

MOE Mural Celebrates Culture and History

By: Michael Curry



The phrase “teachable moment” is a popular phrase among educators and is something that we constantly look for in order to drive home a particular point. One of our goals as educators is to use meaningful and pertinent events and surroundings in order to grab the attention of our audience and teach something meaningful. When this happens, we call it *a teachable moment*. Some times these moments can be few and far between. But when they do come along, we pounce on them like kids under a newly broken piñata. When all the elements come together and everyone has a say and buys into it, then valuable learning is a natural by-product instead of a chore or duty. It becomes so much more than rote memorization. It becomes something tangible and applicable across the curriculum... across their lives. Such is the case with a mural that was recently painted at Chelan’s MOE.

This mural was a cross curriculum coordinated effort led by instructors from CHS, CMS and MOE. “*My Latino History students planned this project*” says CHS instructor, Heather Fox. “*The task was to study Mexican muralists and to reflect our school’s community through art.*” America is made up of a myriad of cultures and has always taken pride of its diversity, freedom and opportunities. Most of our traditions and holidays originated from other parts of the world. The USA is relatively new as a country compared to the rest of the world. Thanksgiving is the only one purely USA. While studying world famous Mexican muralists, the kids thought it would be a cool idea to paint their own mural celebrating the demographics of our area. MOE teacher JoDell Mitchell says, “*Last spring, my class of fifth graders met with Mrs. Fox’s high school history class to share ideas for the mural that was to be painted on the outside of MOE. Because we have a blended community of students in our elementary school, we came up with ideas that showed the blended cultures. We talked about how we all come from different homes and backgrounds and we all have much to give to others because of this. We also wanted to show how education for all is the focal point of us coming together and sharing our cultures with each other. CHS is 44% Hispanic and 53% Anglo, 2% Native American and less than 1% of Asian/Black. The successful and famous agriculture industry plays a key role in the cultural makeup of our community and should be recognized and celebrated with pride. “It was a great experience working alongside the high school kids” says Mrs. Mitchell. “We are used to being buddies with the first or second graders, but not with older students. Working with the high school kids was a treat. I hope we can do this again in the future.”*

“*We tried to use symbols important to our beginnings*” says CHS student, Britta Anable. “*The tee pees represent all of the Native American cultures*” said Brenda Leyva. “*The Statue of Liberty represents all of the European cultures that passed by her as they entered this country looking for freedom and a new life. Irish, German, Scottish, English, Scandinavian, Spanish, the list goes on forever*” said Evan Hendricks. “*George Washington represents all of them and the important leaders of many races that helped to shape our country.*” The reference to “*I have a dream*” by Martin Luther King Jr. emphasizes the fact that skin color is not the important factor in success or status, but quality of character. Whenever racism rears its ignorant head, people are hurt, walls are built and misunderstandings abound. As for the Mexican side of it, the same philosophy applies. “*The temple ruins represent the Aztecs, Toltecs, Maya, Olmecs, etc... from whom we are decedents*” says Gustavo Vargas. “*At one time, much of the southern part of the USA used to be part of Mexico, so our cultures are closely tied together*”. The paintings of Hidalgo and Pancho Villa, political leaders supported by

the US, represent the Hispanic side of our culture. The girl and the grain represent the hard work it takes to reap the rewards of the awesome bounty this country can produce. Baseball and Apple pie on a picnic cloth represent American heartland values with Americana flair. Hard work and immigration from all parts of the world, helped shape America into being a major world power and the envy of many nations. The same applies to the industry and agriculture of our little community in Chelan.



“Our students, both Anglo and Hispanic, are very proud of their accomplishment” says Heather Fox. *“They feel, as do we, that this mural reflects our population here at Chelan, and we should be proud of how we learn from each other and how our schools respect all who enter the classroom.”* Ms. Fox mentioned that as the students were planning this mural, they realized how much both cultures have in common. They wanted to tell the story balancing out both cultures with important symbols, events, and people within each culture and how they merge together through education. It’s a story of how we are more similar than different. The students who came up with this mural celebration are as listed: Britta Anable, David Anderson,

Erika Avila, Karly Bridgewater, Omar Figueroa, Evan Hendricks, Jessy Juarez, Brenda Leyva, Maribel Noriega, Katelyn Peer, Greg Schultz, Cole Soreano, Gustavo Vargas and Danny Zavala.

“This mural is a collaborative effort by so many people from all walks of life” says CHS art teacher, Sue Walker. Input was given from community members, members from the Lake Chelan Arts Council, students from MOE and CHS, teachers, and Artist, Jill Risley, of Fine Line Signs. *“She put it all together and painted and worked with art students from the school to complete it”* says Walker. *“My Latino History class planned this project under the artistic guidance of Sue Walker and with the help of Jodell Mitchell’s 5th grade class and Chelan’s ELL class”* said Ms. Fox. The mural, located along Woodin Avenue, was painted on the side of the covered area of Morgan Owings Elementary school. *“The theme has to do with how the specific demographics of our school’s culture blends together to make the “roots” of our knowledge tree. The mural is physically split with the Tree of Knowledge in the middle, with kids reading books in and around the tree. On one side of the mural is some Latino history and it is paired with some U.S. history on the other side”*.

Often, when studying history and culture, people are surprised about how much they have in common, as opposed to how many differences there are. Some examples of this in the mural show Mayan ruins/Native American tee pees, political leaders Zapata/General George Washington, Diego Rivera’s girl gathering grain/Americana apple pie on a checkered tablecloth, and Freedom (a famous golden statue of woman reaching high)/Statue of Liberty (with the local touch of having an apple in her hand). In the background you can see the mountains that surround our area. Kids did all of the designing, and Jill and the kids put it all together and kids painted it. The student leader for the project was Erika Avila, who came back from Wenatchee to help paint. The Tree of Knowledge in the middle of the mural represents the importance of knowing history so that valuable lessons can be learned from it, which helps curb ignorance, which is a major cause of racism in the world. Working together with each other makes us a great nation. But it all starts in the small town communities like Chelan, Washington.

Lake Chelan School District would like to extend a warm “Thanks” to [Chelan Multisport Corp](#), [Chelan Rotary](#), and the [Lake Chelan Arts Council](#) for their financial support of this project.