

Local young artists' pictures on exhibit in China and Japan

By JOHN K. ALVAREZ
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY – When you think of pictures painted by children, what comes to most people's minds are colorful images of little paint-covered hands pressed against white construction paper or a stick figure family standing in front of a one story house, with a chimney emitting whiffs of smoke.

When kids bring home pictures from school most parents are impressed with their child's work. They might make a comment about what an artistic eye their son or daughter possesses. Then, with just enough fanfare, the child's painting is placed with honor on the refrigerator door, right next to the "Honey Do" list.

Yet, how great would it be if you knew a child whose painting wasn't just placed on a refrigerator but hung on a wall in a museum? Or if the painting went on to be displayed in other museums in other countries? For a few students around Cape May,

this is actually happening.

Last April, as has been done the past few years, the Noyes Museum in Oceanville along with the Ecological Research and

Development Corporation sponsors an educational program designed to make children from kindergarten to sixth grade aware of the life and the plight of the ordinary horseshoe crab. As part of the program, the students have a chance to create their own portrait of a horseshoe crab.

"We have a presentation ahead of time by an artist," explained Linda Leonard, the art teacher at Cape May Elementary School. "The program educates the students about caring for horseshoe crabs. For example, if the students are on the beach and they see a horseshoe crab flipped upside down, the students are taught to flip them over so they'll stay alive. The instructor gives a wonderful presentation to the students about the horseshoe crabs. Then the next week, the students create their paintings."

The portraits are then

placed into a contest to see which ones are the best. In April, the competition wasn't just held throughout New Jersey, or just the states in our country where horseshoe crabs thrive but internationally with students from China and Japan submitting student portraits as well. The winning paintings were placed on display in September and October at the Noyes Museum and are now on tour to be displayed in museums in China and Japan.

Out of the entire student paintings entered in the contest, only about 40 were chosen as winners to be displayed and go on the tour. Out of the winners, the works of six students from Cape May were selected – one from Cape May Elementary School and five from West Cape May Elementary School.

Anna Pratt, who was 7 at the time of the contest (she politely stated she's now eight years old), painted a picture of a horseshoe crab with little fishes swimming around it.

She was happy her painting was chosen and to see her

picture on display with all the others last September at the Noyes Museum.

"It looked really pretty," she said shyly.

Sixth grader Lyndsey Diebel, 11, was also excited about doing a project on the horseshoe crab. Her inspiration for her portrait was simple.

"We live on the coast of New Jersey. I see them a lot when I'm over at my grandmom's house in Villas because I go to the bay."

First grader Dakota Black, 6, likes horseshoe crabs. He sees a few at the bay.

"They're just kinda cool," he said casually. When asked what he liked the most about the horseshoe crab, Dakota said, "It's cool that they have blue blood."

Now even though it was a contest, the project was educational as well. Every student involved with this competition seemed to easily recall what they were taught about the horseshoe crab. Especially when it comes to helping them survive. Most of the students were eager to

share their own experiences.

A good example was from seven year-old first-grader Marley Bingham.

"I've seen a lot of horseshoe crabs but only one at a time", Marley said. "Once, one of my friends, Luka, saved a horseshoe crab. My dad helped by pulling it out of the rocks. Then my friend took it over to the ocean when it was still alive and set it free. It was pretty cool."

Fourth-grader, Lilly Swan, 10, also had her own experiences with rescues.

"I live by the bay and there are horseshoe crabs all along it," she said. "Sometimes, I see horseshoe crabs go too far up onto the beach and they can't find their way back to the water or they get buried in the sand and can't move. I pick them up and throw them back into the water."

Pausing for a moment to correct herself she said, "Well, not actually throw. Place them back in the water."

When asked if they would enter the competition next year, all said yes. However, if

given a choice, a few of the young artists would probably pick a different subject to paint. In the future, Anna Pratt wants to paint a portrait of hermit crabs which she also likes.

"We had a few hermit crabs, my sister and my brother and me," she said. "We liked taking care of them."

Lyndsey Diebel would go in the opposite direction.

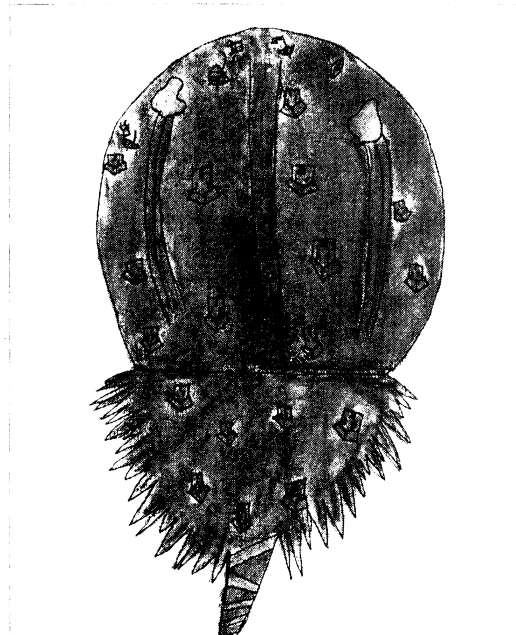
"Big animals like whales or sharks. Dolphins would make a good portrait," she said with a smile.

Marley Bingham said, "I would draw a horse because I used to go horseback riding."

Lilly Swan was more reflective. "If I had a choice," she said, "I would draw the sunset."

Some pretty good ideas. But what do you expect from world-renowned artists?

Editor's note: The sixth winning student Bromley Bryan, of West Cape May Elementary School was unavailable for comment.



Pictured are some of the award-winning portraits of horseshoe crabs which will be on display in China and Japan. Above is Dakota Black's version of the horseshoe crab. At right, is Bromley Bryan's and far right is Lilly Swan's. The contest was held throughout the nation as well as Japan and China. Of the 40 winners, six winners came from Cape May – five from West Cape May Elementary School and one from Cape May City Elementary School. The students also learned about the crabs and how to help them survive. The exhibit now travels through China and Japan.