Rivers of the World - USA

Washington DC  2010 & 2011
Artists Dylan & Abigail Byrd

The Team (opposite)
Shona Watt (on the right) and the guys from the British Council (Alison Corbett is 2nd from left). The location is the Kennilworth Aquatic Centre with the Anacostia River.
The Anacostia

The 8.7-mile-long Anacostia River runs from Bladensburg, Maryland, to the District of Columbia, where it passes through several residential neighbourhoods and just below the US Capitol before merging with the Potomac at the Washington Channel. The Anacostia has fallen a long way from the vibrant health it enjoyed in the early 17th century, when Europeans first arrived in the region. The central artery of a watershed that straddles both wooded hills and coastal flats, it ran through lush forests and rich tidal wetlands. The water teemed with shad, herring, perch, and other fish that had long been a staple food of the local Nanchotank people. Once settlers started clearing fields for agriculture—which led to heavy erosion and sedimentation—in the early 19th century, the river began to suffer. And its decline accelerated rapidly from the late 19th century to nearly the present day.
Washington's Forgotten River

As the Washington, DC area grew, urbanization claimed forest and wetland habitat, altered stream flows, and fed ever-increasing amounts of sewage and polluted runoff into the river. Though it’s surrounded by parkland today, the Anacostia is severely polluted by sediment, nutrients, pathogens, toxins, and trash. As such, it’s often referred to as Washington’s “forgotten river.” The Anacostia is disproportionately affected by urban pollution because of its slow-moving tide. Contaminants like sewage and runoff tend to stay there for a long time before getting flushed downstream. But the future of Washington’s forgotten river is suddenly looking a little less forlorn. Like many other cities around the nation, D.C. has proved eager to reclaim its neglected waterways by restoring their ecological health and returning them to the public as a shared resource. Toward that end, a number of projects are setting the stage for the Anacostia’s resurgence.
Anacostia Watershed Restoration Plan

For example, the Urban Waters Federal Partnership—which connects more than a dozen federal agencies with local RiverKeepers and conservation groups to catalyze and coordinate action—has already moved the needle significantly by helping to facilitate the Anacostia Watershed Restoration Plan. This blueprint for the river’s restoration, in the words of its drafters, represents “a bold and unparalleled initiative. No other restoration plan in the United States has systematically identified the thousands of projects needed to retrofit an entire urban watershed.” Another project, the Anacostia Waterfront Initiative, involves spending $10 billion over 30 years to turn the river’s beleaguered shoreline into a vibrant and dynamic asset to the several communities—most of them poor or working-class—that flank it. Its vision for the Anacostia is one in which the many abandoned and derelict stretches of waterfront are transformed into parks, recreational facilities, bike and walking paths, and commercial centers that will create jobs.
11th Street Bridge Park

After a seven-month nationwide competition, the design for Washington, DC’s 11th Street Bridge Park by OMA + OLIN was unanimously selected by the competition jury. The design team was asked to transform an aged-out freeway bridge into a one-of-a-kind new civic space over the Anacostia River. The team’s design concept connects two historically disparate sides of the Anacostia River with a series of outdoor programmed spaces and active zones, including two sloped ramps that elevate visitors to maximized
lookout points to landmarks in either direction. Each ramp terminates in a waterfall that reconnects the ramps to the river below. On the east side, the waterfall is linked to an active filtration system that in conjunction with new wetland areas adjacent to the bridge piers works to actively clear the river. To encourage visitors to the bridge and neighboring communities, the design includes amenities for comfort and refreshment and an open plaza for markets, festivals, and theatrical performances. The form of the bridge creates an iconic encounter, an “X” instantly recognizable as the river’s new image. (30.10.2014)
Bell Multicultural School was partnered with Notre Dame RC Girls School in LB Southwark. Lincoln Multicultural Middle and Bell Multicultural High School. Known together as Columbia Heights Educational Campus. CHEC is led by a visionary who has for the last 30 years, relentlessly fought and put forth best educational practices to ensure that ALL students are receiving an education that encompasses rigor, relevance and social justice.
Art is my passion. Art can be used to tell a story or be used to express feeling. I learned that art can be a retell a story over and over for as long as the art lives.
—Jovan Almodovar

I liked that we did screen-printing and it was a new way of making art. Also, we could add texture to our pieces and it was a collaboration of many artists.
—Josue Hernandez
What is something new that you learned while working on the project?

“Something very important that I learned is that it is never too late to start changing the world. One small step can make a big difference. Everybody needs to work together as one in order to improve the world we live in.

This project changed the way I look at the world because now I know that one of the biggest reasons the river is dirty is us. Everybody has forgotten that we must take care of our world. Now I know that the only way to improve the environment is by starting to change my habits. For example to always throw the trash in the trash can, recycle etc.”

Nancy Gonzalez, Student

What do you expect to gain via your involvement with Rivers of the World?

There is a lot to be gained from this relationship. We can be presented with a plethora of globally oriented educational programs that the council has. We would like for the council to be our partner in helping our students and teachers to become global citizens and in understanding, emphasizing and learning the commonalities and originalities that cultures have. We would also like to take part in opening the horizon of students and teachers from the UK and for them to open ours! We would love to have the possibility to have an ongoing bilateral exchange.
Abigail Byrd & Dylan Byrd  
(2010)  
Working River

Students created relief sculptures in the shape of mechanical gears with scenes showing the transformation of the working river.

Abigail Byrd & Dylan Byrd  
(2011)  
Working River

The students created cut-stencil screen prints of ordinary household items, then used ink pens and charcoal to add dirty details like cobwebs and tarnish.
Hardy Middle School was partnered with Maria Fidelis Convent School in LB Camden.

_I learned how to use the computer software in a unique and different way. Who knew scanning could work miracles? One pattern was used to make a reflecting design and turned out to look amazing!_  
—Demé Wharton
How did this project change your perspective of the world?

“This project changed my perspective on the river because the river is extremely polluted, and we need to do all we can to clean it up.”
Victor Leonard

“The project changed my perspective on the world by helping me realize that there are other rivers in this world that have the same issues that we have and we all are trying to fix them.”
Anna Taylor

“This project showed me that the little things we do can either help or hurt the life around us.”
Ben Daley

What was your favourite part of the project?

“My favourite part of the project was dissecting squids on the boat. I enjoyed it because until then I had never dissected anything, it was a great experience for me to observe and learn about the inside of squids.”
Stephanie Hamilton

What is something new that you learned while working on the project?

“I learned that the health of the river has a huge impact on the animals in it.” Ben Daley
I learned how to use different shapes and patterns to create a textile using reflection and rotation. The workshop changed my view of textile making because it gave me a sense of appreciation for graphic design. My interest for making textiles has increased.

—Yana Madrid
Art has different styles and comes from different places and people but can come together to represent the same meaning.
—Skakwia Charles
Abigail Byrd & Dylan Byrd (2010)
River of Life

Students looked at the ecology of life in the river and the society around it. They created linocut prints and then collaged them together to give a complete picture of a river of life.

Abigail Byrd & Dylan Byrd (2011)
Resourceful River

After viewing samples of famous Liberty patterns, the students created their own vibrant “scarves” inspired by the originals using decorative paper, reflecting and rotating their designs to create symmetry.
Duke Ellington School for Arts was partnered with Mulberry School for Girls in Shadwell, LB Tower Hamlets.

The school’s mission is to provide a quality arts and academic education to inner city youth. Ellington offers a regular high academic curriculum and a rigorous arts education. The school is primarily African-American in addition to other ethnic groups.
This project changed my perspective of what we do in life and how it affects our environment. Somebody might think that it’s ok to litter but they never stop to think about where that trash ends up.

—Kadijah Frye

In this session, I learned a lot. I learned how to spray paint, make stencils and learned how to use digital scanning. I enjoyed all of it. This session changed my perspective by showing me new styles techniques and processes of art.

—Derrick Laster

When I first started I didn’t like my drawing because I didn’t feel any inspiration in it, but the more I worked on it, the more I liked it.

—Carla Moore
What is something new that you learned while working on the project?

“I learned that the environment affects the people around it and if you fix a key part of that community such as the Anacostia River you can change a community.” Reyshanda Williams

“Team work is important and the eagle is coming back to the Anacostia River because people are working hard to clean and maintain the river.” Estefany Gonzalez

What was your favourite part of the project?

“My favourite part was learning about all the different positive things the Anacostia River has to offer. It’s amazing what a few clean up jobs can do.” Aurielle Catron

“My favourite part was figuring out how to incorporate everyone’s work into one big piece.” Keith Mitchell

“My perspective of the world has changed because I thought that if you did something yourself if would be really good and you could make a difference, but I found out that working together can make a change that’s even greater.” Aurielle Catron
Abigail Byrd & Dylan Byrd (2010)
River City

Students used mixed media to show the culture of the Anacostia River. The eagle was featured as a symbol of hope having returned after a 50-year absence.

Abigail Byrd & Dylan Byrd (2011)
Polluted River

After learning about the Great Stink of 1858, students compared and contrasted engravings of life on the Thames by James Whistler and street art by Banksy. They created their own mixed-media piece inspired by the famous ‘Silent Highwayman’ Punch Cartoon.
Lincoln Multicultural School was partnered with St Thomas More Language College in RB Kensington & Chelsea.

*My favorite part was finishing the drawings and adding details because we had to think creatively.*

– Kenneth Cruz
How did this project change your perspective of the world?

“This project changed my perspective because the world is dirty and polluted and in the future it’s going to be a wasteland if we don’t do anything about it.”
Oscar Waldomado

“It changed my perspective by making me think that I should treat the world better.”
Jairo R

What is something new that you learned while working on the project?

“Something new I learned is that you can scan pictures and put them in the computer to make a photo or art piece.”
Oscar Waldomado

“I never in my life heard of photoshop before this.”
Jimmy R

Students photographed elements of their daily lives then 'tagged' the images with graffiti-style designs which were digitally collaged to form an abstract urban river.

Abigail Byrd & Dylan Byrd (2011) River of Life

The students investigated different types of plants found at the Chelsea Physic Garden. Inspired by the garden's history of science and medicine, they created their own botanical illustrations in the style of educational chalk plates.
John Philip Sousa Middle School was partnered with Stepney Green Maths, Computing and Science College in LB Tower Hamlets.

Sousa is associated with the struggle to desegregate schools in the nation’s capitol - it stands as a symbol of the lengthy conflict that ultimately led to the racial desegregation of public schools by the Federal government.
What was your favourite part of the project?

“My favourite part was doing the screen printing. I thought it was the best part because I’ve never done anything like it before.” Reah Simms

“The project really taught me that the future is in my hands. If we unite we will truly change the world.” Brittany Beene

“This project changed my perspective on the world because at first I thought the world was just this big dump but when we did this project I said maybe we can change the world.” Tiara Robinson

What do you expect to gain via your involvement with Rivers of the World?

We would like to expand the knowledge of our students and allow them to experience activities that are outside of their own culture and enrich the culture of others through meaningful learning and relationships.
I never thought rivers were so important to their community’s well-being. They are true life lines to all the people that live near them and survive because of them.

–Kaylan Smith
This project has made me think more of how people around the world have been affected by their community river, just like us.
—Asia Jones

My favorite part of this project was the drawing and coloring. I like to draw and never thought I would be able to create such an amazing piece. —Quentin Datcher
Abigail Byrd & Dylan Byrd (2010)
Resourceful River

Students researched plans to revitalise the Anacostia River with a National Childrens’ Island, making a mixed media collage inspired by JM Barrie’s Neverland.

Abigail Byrd & Dylan Byrd (2011)
Working River

Students researched the history of sugar refineries on the Thames and used the iconic Lyle’s Golden Syrup tin to create a repeating pattern of featuring everyday uses for the product. Pen and ink drawings were scanned and digitally colored.
Winston Educational Campus was partnered with The City Academy in LB Hackney. The students at Winston are African-American or Latino and often come from challenging circumstances in their neighbourhood or family. South East is a heavily stigmatized area in Washington DC because many of the residents live along the poverty fault line. Our students do not have an easy time with school but they make tremendous efforts to come and share their ideas and hearts in pursuing academic and life goals.
What do your expect to gain via your involvement with Rivers of the World?

Primarily we hope to establish a strong foundation for an international relationship between our school and other participant campuses.

We would like to expand our own and our students’ perspectives of our community and of other communities in our region as well as the world.

An important goal is for us to create bonds between our students and others across the world and in our region, across the streets.
I learned about different materials people use to make art. My favorite part was when we did the photo transfers. It changed my perspective because I did not know there are more than crayons and paint to color with.

—Evadney Woods
Abigail Byrd & Dylan Byrd (2010)
River Culture

Inspired by street art and urban culture, students cut stencils and used spray paint to create iconic representations of their city, designing typography to highlight key ideas.

Abigail Byrd & Dylan Byrd (2011)
River Culture

Students were intrigued by the story of Lion Tower, home to the Royal Menagerie from 1235 to 1828. They created photo transfers of zoo animals and embellished them with colorful designs. Digitally, they placed their images in frames, creating their own royal photo wall.
Rivers of the World artworks are on display in the lobby of the US Department of Education.
Rivers of the World Exhibition

Yards Park (3rd and 4th Streets and Water Street SE)

The exhibition was in place throughout February 2012.
Paul Copson (Stepney Green School); Layla Froomes (Notre Dame School); Mike Fletcher (Maria Fidelis School); Sally Mountain (The City Academy Hackney); Russell Carter (St Thomas More Language School); Shona Watt (lead Artist); Kyra Mihailovic (Mulberry School for Girls)