

Sketchbooks with the Blue Room

Last school year, we introduced the idea of a year-long sketchbook for each child in the Blue Room. The intentions behind this were rooted in a desire to more closely document the progression of mark-making as it relates to writing and drawing.

This school year, the MCE team discussed how the sketchbooks could be a place to document not only the children's intentional mark-making progression, but also as a tool to capture the **crossover between nature + art**. We envision sketchbooks being used out in the nature preserve, sort of in a "field notes" manner.

When I met with the Blue Room teaching team, Charletra had the idea to treat the sketchbooks as a memento that could be reflected on, both at the end of the year (and for years to come) as well as throughout the course of the year. This could welcome the revisiting of certain drawings-from-observation, or spark conversations about certain experiences the children remember.

One example Charletra suggested is putting photos in the sketchbooks to provide some more context for whoever is reflecting back on it in the future. For example, if a child is drawing a flower from observation, we will include a photo of the flower not only so that the child can reflect back on it years from now, but also months from now while they are still at The Nest - both children and teachers can see the photo and remember what the drawing was from, note any changes in drawing style or competency, draw it again, etc.



The first encounter with our sketchbooks took place in the studio. Children were invited in to decorate the cover of their sketchbook. I find that this fun way of introducing the sketchbooks usually gets the children excited about them. It's also a process during which we can discuss what the sketchbooks are for.



When a child feels a sense of ownership of something, be it a book, a space, or even their community, they treat it with care, love, and respect.

I intentionally planned the small groups to mix 2nd year Blue Roomers with rising (previous) Green Room + Orange Roomers. The first few weeks of a school year are important for forming relationships.

Teachers plan intentional groups of children in ways that will encourage opportunities for guidance, collaboration, and problem-solving among older and younger children.





I love seeing the different styles children use to decorate something belonging to them, and sketchbooks are no different. Some children's designs are elaborate and busy, while others are extremely minimal, yet still very intentional.



Legend, for example, added only a handful of marks on the cover of his sketchbook. He explained that each line represented a member of his family. As he was explaining, he elongated certain lines meant to represent his parents, saying, "This is Mommy, she's tall."

Scarlet quietly worked on an elaborate collage for the cover of her sketchbook. When I asked her about it, she said she is, "adding lots of pom poms and stickers, to make it more beautiful!"





When working with mixed media, I find it super interesting to see **natural understandings of juxtaposition and symmetry** emerge in the children's work, especially when using materials like stickers and washi tape.

Henry used a long piece of washi tape to split his composition asymmetrically down the middle, and then balanced each side of it with stickers and marks made with posca pens.

Maddie used colorful dot stickers to create a nearly-symmetrical composition.



This morning I attended the Blue Room's morning meeting. I gave a general introduction to the work we'd completed on our sketchbook covers, and that led to a conversation about the sketchbooks' use and how we should store and handle our sketchbooks.



Rachel: What are these sketchbooks for?

Cedar: Drawing.

Leila: Writing.

Scarlet: Reading.

Ben: Tracing!

Rachel: Cathy and I were thinking about ways that we could use our sketchbooks in nature.

Charletra and I were also talking about how we could put photographs in here to remember certain things that we were doing [while creating the drawings].

Is this something that we will draw in all the time, like every day, or when we're practicing drawing something over and over again and using a lot of the pages?

Everyone: No...

Rachel: No, they are sort of special. It's going to stay here at school for the whole school year. It will live in your cubby! Is that a good place for it to live?

Karter: Yeah!

Rachel: Cubbies are special places that JUST belong to YOU. Your special things go in your cubby and... Can other people go in your cubby and take things out?

Everyone: No!

Rachel: So, that's where your special book is going to live.

What are some other agreements we should have about sketchbooks?

Karter: Take care of them.

Cedar: Be gentle with them.

Ben: Don't break them.

Scarlet: Find them if you lose them!

Karter: Don't move it out of the classroom.

Rachel: Well, we talked about using them in the nature preserve, so maybe we can take them out of the classroom, but we have to be careful with them, right?

Cedar: Make it not dirty. if they get dirty, clean them.

Rachel: Scarlet did you want to tell us about your design?

Scarlet: It has a car... and stickers, and pom poms!

Stella: I don't take it outside because it might get lost and it might get wet.

Rachel: Like we talked about, we could take it outside, as long as we are...

Everyone: Careful!

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