



Community Service Learning Through Art: Empty Bowls

Mission:

Provide an artistic opportunity for students to make a difference in their community that instills a sense of community service, awareness, and empowers our youth.

Objectives:

1. Through activities, students will become more aware of the issue of hunger in Rhode Island.
2. Students are provided an opportunity to make a difference in their community by making ceramic bowls to donate to the Rhode Island Community Food Bank's Empty Bowls fundraiser on Wednesday, March 27, 2024.
3. Students will learn techniques to create artful, handmade bowls.

What does the Rhode Island Community Food Bank do?

The mission of the Rhode Island Community Food Bank is to improve the quality of life for all Rhode Islanders by advancing solutions to the problem of hunger. Each month, the Food Bank feeds 80,000 Rhode Islanders in need of food assistance through their network of 143 member agencies.

In every community in Rhode Island, there are individuals and families impacted by hunger. Far too many people still require assistance putting food on the table. And food insecurity greatly affects some of our most vulnerable citizens. The health of children and seniors suffers when they have limited access to adequate nutritious food.

What is the Empty Bowls Project?

The Empty Bowls Project is a simple concept conceived over 30 years ago by John Hartom, a ceramics teacher at a Michigan High School, and his wife Lisa Blackburn as a way for artists to

give back to the community and alleviate hunger. Hartom encouraged his students to raise money for their struggling community by hosting an Empty Bowls event. His students made ceramic bowls which were used to serve a simple meal of soup and bread at a fundraising event. Guests kept the bowls to remind them that hunger still exists and that there is more work to be done. It is a shining example of how one person can truly make a difference.

Through the Empty Bowls Project, Hartom encourages many communities all over the world to do Empty Bowls events, with the rule that all bowls are handmade and the funds raised are donated to a hunger organization.

About the Food Bank's Empty Bowls Event:

The Food Bank is planning their sixth Empty Bowls event on Wednesday, March 27th, 2024 at The Waterfire Arts Center in Providence 5:30-8:00pm. Tickets are \$70 per person (\$60 early bird), which includes a handmade bowl to keep and an evening of tastings from over 30 of Rhode Island's best restaurants.

The Food Bank must collect over 1,000 soup bowls from artists in the community each year to sustain this annual event.

Starting an Empty Bowls Project With Your Students:

Whether you are working with beginners or advanced students/ hand builders or wheel throwers, there are many ways to create a unit or a project to support the Food Bank's Empty Bowls event. While it is important to donate bowls that are well made and safe, there can be opportunities for exploration and skill development. It can also be a chance to talk with students about social justice, the link between the arts and advocacy, and community service learning.

There are lots of great ways to tie service learning or social justice advocacy education into this project so students develop a sense of some of the challenges people in RI are experiencing. The Food Bank is a great resource for information and statistics both online and in person. Staff members from the Food Bank would be happy to have your class visit their facility for a tour or come into your classroom to talk about the work of they do. Please be in touch with Doris Moore (dmoore@rifoodbank.org) at the Food Bank if you plan on supporting this event.

Additional Ideas:

- If your budget allows, bring the students to the event on March 27th.
- Students can learn about and be involved in promoting the Empty Bowl event at school, in their communities and online.

- If any of your ceramic students need a Senior Project, this would be a great one!
- Create a professional development opportunity at your school for teachers and school staff to hand build or decorate bowls.

Deadlines:

If you plan to donate bowls to the Food Bank, please let Doris Moore (dmoore@rifofoodbank.org) know as soon as possible. Bowl donations can be dropped off at the Food Bank M-F between the hours of 8am-5pm at 200 Niantic Avenue in Providence. If you need the Food Bank to schedule a bowl pick-up, please contact Doris to arrange. Please plan to have bowls ready to donate by mid-February.

Bowl Making:

If it's helpful there are some project ideas for making bowls:

1. Bowl Rotation

This is a great way to encourage students to explore the process of forming bowls and surface decoration. Because many hands can be a part of creating one piece, students tend to be willing to explore and experiment a bit more. They are less precious with their work but respectful of others' contributions. This can work as an introduction or advanced project.

Wheel Throwing:

- Have all students spend a class or two throwing bowls. It helps if you have one large table to store pieces as they are created.
- Spend the next class or two trimming. Ask students to trim pieces they **did not** throw. It is really helpful for the trimmer to spend time exploring the shape of the bowl prior to trimming to see the shape and know where and how much to trim. This is a great way to have students develop a sense of how to look at form and thickness.
- The next step is glazing. Generally it is easier to glaze pieces after they have been fired once (bisque), but if you are short on time it is possible (although not ideal) to glaze unfired work.
- Again – students should glaze pieces they did not throw or trim. This can be a great opportunity to test glaze combinations or techniques. The teacher can number or letter the bottom of each bowl (1,2,3.... or a, b, c...) and create a corresponding list on paper. As students test certain glaze combinations or techniques, they can write down what they used or did for each bowl so there is

a record. It can be helpful to limit choices. For example, if you are having students experiment with layering glazes you might have them pick one base color. If they are glazing 3-5 bowls the second layer can vary to show differences.

- Once you have all the pieces glazed and fired, it's fun to put them all together and talk about the discoveries students made.

Hand Building:

This project may work best using slabs – either with molds or simple construction. Coil construction can work as well. It can be a bit more challenging to have more than one person work on building a piece using coils. This example will use method of slabs on slump molds. You will need to have a bowl-like form to “slump” clay over. Plastic container for food storage work well either as a mold (you will need to cover plastic with paper towel as it is not porous and clay will stick to it) or you can create plaster molds inside the plastic forms to use.

- Have each student roll out a slab of clay about ¼ inch thick. It's helpful to smooth and compress the slab with a plastic card after it's been rolled to remove any unwanted texture.
- Carefully lay the slab over a mold. Because this is a slump method the bowl form will be upside down on the mold. If you want the bowl to fit uniformly around the mold, gently coax or pat it around the form. You can also have it fall loosely.
- Pass your bowl to another student. Because the bowl is upside down, the next student can add a base or foot to the bottom. Use score and slip (or water) to join a base: balls, rings, slabs, etc.
- You can pass the form again and another student can carve a design into the outside of the form.
- It's best to let the pieces dry upside down somewhat before handling.
- The last step of glazing is another opportunity for a contribution to the bowl.

2. Design:

Bowls can be a great form to test design ideas for other pieces. Designing projects to encourage students to explore ideas in bowls is another possible way to generate pieces.

Some ideas:

- 7 bowls exploring 7 elements of design: line, form, texture, value, space, shape, color

- Soup bowl challenge: what makes a great soup bowl? Consider size, shape, rim, weight, foot, etc. Ask students to design their idea for this and then try and create it in 3-6 tries.
- Cultural exploration: Japanese Tea Bowls
- Artist exploration: Warren MacKenzie and the art of function

What makes a good piece to donate?

This can be challenging sometimes with students. When asking students to consider a donation, it can be helpful to ask them not to give their best work and not to give their worst.

It also helps to think of what is functional and safe. Below is a list to help guide your choices:

- Be thoughtful of sharp edges especially on rims or feet. If you have glaze or kiln shelf edges or chips on the bottom please grind them off.
- Use non-toxic glazes: most schools have to work with these.
- No cracks on rims or bottoms please.
- Please make sure the bottoms of your bowls are level enough to sit well on a table surface.
- It's best if the inside of your bowl has a solid coat of glossy glaze. Dry or unglazed areas can remain porous and will absorb liquid or food if used.

Resources:

Contact:

- Doris Moore, at the Food Bank
 - dmoore@rifofoodbank.org

Websites:

- Hunger Awareness Quotes - <http://bitsofpositivity.com/best-hunger-awareness-quotes/>
- Rhode Island Community Food Bank website: <http://rifofoodbank.org/>
 - Hunger Facts: <https://rifofoodbank.org/about-the-food-bank/>
- Empty Bowls Wikipedia page: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Empty_Bowls