Rivers of the World - Ethiopia
Addis Ababa, Debra Zeyit, Bahir Dar 2016 & 17
Addis Ababa at the Kebena

Zenu, Martha & Inku in Addis Ababa at the Kebena stream
We are the reality, but that part of reality means that we need to produce another reality...
Kokebe Tsibah Secondary & Prep School was partnered with Chalkwell Hall Junior School in Southend on Sea. Their theme is Polluted River.
Rivers of the World: Visual Art Exhibition
Kokebe Tsibah School, Addis Ababa

Article and Photos by: Martha Hardy

Rivers of the World is the flagship visual arts project of the Totally Thames festival in London working in partnership with the British Council.

The project aims to increase the self-esteem of students in their early teens through creating visual art about their local rivers. It also aims to increase their understanding of the importance of rivers and protecting their natural environment.

Rivers of the World has worked with around 30 countries so far and in spring 2016 Ethiopia joined them. British Council worked with 6 schools in Addis Ababa, Debre Zeit and Bahir Dar. Approximately 120 students were involved with support of their teachers and the school’s management.

The artwork created was compiled into huge prints first exhibited along London’s Thames River during the Totally Thames festival in September. It then travelled digitally to all the countries involved for exhibitions around the world. Ethiopia’s exhibition was held in Kokebe Tsibah School in Kebena, which along with Bethlehem School in Piazza made up the two schools in Addis. The opening day was a celebration of the student’s hard work and an opportunity to raise awareness of the importance of Ethiopia’s rivers, especially the problem of pollution in urban rivers such as the Kebena river which runs past Kokebe Tsibah School and the Kechene river which Bethlehem School focused on.

Students followed the project’s creative approach at the exhibition setting up a stall for guests to create nametags, a tree decorated with artwork guests made to give feedback about the exhibition, and a table of water collected in bottles from different parts of Kebena river to show pollution. Kokebe Tsibah school students performed a drama called the ‘Monster of Kebena’ conveying their message about the danger of pollution. Speeches were given by students, school principles, the new Government office ‘Rivers of Addis’ and the Ethiopian Bio-Diversity office. The event was covered by EBS, Afro FM and Fan FM.

The project now continues its second year with students creating artwork about their UK partner school’s river The Thames whilst their partner school focus on Ethiopian Rivers. It also hopes to leave a strong environmental legacy aiming to inspire the students and all who experienced their powerful artwork to care for Ethiopia’s precious rivers.

STUDENT’S QUOTES

Kokebe School
“When different waste materials go into the river they change the future of the river.”

“The river is full of rubbish like water bottles, cartons and more. All this was created a monster in the river it was called ‘The Monster of Kebena’.”

Bethlehem School, Addis Ababa
“We care about the pollution of river and how it can disease our parts of our body.”

Beza School, Debre Zeit
“It is good for us and the next generation to grow by art.”

Ghion School, Bahir Dar
“You are nurturing our gifts and helping us develop our skills.”
Polluted River

The students considered how every piece of rubbish in their local river comes from somebody’s hand and tells a story. They discussed how the variety of rubbish could be mixed up, reacting together to create new organisms.

They wondered if these ‘Monsters of Kebena’ could rise up and be a threat to their city! To make the artwork the students used waste materials and paint to create many ‘Monsters of Kebena’.

They wrote their monsters’ stories in Amharic using different colours to reflect how the river can be a rainbow of colours due to pollution.
Polluted River
Kokebe Tsibah Secondary & Preparatory School
Addis Ababa
with
Martha Hardy
(2016)
Bethlehem Secondary School was partnered with Bacon's College in Rotherhithe in LB Southwark. Their theme is River City
“The workshops were very nice, we enjoyed ourselves and we learned a lot about art and how to care about the pollution in our river. How pollution can cause disease to parts of our body.” Biruk Andewerk, student at Bethlehem Secondary School, Addis Ababa
River City

The Kechene River near Bethlehem school is polluted by industries like battery and paint factories, and tanneries. The river runs through Addis feeding the reservoir, which supplies Addis.

On its journey it irrigates vegetable crops, which supply the markets of Addis. The students wanted to express the idea that the people of Addis are what they eat; the fruit and vegetables irrigated and polluted by the Kechene.

Inspired by Italian artist Giuseppe Arcimboldo, who paints portraits made of vegetables, the students created a sick man from sculptures of vegetables created with leather, metal, paint and waste materials.
River City
Bethlehem Secondary School, Addis Ababa
with
Martha Hardy
(2016)
Debra Zeyit: the Awash and the Wadecha
Beeza School was partnered with Southend High School for Girls in Southend on Sea. Their theme is River of Life.
June 8, 2016

To: Ms. Martha Hardy  
Trainer of the Rivers of the world Project  
Addis Ababa

It was a pleasure meeting with you and your colleagues Ms. Zenu and Ato Tsegaye to train our children on the special Art Training project of “the Rivers of the World.” The ultimate goal of the project being the festival to be held on the Thames River in London (UK).

We enjoyed learning more about the Awash River. Thank you for your time. We have gained a lot in developing our art skills. It was informative and exciting.

On behalf of the trainees, myself and the school I decided to write this letter to thank you for I was thoroughly impressed with your method of training. I haven’t every viewed a more efficient smooth running, and cost efficient project such as yours. I was particularly impressed with the procedures you have implemented to monitor the lesson and the children to catch up the skill within a short period of time. They have enjoyed and acquired different basic skills of art and have shown great enthusiasm to be involved in the activities.

I would be most appreciative if the training would extend without slackening because the children showed great interest and were eager to know more about the art skill.

Finally, we appreciate the opportunity we have got from the British Council through Link Ethiopia and we look forward to remain close in touch in the project.

I hope to see you soon.

Sincerely Yours,

Gezahegn G/Kidan
Head Teacher
Benza (Besebarok)
Primary and Secondary School
River of Life

The fossilized bones of ‘Lucy’ who lived approximately 3.2 million years ago were discovered in the Awash basin. The Awash probably provided water for Lucy and our ancestors.

The students studied artistic expressions of early humans, both cave paintings discovered near the Awash basin and others from around the world.

The students painted present day scenes of life around the Awash on tiles, a material used in modern houses. They studied paintings by Ethiopian artist Tamrat Gazuhegn whose work includes paintings of bones and then made stencils to paint bones on the tiles to remember Lucy and our ancestors who lived around the Awash.
River of Life
Beza Primary and Secondary School, Bishoftu/Debre Zeit
with
Martha Hardy
(2016)
Times Choice Academy was partnered with Chase High School in Westcliff-on-Sea in Essex. Their theme is Resourceful River.
Resourceful River

This river is named after the Wedecha tree, which grows on Yerer Mountain where the river starts. The river’s water is used domestically and was used for flower farms. However, the Wedecha trees are being cut down causing rainwater to flood instead of feed the river, reducing its flow to the farms.

The students expressed the idea that the trees and river are mutually beneficial; they painted the trees and river as one. They made leaves and grass from handprints representing the river’s domestic use and designed flowers showing how they can bloom if the river and trees are strong.
Resourceful River
Times Choice Academy,
Bishoftu/Debre Zeit
with
Martha Hardy
(2016)
The source of the Blue Nile: Gish Abay. There three small springs found within a diameter of about 20 meters. These waters are believed to have a healing power and considered holy by the Ethiopian Church.
Ghion Secondary & Preparatory School was partnered with Maria Fidelis Catholic School in LB Camden. Their theme is River Culture.
River of Culture

Long journeys are taken to collect holy water from the sacred Ghion or Blue Nile River especially from Gish Abay, the spring in the Ethiopian highlands where the river starts.

Gish Abay is named after an ancient tale describing a priest leaving his bible in the spring for safekeeping. Using a traditional bible scroll technique of painting on leather the students created illustrated stories and poems describing what precious item they would leave with Gish Abay.

The background is a mud wall representing the ancient mud churches on islands in LakeTana, through which the river runs.
River of Culture
Ghion Secondary and Preparatory School
Bahir Dar
with
Martha Hardy
(2016)
Fasilo School was partnered with Beacon’s Hill College, a specialist college for sensory and physical needs in Thurrock. Their theme is Working River.
Working River

The Blue Nile River flows in and out of Lake Tana without their waters mixing. In the rainy season the line of the river through the lake is visible as they are different colours.

The students painted the river in sections, which were digitally manipulated to show this. They created models using different materials to show the variety of work, which takes place on and around the river.

One of the materials was papyrus, which grows where the river enters the lake. Local people still use an ancient technique to make small boats from papyrus which they use for transport and fishing.
Working River
Fasilo Secondary and
Preparatory School
Bahir Dar
with
Martha Hardy
(2016)
Lake Tana has a number of islands, whose number varies depending on the level of the lake. It has fallen about 6 feet in the last 400 years. Today there are 37 islands, of which 19 have or had monasteries or churches on them. The monasteries are believed to have been built over earlier religious sites. They include the fourteenth-century Debre Maryam, and the eighteenth-century Narga Selassie, Tana Qirqos (said to have housed the Ark of the Covenant before it was moved to Axum), and Ura Kidane Mehret, known for its regalia.
Eating injera