

# Concentric Community: Art & Lit Exhibit 2021 Outcomes



## WHY READING MATTERS

We cannot truly be free without reading. Reading is a non-negotiable skill set for personal agency and self-sufficiency. It is also through knowing the stories of others that we deepen our humanity. When everyone reads, whole communities thrive - placing reading at the heart of conversations about equity, dignity, and prosperity. Our work connects people to the power of reading through the simple, essential, and effective act of reading together - in all the places we come together.

## OUR SHARED PURPOSE

Protecting opportunities for children and youth to learn and their motivation to learn is the highest call to action for community-based organizations with educational resources to lend during the long-term pandemic recovery. Reading paired with creative expression can achieve both by accelerating, amplifying, prolonging and enriching learning experiences for children and their families. Doing so requires honoring children as whole people and empowering the adults in their lives with accessible tools and support.

## The Project

As we enter another season of uncertainty, distress, and trauma during the ongoing COVID pandemic, the number of people seeking help with anxiety and depression has increased. Research suggests that young people are struggling most with their mental health (Mental Health America, 2020). Inspired by painter Alma Thomas' masterpieces, and developed in collaboration with ArtReach San Diego, the 2021 Art & Lit Exhibit **engaged 1,210 learners from 23 community partners** across San Diego County in creating "Identity Circles" that help develop mindfulness habits and emotional awareness through a connection with reading and art.

Since 2014, Words Alive's Art & Lit projects have been a source of deepening understanding for learners and rich collaboration for community partners working in the arts. The experience provides an avenue for students to digest themes of chosen books and place it within the context of the real world while the creative process provides an unparalleled opportunity to communicate their connection to themes of the story.

Recognizing that learners spent over a year social distancing, this year's selections of anchor texts featured characters battling loneliness on their journey to discover themselves. When students read about characters who face similar challenges with resilience, courage, and kindness they develop their ability to understand their own tribulations and improve their coping skills. Enhancing that connection between books and the world, art helps students activate that knowledge because it serves as a vehicle for self-expression and communication that transcends language.

## The Outcomes

### WHAT LEARNERS SAID

Participating learners were asked to complete a retroactive evaluation survey after completing the project. This survey intends to measure learner skillsets, interest, confidence, and value placed on reading, with importance placed on indicators of social-emotional learning after the program.

#### LEARNER SURVEY RESPONSES

*Survey responses from learners who participated in the project were overwhelmingly positive. As summarized in Figure 1 (right), learners demonstrated growth in key areas of interest, confidence, and time spent reading.*

#### After participating:

- The number of learners who rated reading as a good or great way to spend time increased by 53%.
- The number of learners who rated themselves as a good or great reader increased by 24%
- The number of learners who reported spending a lot or most of their free time reading increased by 157%

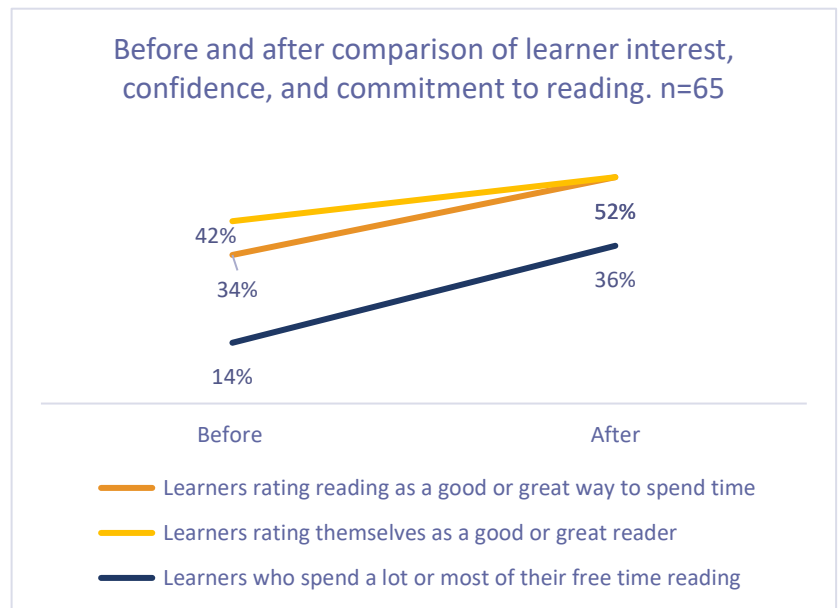


FIGURE 1

Learners also stated that the book choice inspired them to keep reading and had influenced their perceived value of reading:

- 74% of learners agreed or strongly agreed that the book they read for the project was interesting and made them want to keep reading.
- 48% of learners agreed or strongly agreed that the project helped them develop a positive attitude about books.



Additionally, learners identified enhanced scholastic and social skillsets after participating in the project, as presented in Figure 2 (below).

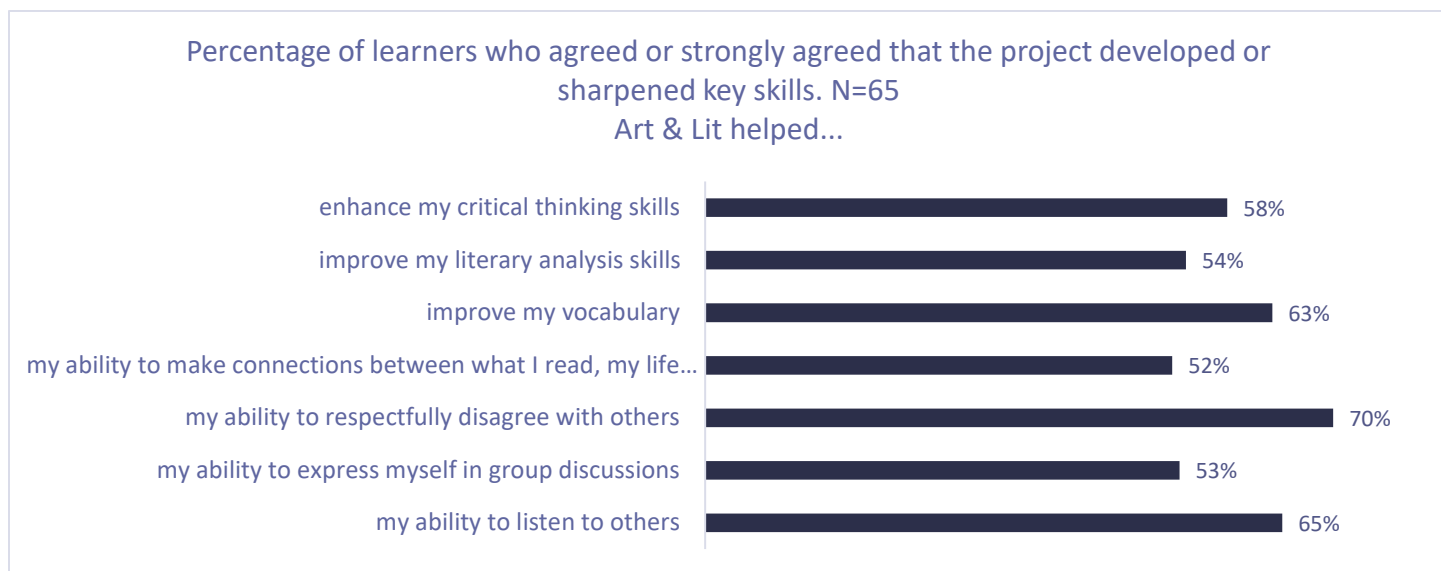


FIGURE 2

Because most learners were attending school or community programs virtually from home, families of learners were encouraged to participate in discussion and artwork through targeted activities and prompts included in their project materials. Figure 3 (below) includes responses from learners, parents, and community partners who helped implement the project across San Diego County and shows the percentage of participants who agreed or strongly agreed that a specific social-emotional skill was strengthened via participation in the program (n=84).

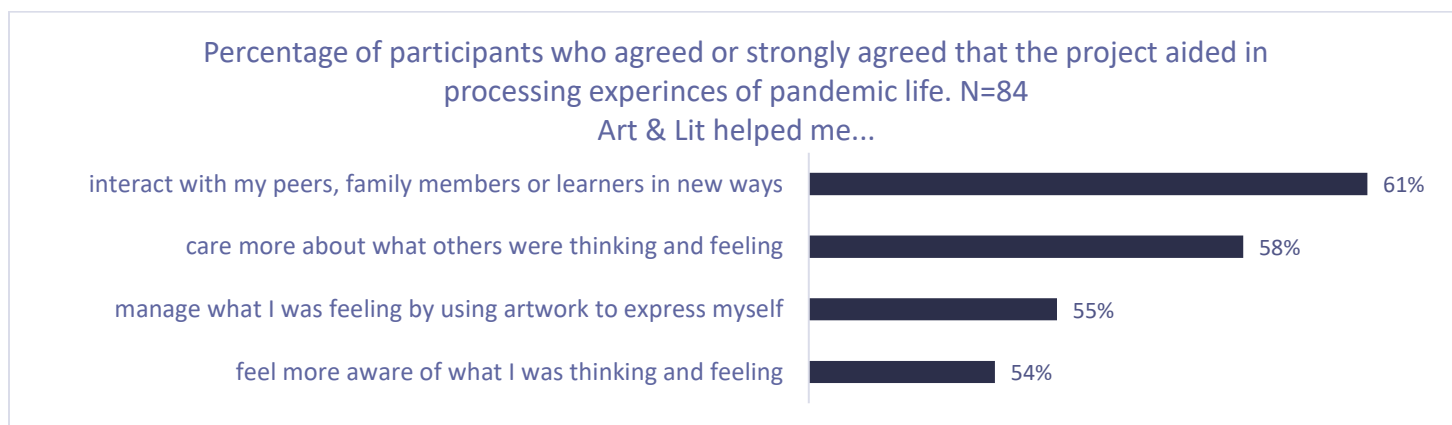


FIGURE 3

### What Parents & Community Partners Said

Parents were asked to identify how the project helped support their family during remote learning, while teachers and community partners were asked to identify how the project supported engagement among the learners they served. Parent statements suggested an appreciation for connection with their children by participating in the project. Teachers and community partners' comments highlighted the efficacy of purposeful, intentional content.

### About supporting their families during remote learning, parents said:

*"This was a great way to connect with my child. It opened up a new way to get into a book, and conversations we may have missed. Loved hearing the thoughts of my child, in reference to the book as well as to him personally."*

*"I valued that we were together, relaxed and discussing."*

*"My family loved the book and the activities. We were inspired to make dot art, which transformed into other artwork. The activities were used by us all. Learning together brings us closer as a family."*

*"It has helped our family a lot by adding more reading at home with our children".*

*"It gave my kids something to look forward to and let them be creative while enjoying a new book. My children read different books but participated in the art activity together. It was something they could share."*

*"It was so wonderful to have a NEW book to read to the kids and activities that came with it. The supplies and ideas that came with it were wonderful."*

*"I think that the most valuable is learning new thing and respect for different opinions about a story."*

### **About fostering engagement and collaboration, teachers and community partners said:**

*"Our middle school students are experiencing those dynamics; the text connections are right on with them."*

*"I've even had students research what else Jason Reynolds has written. That's a good sign if they are researching the author on their own."*

*"The novel Ghost and its implementation served as such a purposeful instruction even allowing both students, families, and teaching teams to connect in an otherwise "unconnected" world. Loved the process, supports, and novel."*

*"I think that having an extra book club was great for the students and it allowed us to engage in conversation with children that we don't normally reach through book clubs. The One and Ivan has strong themes that the children were able to identify with."*

*"The students appreciated the book kits and the art project. Many students would have never considered reading Ghost before but adored it. The students actively talked about the book outside of class discussions."*

*"It was fantastic to be able to offer take home supplies for students in engage in art and express their knowledge beyond using the computer screen."*

*"This project helped me engage with teens and have a great discussion about who they might become and what identity means to them. I think the discussion helped assure them that they do have a voice and how they view themselves."*

*"Ghost was engaging for the students, and they were able to identify with the characters and discuss character development extensively. The activities supplemented the book excellently."*

*"Having everything bundled together made it extremely easy for the students to pick up the supplies at our library location, which was only open for pick up. With everything packed and ready to go, they were able to just let us know they were registered for the program. The kits made it easy to create a collaborative program with another library location. Since we had all the same supplies, it was very easy to work together."*





*"I collaborated with another Youth Services Librarian, and the two of us had great attendance! We did some trivia, a book discussion, and the identity circle art project. The kids loved it all, especially the fact that they got the book and that we did the art."*

*"The kids were so engaged in the book and our class discussions on themes of fitting in, being true to yourself, and friendship. The art project was super fun. We especially liked that we had already studied the artist through one of our ArtReach lessons. The project positively brought our team together in discussion of themes and engagement."*

*"I was impressed with the book selection and my students were so excited to have a copy of their own."*

Finally, we asked participants to identify one word to describe their experience participating in the project. Their responses suggested an engaging experience for youth.

### Descriptions included:



## REFLECTIONS

Thank you to the following community partners who courageously collaborated to connect learners with experiences to read, think, discuss, create and connect:

*ArtReach San Diego  
Allied Gardens/Benjamin Library  
Barrio Logan College Institute  
Boys and Girls Club Vista  
Challenger Middle School  
Groundwork  
Kensington-Normal Heights Library  
Lindsay Community School*

*Logan Heights Library  
Mira Mesa High School  
Mission Valley Library  
National City Library  
North Clairemont Library  
North University Community Library  
Oceanside Public Library  
Pacific View Leadership Elementary*

*Point Loma Branch Library  
Rancho Bernardo Library  
San Diego Public Library  
Serra Mesa-Kearny Mesa Library  
The Monarch School  
University Community Library  
Wagenheim Middle School  
Walker Elementary School*

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