



## ***Bridging the Gap: The Jewish-Arab Art Program*** **2015-2016 Report**

### ***Introduction***

*Bridging the Gap*, initiated by the Ruth Youth Wing for Art Education in 1994, has been supported by the German Friends of the Israel Museum since 2010. Through the German Friends' steadfast support and generosity, the program offers high-quality art classes while creating opportunities for dialogue between Arab and Jewish youth in Israel.

### ***Program overview***

During the 2015-2016 academic year, 75 students in 5th and 6th grades from Jerusalem took part in *Bridging the Gap*. Students were chosen based on two major criteria: 1) A demonstrated curiosity and commitment to dialogue with the "other" 2) An interest in and motivation to create art.

The challenging situation in the beginning of the year threatened the program's survival, mainly because the parents of the Arab students were anxious to send their children to the Museum. We came up with a two-pronged response in order to address this issue: firstly, we worked intensively with the Arab principals to persuade parents about the importance of the program. Secondly, we changed the venue for initial meetings, with the Museum's staff visiting the Silwan school, thereby allowing us to start the program on time. Only when we felt that trust was established, we began joint meetings for both groups at the Museum. We invited participants' parents for the first encounter at the Museum, creating a warm, welcoming atmosphere. During subsequent encounters, our staff emphasized building personal relationships through the use of many games and joint art projects.

### ***Program Curriculum***

During the project, students were divided into four sections with a curriculum tailored to each group. This year, we selected the theme of "**aviation**" as a means to express the **desire to fly as freely as birds**. The program began on schedule in November 2015. As



noted above, the first two meetings took place at the home schools rather than in the Museum due to regional tensions.

Participants' parents were also invited to the third meeting, which was held in the Museum. The group was given the opportunity to create art inspired by the exhibits presented in the African galleries. Sessions were dedicated to activities aimed to introduce and acquaint participants with one another, such as preparing personalized t-shirts with the children's name, that

functioned as name tag.

January's theme was the image of birds and the way they are depicted in art. Participants created works of art both by drawing and sculpting with plactecine. The theme led the classes to consider a bird's perspective and to draw nature from an aerial view. Students also visited and discussed the Model of Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period, demonstrating the principal of areal view.



Just before spring break, participants visited *Pharaoh in Canaan: The Untold Story* and saw the reconstructed palace gate presented. The next meeting took them on a field trip to Jaffa, touring the Old City and the remnants of the palace from the period of the Egyptian Pharaoh Ramses II allowing them to view the site in which the original gate was placed. The day ended with a viewing of the play *Two* at the Arab-Hebrew Theater.



After returning from spring break, *Bridging the Gap* embarked on the final project, "Hot-Air Balloons." Groups of five Arab and five Jewish children worked side-by-side on a large plywood board, practicing *Bridging the Gap's* values of sharing and considering each other's needs. Schools received these final projects at the year's conclusion.

*Bridging the Gap's* final event was pushed up to accommodate Ramadan, which began in early June this year. Parents and their children visited the Youth Wing's exhibition *Wire(less) Connections* and then viewed the end-of-the-year projects created by their

children. At our three different program evaluations – one held with students, one held with students and their parents, and one with program staff – we heard great appreciation for *Bridging the Gap*, particularly in light of the difficult situation throughout the country and in Jerusalem. One of the Jewish children told us "Now I can prove to the kids in school (who hate Arabs) that they are wrong. It was also proof for myself". Another child testifies "I met Ziv here, we created art together and since then became friends, one day he didn't come- if I would have known that- I would not have come either".

Parents enthusiastically praised the program, and expressed pride and gratitude for being invited to participate. One of the Arab mothers said: "he came home every week so happy and excited; he had such a good time". A Jewish father noted: "the project allowed a unique and exceptional opportunity for a direct meeting between the children that enabled dissembling of stereotypes that are created in the media about Arabs and reinforced the notion that we are all human beings".

We are pleased to report that over the year, some students made meaningful friendships that extended beyond sessions at the Museum, and as we develop *Bridging the Gap* for the upcoming year, we will continue emphasizing personal ties to build upon this year's success.



### ***Staff***

Eldad Sha'altiel, Senior Curator of Art Courses at the Ruth Youth Wing for Art Education, oversaw *Bridging the Gap*. Classes were taught by Arab artists and teachers Nasrin Abu Baker, Shatha Abu Aqel, and Siwar Mashrawa, and by Jewish artists and teachers Yael Robin, Roma Keinan, and Anat Bar'el. Mashhara Anuar and Alian Dua served as the program's translators.