

Peace-building 6th Graders

Learning and Educating about Afghan People through Mosaics

Missy Klapperich, 6th grade social studies teacher in Cannon Falls, Minnesota, shares her inspiring story of a wonderful and extremely successful collaborative project. Missy initiated it in 2009 with Dina Fesler, Founder and Executive Director of the Children's Culture Connection — an organization dedicated to world peace by nurturing and connecting young peace-builders across the globe.



U.S./Afghan Junior Investor Program participants.

Education as “Most Powerful Weapon”

Nelson Mandela said, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” Sixth grade students at Cannon Falls, Minnesota, have done just that — used their education to change the world.

When Dina Fesler, founder of Children’s Culture Connection, approached me about working together to offer my students a peace-build-

ing program focused on Afghanistan it was the start of something remarkable. The goal of the program was to learn about Afghanistan and provide the students with as much real-life interaction and experiential learning as possible. We wanted to make a personal connection with Afghan people in order to be completely invested in the project.

American children have little knowledge of the realities of life for young people in other cultures, especially in war-torn areas. With the war in Afghanistan it is easy to overlook the individual

and focus on the negative aspects of the situation. Dina and I wanted to help the students put a human face on the country and break down the stereotypes and misconceptions associated with Afghanistan.

U.S./Afghan Junior Investor Program

As part of our program, titled the U.S./Afghan Junior Investor Program, the students were introduced to the various art forms in Afghanistan. We felt that an especially power-



My mosaic might just look like tile glued onto a board to you, but to me it means so much more. Most Americans judge people who wear turbans,

head-dresses, or any other kind of clothing they are not used to. Even I, myself, USED TO judge them. Not anymore! Because of my ten-week learning program I now understand them. People in turbans used to creep me out, but now when I see them I say to myself, “They are so cool.”

People need to stop being so judgmental just because we like jeans and they like turbans doesn't mean we should be cruel.

So, my main message with this mosaic is simple. This dress represents the beginning of a friendship between two cultures.

Morgan Thumann



This is a mosaic of clothes being washed in a dirty river. It really means a lot to me because it shows the struggles and difficulties

the Afghans face even trying to do something that is so simple for us...like washing clothes. Some are lucky just to have water, whether it's clean or not. We should all be very thankful for what we have and try to help the Afghans out in some way. That's why this means a lot to me.

Mason Lundell



My mosaic means a lot to me. The shattered pieces represent what Afghanistan is right now, but as we move along and help Afghanistan we can get closer and closer to a united country. This is shown by the beautiful part of my mosaic; the pebbles in-between show the rough and bumpy road the Afghans must take to get to the united country they want to be. The beautiful, shiny, glass pebbles. The hearts on each corner mean that we will have hope and love throughout the changes in Afghanistan.

Dani Hansen



All you see here is a board with some tile on it. But what I see is war, fear, death, food, and depression. Afghanistan. But through the thick and thin some people need to realize and understand what these people have to go through. All these lines are things that these people have to think about everyday. They have to choose. Go deep into your mind and think it over. What do you see here? They are patient. They have been waiting for 30 years for war to be over. They have been waiting for a new beginning. Deaths, bombs, food, education, depression, money is what they think about everyday. Remember them. Help them. A new start. A heart of your own.

Cheyenne Regenscheid

ful art form was mosaics. We asked each of the students to make a mosaic representing a thought or feeling they had concerning Afghanistan or its people. Some chose individual people as their inspiration, such as 14-year-old Karima from Kabul whose dream in life was to become a reporter. Others chose dwellings, objects or situations as their inspiration. Most, however, chose a strong feeling they experienced to create their mosaic. The most popular idea was "hope." Children are optimistic by nature. Our students know the immense struggles and hardships the Afghan people face, but they are

still able to see through the chaos, poverty, war, and sadness to find hope. This was beautifully depicted in their mosaics.

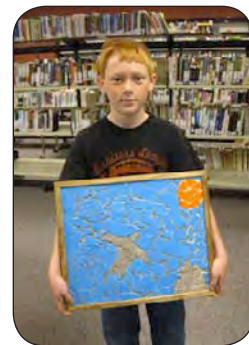
I had each student write a summary or meaning to go with each piece of art. Although the mosaics are beautiful, the true beauty is in the writing. Each and every one is precious; they leave you with a warm feeling deep in your soul.

Educating Others

As an educator, I know that true learning takes place when you can teach what you have learned to someone else. My students have had

many opportunities to take their message of peace and tolerance on the road. They have been invited to speak to various community groups, art camps, and social gatherings.

The 42 mosaics have been on tour since May 2010 as part of an exhibition entitled, "Dreams for Afghanistan...Hope Amidst the Chaos of War." They even spent time in the Minnesota State Capitol where people as far away as Japan and Germany were able to learn from their messages. The 6th grade students at Cannon Falls Area Schools have truly become inspiring global citizens!



Afghanistan is in chaos. Its economy is shattered and almost everybody is poor. The Taliban are still there, and are a threat to their society. They need to be dealt with. In our nation, the eagle represents freedom because it can soar over everything, seeming to have no worries. With the help of America, they, too, can be free just like the eagle.
Luke LaMoore



This year has been one of the most exciting years ever because I got the chance to learn about Afghanistan. Lots of Americans think about Afghanistan as just another country where we've put our troops. Others think of it as a place where we are at war with Afghans. Some don't even know Afghanistan exists. But there are a select few who really know what is going on there. My class can be included within those few. You may think people who wear turbans are bad, or you may find Afghan culture weird, but when you understand them you will want to help. In Afghanistan it's common to be very poor. Some kids have to stay home and work instead of going to school. They need help finding hope, and I want to help them. So that brings me to my mosaic. It may just look like a bunch of tiles on a board to you, but to me it represents all the people in Afghanistan, the good and the bad, struggling to find hope. Can you help them find it?
Lily French



My mosaic is about the Afghans and their life. The black stands for the hurt, war, their lost loved ones, dark memories and all the other bad things. The yellow star is their hope. They still believe there is hope in their life, and it is worth it for them to keep on living. I don't think they would want to leave this world knowing their country is in war and they can't make peace. The line in my mosaic is like their blood vessels. It stands for what they believe in. It is the life line that the gods hold, and they will soon die when their life line breaks. They will do just about anything to live and fight for their rights.
Kirsten Blevins

My mosaic symbolizes Karima's father. Afghanistan is full of many things; some good, some bad, but most are all bad. They have had war in their country for over 30 years, and my mosaic represents the feelings of one little person who lives in Afghanistan. This person is poor like most of the people in Afghanistan and has had one of his family members killed tragically. Each colorful tile represents the only joy he has in his life. His joys are his family, religion, his job and the fact that he and his family have survived another day.

But, the black tiles represent the bad and horrid things in his life. He doesn't have enough money to feed himself and his children, the endless war, and most of all the anger of not being heard. He's tired of the war and living like this. He just wants to be heard, but no one will listen.

The surrounding black tiles represent the bad and horrible things in the life of his family and friends. They just want to find a way out.
Hailey Huseth



My mosaic is about the slow steps of the Afghan life that start out dark and depressing. Americans are helping the Afghans up the steps to a brighter, happier life. The little black pieces of tile represent the Afghans that can't do it on their own, and had to turn to the Taliban. I think it is important that Americans know about Afghanistan so they can understand the tough times they are going through. If people understand Afghanistan, they will help support it. Mosaics help people understand it's importance.
Nicole Sandstrom

Acknowledgments

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