or a semester. And in this particular program, artists are paid for their time and materials.

I was asked to provide a six week program (one day a week) for seventh and eighth grade students at the charter school. Part of the process is a planning meeting: an informal discussion with the teacher about what he or she would like included. In my case, the teacher was pretty informal, interested in having her students get an overview of fiber arts. This worked well for me since I didn't have a set curriculum yet, and that changed a couple of times through the process.

Here's a rundown of the classes I put together:

1. Kool-Aid dyeing in the microwave on wool yarn. This went over well. Next time I will use food coloring or cake dye because the Kool-Aid colors weren't as bright as I was hoping.

2. Tapestry weaving on cardboard looms to recycle the cardboard. The students made simple looms with leftover cardboard and could either use the yarn from the first class or yarn I brought from my stash. They enjoyed the weaving, and it was fun to see their creativity come forth.



3. Natural dyes on wool yarn. We used alum and cream of tartar for mordants and onion skins, black beans, and mustard grass (since I had an abundance of it growing as weeds). Onion went great. The black beans didn't work like the internet said they would (guess you can't believe everything out there), but we added food coloring to get a



nice purple. This was a good learning experience for the kids in improvisation. The mustard turned a pretty green, though I'm not sure whether it will be colorfast.

4. Felt vessels using a grapefruit as a base around which they wrapped fiber before placing it in a knee-high nylon to complete the felting process. After the initial felting is completed, the grapefruit is removed. Most were unsuitable for eating after the vigorous rubbing. The kids enjoyed creating games to do the felting. For example, three kids sat in a circle, each holding the plastic bag with their wool-covered grapefruit, counted to five, then threw the bowl to the next person, and continued on until the 10 minutes of felting were up. They got some good and not-so-good results. Next time I'll be more particular about how to do this and likely will create one along with the kids

5. Spinning and needle felting. Spinning was a bust; no interest. So my idea of always having more than they could do in the two hours paid off. They loved the needle felting; one student created a Sponge Bob piece and another created Patrick Starfish. Another student did a likeness of

*continued on next page*



Jerry Dunn  
 Bear Track Farm  
 Llama Training Center  
 303-277-1129 BTllamas@outlook.com



**PACK'EM**



**STACK'EM**



**DRIVE'EM**

# Lothlorien Llamas

Dick & Jeanne Williams  
 P.O. Box 1070  
 Plains, MT 59859  
 (406) 826-2201  
 bcllama@blackfoot.net  
 Packing & Raising Llamas  
 Since 1983



# PACK ANIMAL



*Pack Animal Magazine* is about the hiker's companion: the llamas, goats, and other pack animals that willingly haul our gear into the great outdoors. A quarterly print magazine full of color photographs, *Pack Animal* is for anyone who loves our wild spaces and our public lands.



[WWW.PACKANIMALMAGAZINE.COM](http://WWW.PACKANIMALMAGAZINE.COM)  
 ALEXA@PACKANIMALMAGAZINE.COM

*Bringing Fiber Arts into the Classroom ...continued ...*

her cat. I brought along short skewers for them to use to hold pieces in place to avoid poking fingers.

6. Indigo dyeing on wool yarn and t-shirts the students brought in. Indigo is magic! Kids loved it. I used an indigo dye kit from Dharma Trading which was super easy. We dyed wool yarn first to familiarize them with the dye process before doing their shirts. I was also able to show them about moving items slowly so as not to create bubbles and introduce air back into the vat.

I wasn't able to attend the class one week due to a friend's shearing day. I explained the shearing process to the students. I also made sure to bring in items from llama fiber that I had created. I have an alpaca felt hat I made that I brought in for the felting day. I also have some handspun llama/wool yarn that I dyed with indigo that I brought in on 'indigo' day. As an enthusiastic camelid owner, I will be sure to bring camelid fiber into the program even more in the future. It was indeed a learning experience for both teacher and students.



I'm happy to talk to anyone interested in proposing something similar in your local school system, and since the coordinator is a former co-worker I can get documents that might be helpful. I really enjoyed participating and hope to get called back to do a program in the fall. I'll feel much more confident and have ideas about how to improve the program.

