River Of Words At Franklin Pierce University

The goal is to engage students in a common project. We hope that this creative exploration of an issue (which may or may not be related to water) will open up pathways to new insights about our relationships with others and our life in common. We encourage you to select a topic and a means of expression that supports what you are already doing in your course. This project should not be seen as an "add on" or extra work!

The earth uses water to communicate. Lately the earth seems to be expressing great discontent through the floods, tsunami, hurricanes, and droughts. The earth also expresses joy through rainbows, mists, waterfalls, streams and brooks, and waves. If the earth uses water to communicate and we use words, how are words like water?

Water manifests in three different forms. It can be fluid, solid, or gas. Certainly words are fluid in that they adapt to a situation. They can be insincere, indecisive, or diplomatic. Words can be solid in that they commit to an ideal or stand up for a belief. Or they can be stubborn or inflexible. Word, like mist, can obscure or lift someone’s spirit. Humans, like water, do not exist in a fixed form. The human body is made up of 60 to 70% water. We are constantly changing.

In A Dictionary of Nature Myths, Tamara Andrews writes, “Ancient people recognized creation as the emergence of form from formlessness . . . from the water, earth and life emerged.” In the same way, words transform our formless thoughts into form. We need human interaction, through language in all its forms, in order to thrive. Words are a manifestation of energy; they give form to thoughts. Like water, words, and our minds, are constantly in motion. Our thoughts and words change, just like water. One can believe strongly in one thing one day and feel ambivalent about it the next. One can feel anger at the simplest inconvenience one day and think that it’s funny the next. It can be challenging to find still water during a storm, or to still one’s mind during tumultuous times. Yet when they are still, the mind —and water—can be reflective and act as mirrors to the reality that surrounds them.
Those who participate in River of Words will use the power of words to communicate. You may take part in this project by contributing to the art installation with a written contribution or you may choose a different form of communication—spoken word, movement, film, sound, or visual arts. For your topic, choose something that is important to you. Whatever you would like to see changed in the world.

The River of Words Installation

The art installation will be made of torn pieces of paper that are attached to one to form a river of words. Each piece of torn paper will have something written on it and we will use plastic tags to attach the pieces of paper end to end. These streams of words will come together in an installation in Pierce Hall. The papers will be supported by a structure that provides both height and form. The room-size installation will serve as the focal point for a River of Words celebration on November 18, and may include dance, music, sound, film, visual art, poetry, or storytelling. (We discovered with last year’s Art for Water project that giving students the opportunity to share their work with a larger audience is quite meaningful for them.)

Christine Destrempes will be available to make classroom visits to explain the project and brainstorm with faculty and students about a topic in early September. Between now and mid-October classes will work on their contribution to the River of Words installation. In mid-October Christine will be back on campus to meet with participating classes during their regularly scheduled meeting time. At that time students will tear the paper into serpentine strips and start writing. (Paper and pens will be provided.) Students will be asked to provide electronic text files for a slideshow that will accompany the installation so that everyone’s contributions can be easily read. Finally, students will go to Pierce Hall during a class meeting in November to attach their contributions to the River of Words.

Faculty who wish to work independently on a project to be shared during the celebration in November are invited to do so. These may include written or spoken texts, films, images (including paintings, photography, or drawings) music or sound scapes, dance, or theatre pieces.

The River of Words installation also will be exhibited at the Sharon Arts Exhibition Gallery in Peterborough in March and April of 2011.

This project is being sponsored on campus by the New England Center for Civic Life. If you would like to participate in this project, please contact Joni Doherty at ext. 1025 or dohertyj@franklinpierce.edu.