Learning Resource Spotlight: Jairo Barsallo

Walk into the Art Garage one morning, when Jairo is convening with 3-4-5 students about to begin a class, and you’ll find a room of kids ready to roll. This week, students are looking forward to beginning their comics unit. This year with Jairo, they’ve been exploring drawing, collage, tape art – a watercolor choice-time favorite of Jairo’s students that reveals the gesture of negative space – and Picasso’s Blue Period. The Picasso study resulted in a myriad of lovely blue-tinged guitars for kids to take home.

Kids love Jairo for his music and stories that pepper the classroom. What kind of stories? Students are quick to point out that his stories are scary and funny and often both at the same time. Students appreciate Jairo’s integrating of music into the classroom, and how he makes art an action: “He makes people smile”; “He plays soccer and other games with us”; and “He’s awesome,” as one student simply put it.

“What most excites me about my work,” says Jairo, “is that I get to guide students in their learning experience but also help students become individuals that function in society. I am most proud of seeing students grow as individuals,” says Jairo. “Whether they come back to my class for another year or they move on to 6-7-8, it’s nice to be a part of that process.

A Stanley graduate himself, Jairo felt the pull of community in 2013 when applying for the Stanley Teacher intern program. “Stanley fosters relationships for everyone around the school. Stanley helps bridge parents, students, teachers, administration and other employees, to make a strong community and a successful learning- and work-place.

“Being an alum that enjoyed my own learning experience here,” says Jairo, “also helped bring me back. So far in my experience as a teacher, I have enjoyed working with kids and teaching art. I have also enjoyed how students can teach me how to alter a lesson, to better teach and suit their learning styles.”

Born in Florida to Panamanian parents and raised in Colorado, Jairo likes to make music and make art, play soccer, skateboard, hit the gym, spend time in the outdoors, read a good book, watch live performances, take pictures and film, travel and adventure, and hang out with friends and family. He has B.A. degrees in in studio art and Spanish from Cornell College – the other block-learning program like Colorado College that suits Stanley learners so well. He’s studied in Panama, spearheaded the effort to launch the lacrosse team at Machebeuf H.S. as a student, and was one of twenty students from Colorado to be a delegate for the Anti-Defamation League’s Sturm Youth Leadership Mission to the Holocaust Memorial Museum in D.C.

If you follow Denver’s music scene, you’ll know Jairo plays bass and sings backing vocals for the band The Kinky Fingers – five guys brought together by skating, snowboarding, and jazz school. The group is known for Santa Fe surf rock; and you can find their albums online as they cut their first two LPs later this year.

A favorite quote of Jairo’s – and perfect for this teacher of art – comes from Pablo Picasso: "Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up." Says Jairo, “I love this quote because it can speak to the work I do daily, and all of us experience as we grow older. Every child has something to offer, imagination, openness to exposure. As we grow, sometimes we can lose some of
these gifts of creativity and eagerness to be exposed to new things as we look for more answers and solutions. It’s important to stay open to lifelong learning and enjoy the process of problem solving and – maybe – getting an answer!”