

Painting with mud

“Dirt,” the second-grade teacher told me when I asked her what they were learning in science class. Since St. Joan of Arc is a STEM school, I’m trying to tie material from other classes into my art lessons. The eighth grade was learning about heat, so we used a hot plate and crayons to create melted wax images on aluminum foil. The seventh-grade was learning about solubility, so we combined salt and watercolor paints for a cool tie-dye effect. But, dirt?

Naturally, I consulted Google for advice. I found a home-school mom’s website with pictures from a mud day. Her children were encapsulated in dirt and mud. I decided rather quickly that I should make every effort to keep my students’ uniforms crisp and white.

Then, I stumbled upon something awesome: the dirty car artist, Scott Wade. This guy carves masterpieces into the thick dirt found on the back windows of people’s cars. But, where was I going to find 18 dirty cars (and stepstools) to make this happen?

Louisiana Mud Painting looked promising, until I learned that I’d need to travel all over Harford County –and perhaps even the state of Maryland—to find the many types of soil I’d need to offer a range of colors.

I was stumped and running out of time. That’s usually when I pray. I fixed myself a sandwich (also a good time to pray) and returned to Google one last time before deferring to a plan B assignment. This time, I stumbled upon something new: Korhogo Cloth (African Mud Painting).

The material used for the painting looked similar to burlap. I had a roll of it left over from Collin’s Scarecrow costume last year and a pot of dirt that used to be a plant (I’m a horrible gardener for a farmer’s wife), so I mixed some dirt and water in a plastic bowl and used one of Frank’s old paintbrushes to paint a house on the fabric.

It looked great, but when I moved it after it dried, all of the mud flaked off.

As it turned out, it needed a binder. We were out of eggs, so I used some brown tempera paint (it has egg as a binder) to make the mud smoother and stickier. This time, it looked great. I mixed up a bucketful for the students, poured into little white plastic bowls, warned them that even though it looked like chili, they shouldn’t eat it, and let them go to town on their pieces of burlap.

Thanks to God for directing me to a cool project idea, the students’ projects were a great success.



