



OREGON SMALL SCHOOLS INITIATIVE

ARTS INTEGRATION PROJECT SUMMARY

PROJECT AT-A-GLANCE

Project: Word jazz

School: Springfield Academy of Arts and Academics (A3)

Class: Language art (2 classes of 30 students—a mix of freshmen, sophomores and juniors)

Product: A creative writing piece (poetry or short prose) set to a piece of original music and recorded on a CD

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Language Arts teacher Scott Crowell has always been interested in the work of word jazz artist Ken Nordine. "I have a real love of poetry and music," said Crowell, "and always thought it would be interesting to bring that combination of elements to my teaching." The opportunity to do word jazz with students presented itself when Crowell and an A3 music composition teacher collaborated with Marti Byers, a theater arts professional and teaching artist with [ArtsWork in Education](#). In Crowell's creative writing class students wrote and refined original works of poetry and short prose. Students in the music composition class composed original soundscapes tailored to each creative piece. Byers worked with students on how to best speak their pieces to the music, coaching them on how to use pace and annunciation to communicate the essence and emotion of their written words. The students' final work was captured on a CD. As the culminating event students participated in a CD release party during which selections from the CD were played for an audience of school and community members. A jazz band was hired to play the compositions of those students who wanted to perform their pieces live.

"Something I wanted to teach students is that writing is a process. Any good piece of writing has to be revised and revised again. What this project demonstrated is that music and performance are also a process. The bigger lesson here is that if you are interested in being a scholar, an artist or a good citizen, it requires commitment to the process of doing something well."

—Scott Crowell

Crowell and Byers began the project by sharing numerous examples of poetry and other writing by authors whose work, with its highly descriptive, condensed dramatic language, created images and emotional responses that lent themselves to musical scoring. They also played many examples of word jazz by artists like Ken Nordine, Robinson Jeffers and Lawrence

Ferlinghetti. Each class of students worked on writing pieces, which they shared with classmates for feedback. Although the students were accustomed to sharing their writing with their teachers, an environment of trust had to be established so that everyone felt safe to share their work with their peers. At the start of each class Byers led trust exercises (such as blind walks) and creative dramatics (such as guided imagery) to build a supportive community among the students. Each class had writing starters (such as atmospheric descriptions, musical selections, blindfolded scents, textures and objects) all of which were geared to open students up to finding new venues for expressing their ideas and turning off self-criticism. A lot of time was spent learning the process of safely and respectfully critiquing, and learning how to receive and use the critiques of others.

"I think that students didn't just become better writers, but better human beings for the experience."

—Scott Crowell

PROJECT GOALS

The goals of the project were to:

- Enhance students' abilities and confidence as writers
- Deepen students' understanding of different poetry and prose styles
- Practice writing from a variety of perspectives
- Develop skills in effectively revising work to maximize its emotional impact and intended message
- Learn to respectfully critique the work of others
- Learn to receive, use or reject the critiques of others
- Develop creative dramatic skills to communicate the meaning of piece when it is spoken
- Persist in the refinement of work to reflect professional standards of production and performance