



CHILDREN'S ARTIST takes Chadwick students on 3-D journey

By Chris Boyd, REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION FROM THE PALOS VERDES PENINSULA NEWS

Chadwick School got multidimensional last November, when children's book illustrator Robin Brickman, well known for her 3-D images of nature's wonders, visited to help kindergarten through 6th-grade students construct a mural for the school library.



The finished 3-D mural is currently displayed in the Village Library.
PHOTOGRAPH BY DOUG MORGAN

cutting and shaping," Brickman told a class of 6th-graders. "You want your piece to be scientifically accurate; no smiley faces or human figures."

A graduate of Bennington College in Vermont, Brickman has a studio in Massachusetts, where she lives with her family. She painstakingly cuts and shapes many aspects of the natural world, from feathers and fur to a flower's delicate stamen, and glues them all in place to create a 3-D painting. Her work is then photographed and used to illustrate books like "A Log's Life" and "Swallows in the Birdhouse."

BRICKMAN, who uses common items like paper, scissors, paint and glue to create scientifically accurate 3-D images of all sorts of animals and backgrounds, showed the kids how to make sea creatures for the 4-by-8-foot mural based on her books "Starfish" and "One Night in the Coral Sea."

"The work that I do for these picture books doesn't just require drawing skills. It involves

"It'll take me literally three hours to make a background," Brickman said, adding that some of her colleagues say she's nuts because of the long hours she spends on her work. "As far as I know, I'm the only person who works this way. [The pieces] are researched, they are informative."

Brickman keeps some of the artwork in her home, while other pieces appear in private col-

Children's book illustrator Robin Brickman shows 6th-graders **Emily Newton**, far left, and **Grace Memmo** how to create 3-D sea creatures with simple items like paper, scissors and crayons. PHOTOGRAPH BY TOM UNDERHILL OF THE P.V. NEWS ©2006



lections. "Seeing them in person is a completely different level of experience than seeing them in books," she said. "The book is never going to measure up to the original. The books are emissaries out to the people who don't even know about me."

Though Brickman began her 3-D work with white paper, she soon started painting her creations. "It was just an amazing opening to me emotionally and creatively," she said. "I've always been knitting and sewing. It's like making little jewelry. This method allows me to be free in ways that a conventional piece of art doesn't."

A FIRST FOR CHADWICK

Brickman has visited schools across the United States to teach more than 12,000 youngsters her technique, but this week's stop at Chadwick is the first time she's done a workshop in California.

"She brings one really unique thing, and that's the collaboration between arts and science," said Chadwick art instructor Kim Kohler. "Having new people come in I think is a wonderful opportunity for these kids. I wish every child could have these experiences."

"Her whole demeanor was low-key, and it was very appealing to the kids. They caught on immediately to what she was saying," said 5th-grade teacher Beverly Burrell. "She went over the directions clearly but never imposed her own style on them. They were fascinated that you could actually do that with paper."

Though she doesn't have aspirations to become an artist, 6th-grader Emily Newton had a blast in Brickman's class. "It was fun making it look three-dimensional by folding the edges," she said. "I thought it was one of the coolest things we did that day."

Fellow 6th-grader Anthony Fadil agreed. "I thought it was very interesting, the different techniques that she taught us," he said. "I learned a lot of new skills to use in art."

Brickman is just one of a handful of authors and artists who visit Chadwick thanks to the school's Friends of the Library, which funds their appearances. "This is particularly interesting because it's an interactive program for kindergarten through 6th grade. This is really hands-on," said parent and Friends member Kim Sonnenblick, who's led the visiting authors program for about five years. "It's just an exciting thing to bring all these published authors and illustrators to meet the kids. We think that it's a really neat way to bring books alive for these kids."

Brickman said she hopes "to be able to show all ages, using inexpensive materials ... that you can do something that is worthwhile. It's not just the class artist who is worthwhile. There is value in the research to make sure [the artwork] is accurate," Brickman said. "This is wonderful because it's scientifically accurate and it's based on the natural world."

Where does Brickman get her inspiration? "My entire persona is creativity and being self-motivated, being able to make something out of these simple materials that makes an impact," she said. "I feel as if I have come up with something that is really special. I'm just glad I'm able to do it for a living."



Village librarian **Luiza Rousseve** admires the mural. PHOTOGRAPH BY DOUG MORGAN