

# ***Creating a Legacy of Understanding through the Visual Arts***



## ***The Istanbul Center of Atlanta's Art and Essay Contest***

*Middle East Institute Viewpoints  
June 2011*

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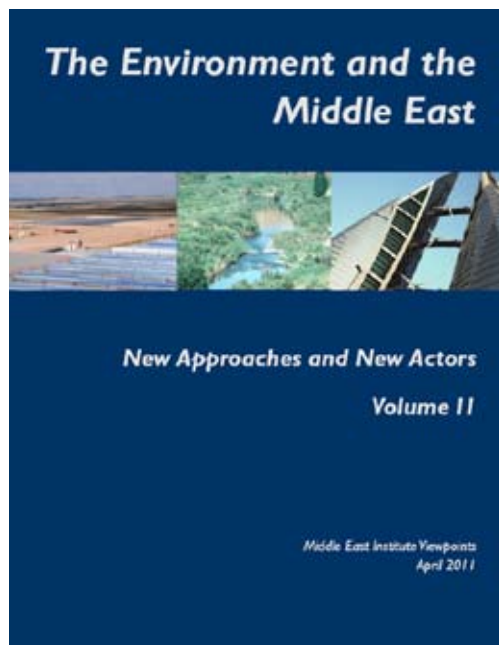
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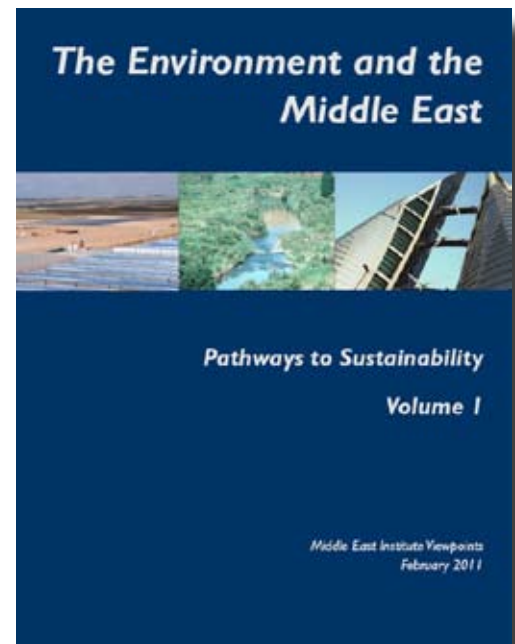
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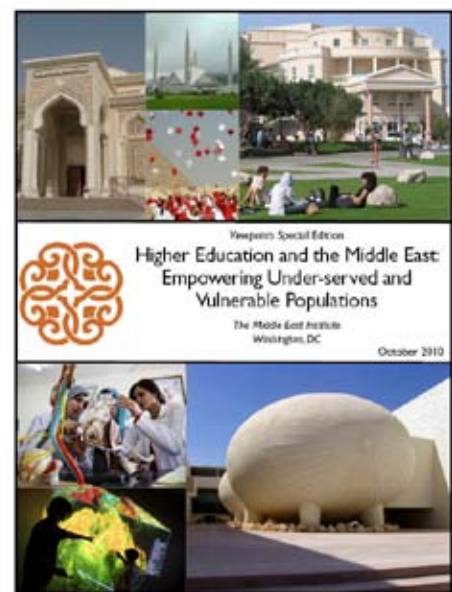
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## About the Authors



*Sandra Bird, Professor of Art Education at Kennesaw State University, writes on topics concerning cross-cultural aesthetics and art criticism. She has served as the “Head” art judge for the Istanbul Center’s art contest since its inception. In this photo (taken in 2008 by a travel companion, Jeanette Wachtman) Bird stands within a reconstructed shelter at Catalhoyuk — a Neolithic settlement site near Konya, Turkey.*

*Tarik Celik is the Executive Director of the Istanbul Center of Atlanta. Among the myriad of leadership skills “Tarik-bey” brings to the IC, he regularly empowers educational venues due to his previous experience as a chemistry teacher and school administrator.*



*Kemal Korucu served as the major organizational force for the Istanbul Center from its inception in 2002 to the autumn of 2006. As a most gracious volunteer, Kemal continues to lead IC outreach events devoted to intercultural dialogue. He is currently the President at Korucu Technology International, Inc., a computer software company in the Greater Atlanta area. (Photo by Amity Turkish Cultural Center of Jacksonville, Florida Staff)*

*Jacqueline LaMere is a recent graduate of Kennesaw State University’s Art Education Program. Her passion is stimulating creativity in children through the use of multicultural art lessons. Jacqueline was selected by the KSU art education faculty as the Outstanding Senior for the Art Education Undergraduate Program for 2010/2011. academic year.*



*Lanny Milbrandt, seated at the far left in this photo of the art contest judges for 2010/2011, is Professor Emeritus and Former Dean of the College of the Arts at Valdosta State University. (Photo by IC Staff)*

*The views expressed in these Viewpoints are those of the authors; the Middle East Institute does not take positions on Middle East policy.*

## About the Authors (cont.)



*April Munson, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Art Education at Kennesaw State University. She is a specialist of qualitative evaluation and assessment in art. April was asked to evaluate the art component of the IC contest in 2010. Most of her remarks below are taken from her evaluation report.*

*Jeanette Wachtman has been an art educator, artist and author for over thirty-nine years. Presently, she is retired, teaching part-time at Kennesaw State University and living on five acres in the mountains with her five cats.*



*Debi West is an art specialist that is currently preparing a Ph.D. at the University of Georgia. While pursuing this advanced degree, she is also teaching fulltime and chairing the Visual Art Department at North Gwinnett High School. Debi is a woman who can wear many hats at once, formerly serving as the Georgia Art Education Association President and currently functioning as the National Art Education Association Southeast Advocacy Chair. Debi is a Nationally Board Certified Teacher - an inspiration to all art professionals.*

*Katherine C. Whitehead served for several years as the Program Coordinator for the Istanbul Center. As Mr. Celik's assistant, she managed the Center's headquarters office, facilitated meetings, and coordinated special events. Katherine is currently graduate assistant and a Master's degree student in the Department of Art at Florida State University.*



This volume has been prepared for the Middle East Institute's *Viewpoints* collection. Several stakeholders in the Istanbul Center of Atlanta's Annual Art and Essay Contest have been involved in the composition of this text. Our goal is to provide a history of this successful program, as well as to define a model for the recreation of such an outreach project for other regions. We have tried to highlight positive outcomes, but we have also examined negative assessments, hoping that if "the wheel is reinvented" there may be some insights that help others steer clear of our obstacles.

The imagery used to connect these contributions alludes to the "Tree of Life" motif found throughout world mythologies, arts, and religions. The tree is an appropriate metaphor, due to its patterns of growth and rejuvenation. In many mythic systems it represents the *axis mundi*, the center of the world — the central pole from which all life germinates and continues to rotate. The allusion to this immortal tree speaks of our shared humanity, which is a common theme associated with the work of the Istanbul Center, and particularly this contest.



# Roots: A Dialogue

*Sandra Bird*

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In 2003, I had an amazing experience flying over islands in the Aegean Sea. I sat looking out the plane's window feeling as if my journey were a kind of homecoming. My colleagues and I were traveling to Rhodes Island in Greece for a group presentation at a humanities conference. We stayed at a hotel on the edge of the island that looked across the sea to the Tauris Mountains of Turkey. I wanted so badly to take a boat to Marmaris just to say I had set foot on Turkish soil but also to see some of the renowned architectural sites I had been teaching about in my various functions as an art education professor. Unfortunately, I did not visit Turkey on this occasion; instead, our little group satisfied ourselves with the wonderful sites of Rhodes.

After attending Georgia State University Middle East Institute's "Teaching the Middle East Workshop" in the fall of 2004, the participants were invited to the Istanbul Center for Culture and Dialogue for a Ramadan *Iftaar*. The director of the center, Kemal Korucu, greeted us as we entered the waiting hall, finely decorated with Turkish *kilim* carpets and Ottoman calligraphy. I was immediately impressed by the group's gentility and kindness, as we were entertained and fed a sumptuous five-course dinner. This experience further fueled my desire to visit Turkey.

Later that fall, I wrote a grant to support this travel opportunity. It was awarded through the incentive grant program from the Center for Teaching and Learning at Kennesaw State University (KSU). In the summer of 2005, I traveled with my good friend and kindred spirit, Jeanette Wachtman, through the major cities of Western and Central Turkey. During this trip, I fell in love with all things Turkish, particularly its rich historical and cultural content.

Following my trip, I received a phone call from my older brother, Steve. As we talked, Steve mentioned that he had just taken a DNA swab test that indicated a certain genetic marker that related to my recent journey.



**Figure 1:** This image is a carpet detail, an abstracted image of a phoenix from a 19<sup>th</sup> century Anatolian carpet on display at the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts in Istanbul, Turkey. To the left of the off-white phoenix figure is a stylized "Tree of Life." The phoenix serves as a protector of that tree, and thus a procurer of longevity for those who depend upon it. (Photo by Sandra Bird)



**Figure 2:** Here is another detail from the same carpet, displaying the abstraction of a dragon, the other ancient guardian of the "Tree of Life". (Photo by Sandra Bird)

**Steve:** Did you know that direct-to-consumer DNA testing has become available?

**Sandra:** Well no, I did not...it's not the kind of thing I tend to follow, you know.

**Steve:** Recently I decided to have my own Y chromosome profile made. One type of testing available identifies the subject's membership in a "haplogroup," or a tree branch of common descent from a particular male ancestor who lived in the distant past, based on something called a "SNP" (pronounced "SNiP"). Y chromosome SNPs are associated exclusively with the male line of ancestry, since the Y chromosome is passed on from father to son essentially intact, with only an occasional mutation to change the profile of the Y.

**Sandra:** What exactly is a "SNiP"?... this all sounds so academic.

**Steve:** Sandy, I am an academic.... (a pregnant pause)... "SNP" stands for single nucleotide polymorphism, a specific genetic mutation that has occurred in one precise location, some time in the distant past, that has been passed on to all living male descendants of the first common ancestor to have the particular SNP.

**Sandra:** Well, that's all fine and good if you are male.

**Steve:** (Probably smiling in that "I've got you covered" kind of way that he does)...a similar SNP-based haplogroup exists for the all-female-associated mitochondrial DNA line.

**Sandra:** Oh...(slightly embarrassed).

**Steve:** Since our family surname, "Bird," obviously was English and the genealogy for the Bird family was known to extend to the region of northwestern Essex county in England in the early 1600s, I fully expected our family male haplogroup to be identified as "R1b1," the so-called "Western Atlantic Modal Haplotype" group associated with many people of English descent. But as I have learned, DNA testing is always full of surprises!

**Sandra:** What did you find out?

**Steve:** My male haplogroup turned out to be E1b1b1a2.

**Sandra:** No way.....(said with half of a smile).

**Steve:** (Continuing without the slightest attention to my tease) E1b1b1a2 is characterized by the SNP known as "V13." This male haplogroup is found at its highest levels in the Balkan peninsula, where it can exceed 40% of the male population in some places, and is believed to have originated from Anatolia just prior to the earliest Neolithic era. By the early Bronze Age, V13 was well established in large numbers throughout the Balkans. Somehow, a male ancestor moved from the Balkans to the island of Britain for some unknown reason and carried the V13 marker with him!

In 2006 and 2007, Steve began to investigate possible migration routes from the Balkans to Britain and what vectors might have been responsible for the movement of V13 to Britain in low but significant numbers (about 2-3% of the present British population). His findings, relayed through an email correspondence, are as follows.

The result of that study was published in *the Journal of Genetic Genealogy* in Fall 2007<sup>11</sup> and traced the distribution of V13 among living Brits who have remained in their ancestral homes for several generations. The conclusion of this study was that V13 was in all likelihood introduced by Roman auxiliary soldiers from the Balkans who were stationed in Britain from the first to the fourth centuries, CE, and then remained upon their retirement to settle in those regions of

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1. Bird, S. C. (2007). Haplogroup E3b1a2 as a Possible Indicator of Settlement in Roman Britain by Soldiers of Balkan Origin. *Journal of Genetic Genealogy*, v.3, (2): 26-46. Available online at: <http://www.jogg.info/32/bird.pdf>.

Britain associated with extensive Roman fortifications and the associated *vici* nearby. Their descendants remain today both in Britain and in America.

Steve went further to explain other discoveries:

Subsequently, I had my mitochondrial DNA tested also, with the surprising result that both the paternal (Eb1b1a2) and maternal (J2b2) haplogroups emerged in Anatolia in the period prior to the Neolithic revolution. Both are associated with the earliest farmers and both eventually found their way to the British Isles. In the case of the maternal line, J2b2 is associated with certain populations found around Edinburgh, Scotland, where our mother's maternal line was believed to have originated. Ironically, at the deepest level, our paternal and maternal lines originated from the same part of the world.

The images of the Anatolian carpet I have shared with readers have an interesting function for me, particularly as I begin to tell my story of the roots of the Istanbul Center contest. The interactions between these ancient protectors of the "Tree of Life" exemplify the power of opposites to protect and generate new life. Both sides seek to perform the same service (to protect life...to endure...to sustain existence) despite their differing origins and actions. The greater good of the tree is the focus of both positions.

Due to my interest in Turkish art and culture, Ferhat Demir (a KSU Business student and Istanbul Center for Culture and Dialogue volunteer) approached me in 2006 for a potential slot on one of the "Dialogue" trips to Turkey that the Istanbul Center was developing. While I could not participate at that time, Ferhat also asked me if I would be willing to support the development of a new student group on our campus, devoted to dialogue among cultures. Eventually, this led to the establishment of the International Dialogue and Empathy Association (IDEA) student group, and Ferhat became "my Turkish son." Was it my ancient Anatolian roots that made me open up to my long-lost Turkish relatives, or was I questioning the very idea of the "other" as one of the most ill-conceived notions to have plagued our earth? My brother's genetic inquiries, as well as others performed by scientists analyzing mitochondrial DNA lead-



**Figure 3:** Here is the larger carpet fragment from the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts in Istanbul. It depicts the meeting of the Phoenix and the Dragon, which symbolizes heaven meeting the earth and thus producing the fortifying rains of spring. Both figures are essential guardians of the "Tree of Life". This is a common stylization on rugs from Anatolia. (Photo by Sandra Bird)

ing back to African sources,<sup>22</sup> indicate that we are much more connected than we generally tend to recognize. Science, art, and religion meet in agreement on this plane.

KSU IDEA was responsible for several activities that were similar to its “mother” group at the Istanbul Center, including a “Dialogue Dinner” to discuss the role of dialogue in peacemaking and a guest appearance of the Sufi performers, “Rumi Nights” in our university’s grand meeting room. That handful of Turkish students also asked me if I would be willing to judge an art contest that the Istanbul Center was in the process of developing. Such requests for adjudication come very frequently in my art education profession. I replied, “Sure, I’ll do whatever you need.” I had no idea how important this contest would become.

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2. Lui, H., Prugnolle, F. Manica, A. & Balloux F. (2006). A Geographically Explicit Genetic Model of Worldwide Human-Settlement History. *American Journal of Human Genetics*, August; 79 (2), 230–237.

# The Origins of the Istanbul Center of Atlanta

Kemal Korucu

The existence of a small Turkish community in Metro-Atlanta can be traced back to the 1950s. Medical doctors, engineers and other professionals and their families were the majority of this small group. Up until the 1990s, this community would remain relatively small in number. For a long time, the interaction between members of the community would be limited to a few celebrations and picnics once a year, and of course home visits among friends.



**Figure 1:** A festive sign was displayed at the Norcross Center in 2004, wishing all Iftar participants a “Happy Ramadan.” (Photo by Sandra Bird)

Turkish society in general and the Turkish economy in particular, went through many drastic changes during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Turks experienced an expansion of more freedom and opportunities during this decade. Turkey’s society and economy were opening up to the world and a new middle class was being created. It was during this same period that the number of Turkish students who came to the United States and to Atlanta in particular, increased dramatically. Most of the students were graduates of top universities in Turkey who sought graduate-level degrees. The influx of these students brought new energy and vitality to the Turkish community in Atlanta. Families who had lived in Atlanta for a long time opened their homes and hearts to these students. Interactions between the new and the old members of the community brought out the best in both groups. It was during these years when the ideas and teachings of the Turkish philosopher, Fethullah Gulen, were introduced to the Atlanta Turkish community by these newcomers.

While Fethullah Gulen was renowned in Turkey, he was relatively unknown within the Atlanta Turkish community. His teachings emphasized the importance of education, dialogue, bridge-building, and self-reliance.<sup>11</sup> Young people, inspired by his message of achieving peace through small but persistent positive actions, also inspired the entire community. It was in the garage of a home (where some of these students were staying) where the first Turkish language, math, and science classes were offered to the children of the Turkish community. In a very short time, it became obvious to everyone that the community needed a larger space to serve its members. People who had lived in Atlanta for many years knew that there had long been talk of establishing a “Turkish Community Center” which, however, had not materialized. In the early 2000s, things began to change. The spirit of sharing and *hizmet* (service)



**Figure 2:** A group of Turkish university students played traditional music for the audience, followed by a traditional dinner prepared by students from the Turkish cooking classes at the IC. (Photo by Sandra Bird)

1. For more information on the work of Fethullah Gulen, please read the following: Aslandogan, Y & Hunt, R. (Eds.). (2006). Muslim Citizens of the Globalized World. Somerset, NJ: The Light, Inc. & IID Press.



distributed the stewardship responsibility, making it less painful for everyone. In 2002, The Global Spectrum Foundation of Georgia was established as a non-profit organization to serve the needs of the Atlanta Turkish community. That same year a small office space was rented in Norcross and the “Istanbul Cultural Center” came into existence. To make this happen, some donated money while others gave their time.

The Istanbul Cultural Center took off rapidly. A number of programs were established within the first year, which made it necessary to rent additional space in the same building. Volunteers led steadily increasing programs such as academic classes for children, cultural festivals, and dialogue activities with other communities. For those community members who had lived in Atlanta for a long time, The Istanbul Cultural Center became an oasis. As the organization grew, the nature of the activities changed. Soon, community members decided to alter the name of the organization to the “Istanbul Center for Culture and Dialogue.” This was also a sign that dialogue and bridge-building had become more important to the organization’s mission. Initially, the organization’s educational activities were designed for the members of the Atlanta Turkish community. However, with the introduction of the art and essay contest, educational opportunities were opened up for the entire state of Georgia. Since it was not practical to name the organization “Istanbul Center for Culture, Dialogue and Education,” it was decided to rename it “Istanbul Center.”

The name of the Istanbul Center was being recognized in many circles in the city. The organization was becoming an accepted representative of Turkish people in Metro Atlanta. After long deliberations, the community decided to open a branch office in Midtown Atlanta. This would allow closer interaction with educational, cultural and civic leadership of the city and state. The amount of time required to achieve the goals of the growing organization required full-time attention to the various issues at hand; therefore, an Executive Director and a small staff were hired to serve the community.

The story of the Istanbul Center is not over. It continues to grow and innovate. While it would not be possible to list all the activities organized by the Istanbul Center in this limited space, it is possible to say that the “volunteer” roots and spirit of the organization is still alive in everything it does. It is this spirit of service that allows the Istanbul Center to become an inspiration for other




**Figure 3:** An early brochure design for the Istanbul Center at Norcross featured dialogue, education, culture and humanitarian activities throughout the Atlanta Metro area. (Graphic Design by IC Staff)



**Figures 4 & 5:** Of major prominence among the many IC activities was the Turkish Festival, held annually in autumn. Many other cultural performers were brought in throughout the years, including the Sufi troupe, Rumi Nights, who performed their Sema dance in a variety of locations. (Photos by IC Staff)

cities and communities in the Southeastern United States. There are two questions that are always asked of the community's members; 1) How do you grow so fast? And 2) Where do you get your funding? The answers are hidden in the fact that the Istanbul Center still has its roots in the Atlanta area. It is supported through financial contributions from the local Turkish-American community, and continues to grow as the community itself does.



**Some of our education activities:**

- Language Classes
- Art Classes
- Weekend Schools
- Camps and Field Trips
- Seminars and Lectures
- Annual Art & Essay Contest

**Figure 7:** This is an excerpt from another Istanbul Center brochure, created not long after the initiation of the Annual Art & Essay contest in 2006. (Graphic Design and Photos by IC Staff)

# The Making of Stars

*Jeannette Wachtman*

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In the early 1970s, I taught art classes in three elementary schools in Phoenix, New York. After enduring long snowy and cold winters for ten years, I moved to the Atlanta, Georgia area where the sun shines almost every day. There, I re-entered the field of education, teaching art for Cobb County Schools for 17. During this time, I shared original programs and curriculum in workshops and lectures held at international, national, and state conferences.

Traveling has always been an integral part of my life and influenced cultural curriculum which I designed and presented to my elementary students. So when my phone rang and Sandra Bird asked me, “Do you want to travel to Turkey?” of course, I said “yes.” The trip to Turkey included visiting Istanbul, Ankara, Konya, Bursa, Cappadocia, and the western region, including Troy and Ephesus.

With my sturdy Mavica camera, I snapped over 1,000 photos. Upon our return, Sandra introduced me to Kemal Korucu, Director of the Istanbul Center in Norcross, Georgia. We then set a date to present my work at the Center’s small gallery. The exhibition, *Windows of Change — a visual narrative of Turkey*, was held in 2006.

I became more closely acquainted with the Istanbul Center in 2007 when Sandra asked me to serve as a judge for their art contest. The Istanbul Center’s Art and Essay Contest offered an opportunity to promote understanding of the human experience via the arts, encourage engagement with Turkish people, and to advance their country and its rich history. Learning about others’ heritage, culture, and beliefs enhance one’s knowledge and appreciation of them. As an elementary art teacher, I had witnessed my students’ behavior and attitudes change when I taught cultural units on Africa, India, Mexico, and Turkey.

“*Land of the Sultans*” is a cultural unit I introduced to my students in an effort to encourage them to “discover” Turkey’s history, architecture, music, and belief systems. We also explored a traditional form of storytelling using the puppets, Karagoz and Hacivat. Student art activities included marbleizing paper with Arabic calligraphy, Ottoman flower designs on metal foil, geometric



**Figure 1:** This photo was taken from an early morning balloon trip over the Cappadocian landscape. It is an experience that lasts in one’s memory forever. (Photo by Jeanette Wachtman)



**Figure 2:** These are the streets of Bursa after a soft summer rain. (Photo by Jeanette Wachtman)



patterns on tiles, and the opportunity for the students to design their own “Sultan’s throne.”

When my art student from Turkey was able to read the Arabic calligraphy on my teaching slides, it was then that the other students took notice of him. He acquired new friends, who asked him to write their names in Arabic. My student’s self-image soared and his participation in school activities increased. My student had become a star! As a retired elementary teacher, supporting and participating in the Istanbul Center contest is my way of continuing to help make students “stars.”

When we (Sandra, Tarik Celik, Katherine “Kasan” Whitehead, and me) met as an organizing committee in the summer of 2008, we discussed the project criteria, rules, and rubric design. The crucial question was what strategies we could employ to involve teachers so that they would integrate the contest into their own curriculum and motivate students to participate in the contest. I recommended changing the word “contest” to “exhibition.”

My preference for the term “exhibition” over “contest” reflected several concerns, including the potential adverse effect that a competition might have on students who do not win, and the possibility that it could compromise the aesthetic experience (i.e., limit the diversity of expression due to the interests of the sponsors). However, the Istanbul Center’s contest is designed and executed in a manner that ameliorates such concerns. The Center’s contest presents thought-provoking themes that are integrated into the classroom setting. The themes have educational value and meet the needs, interests, and concerns of learners and teachers alike.

Many solutions to involve teachers with contest information were devised and eventually implemented. Such materials included contacting school superintendents, administrators and department chairs with contest information, sending e-mails to individual teachers as “reminders,” providing posters and pamphlets to the schools.

The most powerful motivations for teachers to participate in the contest were cash awards and a trip to Turkey for winning students, along with their teachers and superintendents. The trip would include visits to Istanbul’s mosques and



**Figure 3:** This is Aya Safia at Istanbul, rising above the hot city streets. (Photo by Jeanette Wachtman)



**Figure 4:** In this photo, the cenotaph for Mehmet I is centrally placed in the Yeşil Cami (Green Mosque) Mausoleum at Bursa. (Photo by Jeanette Wachtman)

markets; in Ankara, students would walk through Atatürk's mausoleum/museum and learn about Turkey's ancient past in the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations. Students at Konya would view the *Whirling Dervishes* and in Ephesus, see the ruins of the historic capital of Roman Asia Minor.

Sandra and I organized lectures that have been delivered at the Georgia Art Education Association Conferences for the past three years. We developed a PowerPoint presentation on our travels in Turkey showing images from Istanbul, Bursa, Cappadocia, Ephesus, and Troy. Istanbul Center representatives provided information regarding contest themes, criteria, media, and deadlines. Baklava and black tea was generally provided during these presentations, and a display of winning artworks was set up in the conference hallways. Excited art teachers talked about the contest's concept and were especially intrigued about a possible trip to Turkey.

I also wrote an article in 2009, "Georgia Students Win Trip to Turkey Sponsored by the Istanbul Cultural Center," which appeared in the Georgia Art Education Association's bi-annual publication, *Collage*. It described the winners and their artworks for the 2008–2009 contest.

At the most recent committee meetings regarding the art contest, we restructured the contest rules and clarified the art media categories. The long-term plans included additional Southeastern states within the competition. A large determining group (including teachers, professors, IC advisory board members, and IC staff) selected a new contest title: *Istanbul Center's Southeast Region Art and Essay Contest: Creating a Legacy of Understanding*. As the contest moves forward, strategies to involve educators will be the main agenda. It is essential, as the contest continues to evolve, that teachers develop and present innovative and challenging teaching units on the identified themes. Exploration of these humanistic themes by students will help mold these future "star" ambassadors of peace and understanding.

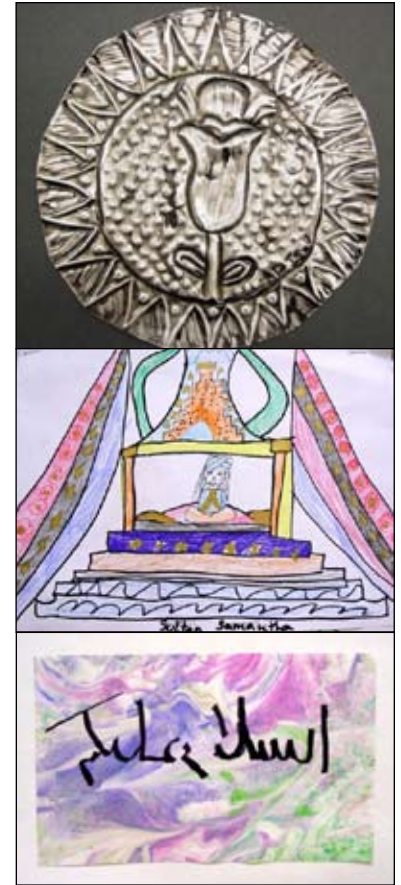


Figure 5: Here are some elementary school products from my "Land of the Sultans" art unit. (Photos by Jeanette Wachtman)



Figure 6: Another idea was to make a brochure for the awards ceremony for archival and demonstration purposes. (Graphic Design by Gonca Unca)





**Figures 7–9 (clockwise):** Dervish Sema dance performance at the Konya performance hall. (Photo by Jeanette Wachtman); A panel of judges are viewing and discussing the art entries for *The Alliance of Civilizations* theme (2008-09). From left to right, Dr. Lanny Milbrandt (representing Valdosta State University), Dr. Diana Gregory and Assistant Professor Jeanette Wachtman (representing Kennesaw State University), and Dr. Melody Milbrandt (representing Georgia State University) with IC Director's Assistant, Katherine Whitehead. (Photo by Sandra Bird); High School art winners line the stage, including Emily Silva, Jennifer Paek and Laura Bragg (with their teachers) at the 2009 Istanbul Center Art & Essay Awards Ceremony. (Photo by Jeanette Wachtman)

# Branches: Growth of the Contest

*Sandra Bird*

I arrived at the Midtown office of the Istanbul Center at about 4:00pm. I wanted to help Sedat Memnun, this year's IC Education Coordinator, set up the tables for the university students who would come in at 5:30. I had stopped along the way to pick up some cookies for them to snack on while they performed the first round of adjudication. When I walked into the Center I found that the tables had all been set up, and the Middle School works were all neatly arranged. In fact, my trip to the grocery for cookies was also unnecessary, as Sedat had already purchased a sample of snacks to feed the hungry undergraduates while they worked. Of course, there was a huge tray of baklava among the food offerings.



**Figure 1:** A photograph of “The Three Amigos” (Jeanette Wachtman, Sedat Memnun and Sandra Bird) at the Fall 2010 GAEEA Conference, peddling the art contest to secondary teachers with an annual presentation, and of course the lure of baklava. (Photo by IC Staff)

Sedat and I chatted for a moment, catching up since our last visit (in late October at the Fall 2010 Georgia Art Education Association Conference at Calloway Gardens). I have been to the Istanbul Center since that time, but on days when Sedat was off roaming about the Southeast, trying to sell other states on the idea of this or that project from the center. He and Sarabrynn Hudgins, Mr. Celik's new assistant and program coordinator, are kept very busy. New brochures about the Istanbul Center's projects are always being prepared by these two and Gonca Unca, the IC Director of Art and Design. The staff is traveling almost every day, as new teachers are being oriented at their schools by the IC staff toward a science education initiative that the center is beginning this year.

This is the fifth year of the Istanbul Center Art and Essay Contest — a good time to reflect on how the program has grown over the years. With contest experience as a hallmark of his leadership, Tarik Celik is the powerful force behind the success of this particular art and essay program. Still, I think he would quickly second that this success would not have been achieved if not for his excellent staff, including formerly Katherine Whitehead, Omer Ozbek, Gurkan Ekicikol, and now Sedat and Sarabrynn. Tarik has a way of getting what he wants from people, whether it be funding from his generous “friends” around the world or total dedication from the people working under him. He is a strong character, and is very bright as well. He does not generally accept “no” for an answer. While this is not a great quality in most people, it works pretty well for this CEO.



**Figure 2:** Art Education student, Rebecca Beaver, enjoys the baklava provided by Sedat for undergraduates to partake during the initial judging sessions. (Photo by Sandra Bird)

Istanbul Center Program Coordinator's activities summary:

- Facilitate judges/staff/board members, etc. in debating and choosing annual theme
- Draft text for A&E Contest flyer/posters for publicity
- Review/edit A&E Contest flyers/posters once made by graphic designer
- Send A&E Contest announcement to teachers in May with dates and annual theme included
- Update the huge "Letter to Teachers" document, including contest and trip rules, with any changes decided upon from last year.
- Send contest announcement to teachers, superintendents, curriculum coordinators with contest submission dates and complete Letter to Teachers rulebook during 1st week of August
- Follow-up regularly with rounds of
- Phone calls to superintendents' offices
- Calls/emails to previously-participating teachers, especially past trip participant
- Phone calls to curriculum coordinators
- In-person visits to area schools
- Calls to school principals
- Arrange awards ceremony
- Find venue & handle related paperwork
- Plan awards ceremony registration, nametags, seating arrangements, certificates and other paperwork/organizational tasks
- Notify winning students and follow-up on:
- Trip winners' paperwork
- Awards ceremony RSVPs
- Getting student photos for awards ceremony booklet
- Post winners' information on Istanbul Center website, including awards ceremony details
- Draft new text for "A&E Contest Awards Ceremony" booklet
- Review/edit "A&E Contest Awards Ceremony" booklet once made by graphic designer
- Send "A&E Contest Awards Ceremony" invitations to participating teachers/students/schools
- Execute "A & E Contest Awards Ceremony" with Educational Programs Director
- Send out unclaimed awards and certificates
- Process trip paperwork and handle student/teacher/parent questions about the trip
- Plan and execute trip orientation session(s)

**Figure 3:** IC Program Coordinator, Sarabrynn Hudgins' "Things to Do" List

When Tarik came on board in a full-time capacity as “Director of the Istanbul Center,” he instituted many changes. A former science educator and a sharp critical thinker, Tarik adopted and built upon ideas generated by the former volunteer director, Kemal Korucu. Part of his success is related to the security afforded by a full-time position; however, it also stems from his strong managerial style, including his solicitation of various opinions when trying to resolve problems. Each issue is explored with area specialists, but then debated in advisory board meetings and with other partners whose input may provide alternative angles from which to view the problem at hand. While initially it may be frustrating for specialists to have their educated opinions sought and then ignored, it also ensures that Tarik is gleaning the very best option from the many sources that contribute their views on an issue. One example of that reliance on a debated issue was the integration of a rubric for the art judges. Artists do not typically like to be restricted by numbers (it’s not generally their territory of specialization), but Tarik (and his larger group of thinkers) wanted to add this level of objectivity to the art adjudication process. So, we added a primary level of review with rubrics, using undergraduate art education students from my home institution.

I began involving my own art education students in the judging process of the Istanbul Center’s art contest in 2010. At this point in their training, these students were still learning about secondary school graphic development, as well as how to properly gauge success in artworks using a formal grading system. A rubric used at this preliminary stage of judging was helpful to the students as they reviewed and then ranked artworks. There was a practical purpose for the initial “hierarchical” rating, as it helped to cull through the over 1,000 works generally submitted to the art contest. Nevertheless, using rubrics for art contests is somewhat heretical in art adjudication circles. There is a tendency to use subjective, but more reliable methods of triangulation — combining several reviewers’ informed critical opinions when determining value in artworks. The students’ quantified rankings were met with suspicion by the faculty judges, who, in truth, were the “real” decision makers for our final slate of winners.



**Figure 4:** In this photo, Tarik Celik welcomes the KSU art education students to the Istanbul Center Headquarters and giving them a small pin with Turkish and US flags intertwined. (Photo by Sandra Bird)



**Figure 5:** KSU’s art education students are examining artworks submitted for the Istanbul Center art contest in 2011. (Photo by Sandra Bird)



While I regret that the faculty judges found this process unnerving, I do see clear benefits to my art education students. First of all, they were able to provide a constructive service to an active community organization that craves young partners who are willing to work toward a common good, in this case helping to identify ideas that provide “out-of-the-box” solutions/opinions on this world that we all share. For many of my art education students, the contest was their first contact with people from Turkey (or even Muslims in general). Just being at the Istanbul Center for two sessions of classes gave the students an idea of Turkish gentility and enthusiasm for building international relationships. My students also had an opportunity to see how artworks can be evaluated according to formal directives. As more and more “objective” evaluation criteria are used in our schools to assess artworks (sadly, to validate the importance of the arts in our schools), I can be certain that my students can administer rigorous assessment according to well defined parameters when needed.



**Figure 6:** Evaluator (KSU Art Education Assistant Professor) April Munson sitting down with Kasan Whitehead to discuss the 2009/2010 art contest. (Photo by Sandra Bird)

I asked an art education colleague and program evaluator, Dr. April Munson, to examine the art judging process in 2010. Dr. Munson’s remarks are included in this collection of essays from various stakeholders. Ultimately, Munson recognized that the end product, effective judging, was achieved. I have also asked several of the other stakeholders to write about their experiences, particularly as to how the contest has grown and currently operates. I submitted a series of questions to serve as a kind of guide,<sup>1</sup> but the writers had complete liberty to explore issues that were most important to them. That collection of viewpoints should help the reader to understand the shoots of this growing tree.

Sedat Memnun adds to this assembly with an assessment of work following his first year as the IC’s Director of Educational Programs:

I have been coordinating the art and essay contest for seven months at the Istanbul Center, and I have seen that this contest helps young people to be more tolerant and open as they express them-



**Figure 7:** This image of an Anatolian “Tree of Life” bursts forth with growing leaves on the perimeter of the design. It is a detail from a carpet on display at the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts in Istanbul, Turkey. (Photo by Sandra Bird)

1. The guide was as follows: (a) What is your experience in the arts?...and/or...What is your experience with the Istanbul Center? (b) How did you come to know the Istanbul Center art contest? What was/is your function regarding contest facilitation/participation? (c) Did your experience with the contest introduce you to the work of the IC? Or rather, did your experience with the contest introduce you to the visual arts? (d) Did you have any concerns about this contest, or contests in general? (e) In what ways was the contest successful and/or unsuccessful? (f) In what ways should the contest organizers continue to develop the contest? (g) Did you learn anything new during this experience? (h) If you participated in a “Dialogue” trip to Turkey (that resulted from your contest participation), please describe that experience. How did this trip impact your life/thoughts?



selves creatively. The themes are chosen very carefully, for this contest creates ways for students to be more responsive to global problems and think about helping their community at multiple levels.

The Istanbul Center wants to proactively contribute to solving educational, cultural, environmental, social, and humanitarian issues and to create opportunities for dialogue between communities in order to build bridges between cultures. The Istanbul Center Art and Essay Contest fits our institutional mission while satisfying the stated goals of art practitioners: “Arts education helps all students develop more appreciation and understanding of the world around them.”<sup>2</sup>

The secondary students are not the only ones to benefit from this contest. I personally have learned much in terms of understanding the students’ thinking styles as well as the influence of their culture on their discernments. As a native of Turkey, it was interesting (and reassuring) for me to hear a Korean-American student (as she explained her art piece) comment on the similarities of an American woman and a Muslim woman reflecting on one another through the very natural recourse of empathy. This contest is a very good tool for different cultures to know and understand one another. We need more of this type of understanding. We hope that the contest will continue to grow to become a nationwide competition, and perhaps an international project in the coming years.



**Figure 8:** Sedat Memnun was born in Turkey and received an engineering degree from Middle East Technical University in Turkey and then a MBA from Clayton State University in Georgia. He is married and has a six year-old daughter named Selin.

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2 Americans for the Arts, <http://www.americansforthearts.org>

# Creating a Legacy of Understanding

*Tarik Celik*

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With arts programs continuing to be cut throughout the United States, educators are scrambling for new ways to integrate the humanities and art education into students' curricula. Educators are also pressed to impart international understanding because they know that today's young people must not only develop diplomacy skills for use in their native lands, but also know how to apply these skills in a globalized world. Non-profit organizations can assist in these goals with educational programs that function outside of the school boundaries. We are proud to do just that with the Istanbul Center Annual Art & Essay Contest, whose tagline, "creating a legacy of understanding," articulates the contest's goal.

The Istanbul Center is inspired by the idea that the world would be a better place with better citizens if individuals the world over would engage in more dialogue. Anecdotal evidence indicates that, for all its strengths, the American educational system does a poor job of teaching students to understand other cultures. In an atmosphere of polarization, such understanding is not a luxury; it is crucial. Addressing the obvious problem fostered by insular thinking, dialogue is often most effective when such programs target young people.

Dealing with social issues and overcoming social conflicts is key; we believe that young minds should be engaged in thinking about social issues and how to solve them. The Istanbul Center Art and Essay Contest does that by asking students to meditate on a yearly theme and create works that reflects that theme. The 2009–2010 contest theme of "Who's My Neighbor?" drew submissions that related to literal, next-door neighbors, to classmates of different origins and to people involved in international conflicts. Students were able to highlight their differences while recognizing the breadth and depth of their similarities with neighbors as close as the next house and as far away as other continents.

The 2010–2011 theme was selected with input from a large committee including teachers, contest judges, students, partners, sponsors, and Istanbul Center board members. Serving also as the overall institutional theme for this year's IC programming (involving educational, cultural, environmental, social and humanitarian issues), 2010–2011 operated under the theme of "Empathy: Walking in Another's Shoes." When given direction through a theme, students are able to conceptualize issues like social justice and foreign cultures easily and have fun while they are engaged in the topic.

Contest support has grown over the years to include more than 100 sponsors and partners in the Southeast region. The Georgia Department of Education has identified the program as a "co-curricular activity." Buttressing the international



**Figure 1:** Winners (with their teachers) of the Istanbul Center Art and Essay Contest for 2010 stand before the Bosphorus Strait, the crossroads of Europe and Asia. (Photo by IC Staff)

orientation of the contest is support from the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), which has sponsored this contest since 2009. The UNAOC “aims to improve understanding and cooperative relations among nations and peoples across cultures and religions, and to help counter the forces that fuel polarization and extremism.”<sup>11</sup> It is composed of 125 member countries and involves many international and private organizations. The UNAOC supports international initiatives and partnerships, helping all of us to work together to “build bridges” between diverse peoples and cultures.

The inaugural art and essay contest in 2007 involved only forty-five submissions. The 2010-2011 contest expanded to the entire Southeastern United States; including Alabama, Florida, South Carolina and Tennessee, as well as Georgia. This brought the Contest and its message of international cooperation to thousands of schools in the region and drew more than 2,500-selected submissions — an incredible increase over the past five years. With a reach of more than 4,000 schools and 150,000 students in five states, The Istanbul Center’s Art and Essay Contest has become the largest program in its kind. The organization’s long-term plan envisions nationwide expansion and, eventually, internationalization.

The Istanbul Center also partners with local universities, holding the contest’s awards ceremony at a different institution of higher education each year. Furthermore, professors of art at area universities volunteer their time in judging the art submissions while English professors judge the essay submissions. The number of judges this year has increased to 300 academics from many colleges, universities and civic organizations.

The Istanbul Center’s Art and Essay Contest is unique in its recognition of teachers as well as students. Each student’s sponsoring teacher receives prizes along with the student, whether an 8<sup>th</sup>-place high school art contest winner’s gift certificate or a 1<sup>st</sup>-place middle school essay winner’s all-expenses-paid trip to Turkey. We also invite sponsors to present their gifts to students and teachers directly. This phenomenal prize distribution has brought dozens of teachers and students to Turkey, offering them the special opportunity to learn and explore a foreign culture together.

Turkey is an appropriate destination for such winners, as it is a land of both ancient civilizations and modernity, situated at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. At least 25 civilizations have passed through Anatolia. Turkey was the seat

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1. See <http://www.unaoc.org/> for specific information defining The Alliance of Civilization Program. The mission of the Alliance of Civilizations is defined by the following “capacities”(globally and within the UN system):

- A **bridge builder and convener**, connecting people and organizations devoted to promoting trust and understanding between diverse communities, particularly – but not exclusively – between Muslim and Western societies;
- A **catalyst and facilitator** helping to give impetus to innovative projects aimed at reducing polarization between nations and cultures through joint pursuits and mutually beneficial partnerships;
- An **advocate** for building respect and understanding among cultures and amplifying voices of moderation and reconciliation which help calm cultural and religious tensions between nations and peoples;
- A **platform** to **increase visibility**, enhance the work and highlight the profile of initiatives devoted to building bridges between cultures; and
- A **resource** providing access to information and materials drawn from successful cooperative initiatives which could, in turn, be used by member states, institutions, organizations, or individuals seeking to initiate similar processes or projects.

of the Ottoman Empire for several hundred years. Visitors to Turkey can see not only archeological and historical sites, but (through the hospitality and open minds of the Turkish people) they can experience first-hand the ancient Turkish tradition of “The Art of Living Together.” Art and essay contest winners visit public and private schools and meet young Turkish students, with whom they discuss shared values and educational goals. They also are able to meet important Turkish governmental representatives of education, culture, media and politics.

Participating teachers have often expressed afterward that they are better teachers for having had the experience, and that they plan to be all the more ardent in encouraging their students to pursue study abroad opportunities and similar experiences. Participating teachers and students have subsequently joined the advisory board of this program and dedicated themselves to the following year’s contest. They have been especially helpful in choosing the yearly theme publicizing the program. Parents regularly report that their sons and daughters return from Turkey with a new passion and understanding that augments all their academic and personal pursuits. I encourage anyone interested in this program to contact one of the students or teachers who have traveled with the Istanbul Center to Turkey. Their enthusiasm for the Contest is the greatest testament to its success.



**Figure 2:** Tarik (and the IC staff) with the 2010 traveling group, posing in the office of the Turkish Deputy Prime Minister in Ankara, Turkey. (Photo by IC Staff)

The United Nations’ Alliance of Civilizations office decided to have an exhibition of this program in the UN building in New York while the Youth Art Connection of Boys and Girls Clubs in Atlanta decided to exhibit the winners in their art gallery in downtown Atlanta. In one of its farthest-reaching effects, visits from program participants to superintendents and other education officials of big cities in Turkey such as Ankara and Istanbul have inspired the Turkish officials to create similar programs in their school systems.

We invite everyone — students, parents, teachers, principals, superintendents, education board members and community leaders — to learn more about the Istanbul Center’s Art and Essay Contest and to help us create a legacy of understanding.



**Figure 3:** At the 2009–2010 IC Art & Essay Awards Ceremony, a speech was written for this event by the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations President, Jorge Sampaio. It was delivered by Dr. Thomas Uthup, the UNACC Secretariat. The entire speech is printed on the following pages. (Photo by IC Staff)



## ALLIANCE of CIVILIZATIONS

President Jorge Sampaio

UNITED NATIONS HIGH REPRESENTATIVE  
FOR THE ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

*Istanbul Center Awards Ceremony*  
*Oglethorpe University, Atlanta, Georgia, USA*  
*Art & Essay Contest on the Theme: "Who's My Neighbor",*

*March 5, 2010*



Excellencies  
Ladies and Gentlemen  
Young Creative People

I should like to thank the Istanbul Center and the Georgia Department of Education for inviting the Alliance to co-sponsor this contest aimed to spur the thinking of young people on the theme of "Who's My Neighbor."

Let me express my appreciation to the contest's partners and co-sponsors from local universities, media, NGOs and other civil society, the Honorary Consulate General of Turkey for Georgia, as well as the British Consulate General and the Consulate Generals of Germany, Israel, and Switzerland.

In my view, this wide-ranging partnership is symbolic of the efforts of the UN Alliance of Civilizations to bring together governments, civil society, and educational institutions to bridge the gaps between different cultural groups. Efforts deployed by Georgia and by the Istanbul Center are also emblematic of our focus on practical projects that bring people together from host and migrant communities.

The work of the Alliance is done through practical projects in its four areas of action - Education, Migration, Media, and Youth – aimed at enhancing trust and respect among people within and between diverse communities.

To give a few examples: the Alliance's Youth Solidarity Fund provides support to a range of grassroots projects that facilitate genuine bridge building between youth from different cultural backgrounds. The Rapid Response Media Mechanism offers a diversity of expert voices to the media to provide constructive opinions on issues that threaten to divide communities. The new Dialogue Café network to be launched in Rio is aimed to connect people in global conversations showing that people have more in common with each other than divisive differences and that given the opportunity they will explore their common interests and spark collaborations". And in order to help the next generation develop the skills they need to operate in an increasingly multicultural world, the Alliance is developing online resources providing invaluable information to policy makers, educators, and NGOs on media literacy education, education about diverse religions and beliefs, and good practices in the integration of migrants.

However, we can achieve far more by stimulating and catalyzing projects that are created by local groups who can come up with creative means to bring people together from different groups.

NGOs, corporations, state and local governments are more attuned to success in fostering mutual understanding, confidence and respect among peoples of different cultural traditions because of their in-depth contacts with local key individuals and knowledge of local issues.

This is why we are encouraging countries to develop strategies at the national and local level with the help of partners from various sectors to conceive, plan and implement projects that bring people together and reduce cultural divides – the *raison d'être* of the Alliance of Civilizations.

Ladies and gentlemen, globalization and migration brings together different cultural communities who may previously not have had much interaction with each other. Interaction of different groups can be a source of friction and often of conflict. But cultural diversity can also result in cross-fertilization and success stories of people interacting in mutual respect and harmony. Cultural diversity can spark innovation, stimulate creativity and boost the economy. Indeed, Atlanta, Georgia, and the United States have seen this first-hand.

The Istanbul Center's efforts to promote better understanding and closer relations between the Turkish, American, and other communities in Atlanta and the Southeastern United States are inspiring in this regard.

In my mind, the value of the Istanbul Center's annual Art and Essay Contest is in stimulating young people to think positively and creatively about cultural diversity and the bridging of cultures.

Through this contest and in your future life, it is important to understand the differences between you and your neighbors – in your looks, origins, religions, cuisine, and dress, for example. However, the commonalities of your dreams, fears, and aspirations are also important to explore because that will determine the shared future that you both have to inhabit. You will soon learn that the differences are often less important than the commonalities of love for family, fear of the unknown, the sense of dignity and the aspiration for a better future.

To the young people – the emerging global generation -- gathered here today, I say: you can go towards the futility of prejudice and hate through building physical and mental walls. Or you can explore the fruitful nature of cultural diversity by breaking down the barriers and discovering the differences --- and commonalities – of your neighbors.

In this busy world, we are sometimes not aware of our neighbors and often do not understand them and their ways. Even if we are aware of our neighbors and understand and tolerate them, we are still scared of breaking down the barriers and build shared spaces. But only shared spaces enable us to respectfully work with each other towards greater harmony and building a better future for all.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Alliance of Civilizations emphasizes exchanges as a practical effort at bring cultures together. The awards of the trips to Turkey for the contest winners and educators presents a powerful way to learn about yourself, experience another culture first-hand, and engage in the dismantling of stereotypes and prejudices. Perhaps in the future, Turkish school children will have an opportunity to take part in a similar contest and visit the United States and Atlanta.

Thanks for your support and participation.

# Global Education through the Arts

Jacqueline LaMere

During my senior year coursework in the art education program at Kennesaw State University, I had the unique opportunity to judge the artwork of Georgia middle and high school students at the Istanbul Center in Atlanta. As an advisory board member of the Istanbul Center, Dr. Bird, the professor of my Teaching Art History and Aesthetics course, has built a strong professional friendship with this Turkish non-profit organization. Through this connection, as a class, we were invited to participate in judging the first round for the artworks submitted for the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Istanbul Center Art & Essay Contest. The main objective of the Istanbul Center's art contest is to have students in middle and high schools think about and be involved in solving social problems in our world today, such as intercultural understanding and respect towards others.

The Istanbul Center Headquarters, located in Midtown Atlanta, was very welcoming and provided an environment that advocates travel to the historic and culturally rich Turkish capital city. The representatives of the Istanbul Center were a wonderful source of information and they were eager to help us feel at home. The staff showed Turkish hospitality by offering delicious, traditional Turkish foods and teas.

After arriving at the Istanbul Center, our class was split into numerous small groups, which were determined by our medium of expertise (e.g., photography, drawing and painting, and graphic design). Piles of artwork covered the tables and lined the walls, some still in their original mailers. Only after joining the photography group, did I realize that the vast majority of art applicants were photography students. It was clear that our group had our work cut out for us. Due to time constraints, my group had to quickly work through our piles of artwork. Our primary goal the first day was to separate the artwork that met the basic criteria of size and included an artist's statement as established by the Istanbul Center. The second day we were given rubrics to score the artwork. Our rubrics contained a list of the formal criteria of the contest and



**Figure 1:** KSU Art Education students were conducting the initial judging of the artworks for the 2009/2010 Istanbul Center Art & Essay Contest. (Photo by Sandra Bird)

Judge	Project Code		
Criteria for Products	Poor Quality (1 point)	Good Quality (3 points)	Excellent Quality (5 points)
Craftsmanship			
Formal Qualities			
Creativity			
Interpretation of Topic			
Artist's Statement			
Total = _____			

**Figure 2:** The small rubric record kept by the art education student judges for each qualifying work.



**Figure 4:** Artwork by Kylie Brown, 3<sup>rd</sup> place winner of the 2010 art contest for the high school division. Kylie was a student of Carissa Griffin at Grayson High School in Georgia's Gwinnett County.



included craftsmanship, formal qualities, creativity, interpretation of the topic “Who is your Neighbor?” and the artist’s statement.

As a first-time art judge, I had reservations giving students low scores when they did not meet the requirements of the contest. Unfortunately, a large amount of meaningful artwork was disqualified for failure to meet the guidelines of the contest. If their teachers better express the parameters of the contest to the students, perhaps this could be avoided in the future. The most frequent discrepancy that arose was whether or not the student him/herself had actually taken the photograph. Two other requirements that were frequently overlooked were the size requirements and the inclusion of a written artist’s statement with the artwork. It was evident which photographers took their time to creatively express their thoughts of the theme through their artwork and essay. From this point forward, university professors conducted the judging at a different session.

The contest was successful in promoting the visual arts and advertising the Istanbul Center’s core philosophies of advocating harmony, peace, and respect between all cultures. Thousands of Georgia students were given the opportunity to express themselves creatively through the theme “Who is my Neighbor?” The topic alone provided many avenues for each student to express original and meaningful ideas. The winners of the contest executed their ideas with the most fresh and creative interpretations of the theme, and were able to communicate its meaning effectively in their artist’s statements.

This wonderful experience gave my peers and me the opportunity to actively participate behind the scenes of a student art contest. The framework of combining the visual and literary arts makes the design of this contest unique. I am eager to have my future art students participate in this annual event. The Istanbul Center Annual Art and Essay Contest is a great vehicle for students to express meaningful global topics in a creative fashion.

<b>ISTANBUL CENTER</b> <b>ART RUBRIC</b> <b>Istanbul Center Art and Essay Contest: “Creating a Legacy of Understanding”</b> <b>2010-2011 Theme: “Empathy: Walking in Another’s Shoes”</b>			
Criteria for Products	Poor Quality (1 point)	Good Quality (3 points)	Excellent Quality (5 points)
<b>Craftsmanship</b>	*There is no evidence of skill development in the media. Little technical competency	*Demonstrates some skill with the media, technically proficient	*Demonstrates strong skill with the media, technically accomplished
<b>Formal Qualities</b>	*Composition lacking a cohesive appearance *Weak integration of elements and principles of design	*Composition lacking a cohesive appearance *Some integration of elements and principles of design	*Composition is cohesively unified *Strong integration of elements and principles of design
<b>Creativity</b>	*Does not exhibit innovative thinking - very little experimentation to enhance concepts *Does not exhibit creative thinking skills - uses tried or over-used images and/or approach	*Exhibits innovative thinking - sufficient experimentation to enhance concepts *Unusual approach, play on image and concept, use of visual metaphor that has some visible connection to the theme	*Exhibits distinct experimentation and innovation to enhance creative concepts *Use of strong metaphor, personal meaning and/or elaborate or complex visual responses *Strong apparent connection to the theme
<b>Interpretation of Topic</b>	*Poor interpretation and communication of thematic concepts due to inappropriate or inadequate images or thoughts	*Adequate interpretation and communication of thematic concepts	*Excellent interpretation and communication of thematic concepts
<b>Artist’s Statement (No longer than 200 words)</b>	*There is little or no correspondence between the written statement and the visual image *Does not reflect on the experiences or art processes utilized in the creation of the artwork	*There is moderate correspondence between the written statement and the visual image *Reflects in writing on the experiences or art processes utilized in the creation of the artwork with adequate or minimal explanation	*There is strong correspondence between the written statement and the visual image *Reflects on the experiences or art processes utilized in the creation of the artwork with detail and thorough explanations
Total = _____			
<b>General guidelines for all art submissions EXCEPT Photography and Graphic Design:</b> Traditional media categories include Drawing, Painting, and Collage. Original work must be 15" x 20" which in turn needs to be mounted or secured (not matted) on illustration board of equal size. The artwork will extend to the edges of the illustration board. All artworks must include an "Artist's Statement" on the back of each work. All images must be two-dimensional, original, and not appropriated from any other resource unless dramatically altered. Artwork must be unpublished and completed by one person.			
<b>General guidelines for Photography submissions:</b> Photography work includes color and black & white works. Actual photos should be 8" x 10" only and must be printed on 8.5" x 11" photo paper. Please do not frame and do not mount photography submissions. All images must be two-dimensional, original, and not appropriated from any other resource unless dramatically altered. Artwork must be unpublished and completed by one person.			
<b>General guidelines for Graphic Design submissions:</b> Graphic design work is defined as the use of computer media and innovative computer applications in art. Original artwork must be 8.5" x 11" only, and must be mounted on illustration board that is also 8.5" x 11". Please only mount the piece on illustration board that is the aforementioned size. Please do not mat graphic design work. All images must be two-dimensional, original, and not appropriated from any other resource unless dramatically altered. Artwork must be unpublished and completed by one person.			

**Figure 3:** The larger rubric shown here is one of the documents shared with teachers and students in the IC’s “Teacher’s Educational Package,” via the IC Art & Essay Contest website.



# Bridges of Understanding

*Lanny Milbrandt*

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Having been involved in art education for many years, I became aware of the Istanbul Center (IC) during a Georgia Art Education Association (GAEA) conference several years ago. Representatives of the organization participated in the conference with an educational presentation of the IC's cultural and educational mission and invited art educators at the middle and high school levels for students to participate in an art contest. The IC art contest themes over the past several years have been directed toward building bridges for greater understanding, empathy, and compassion toward others.

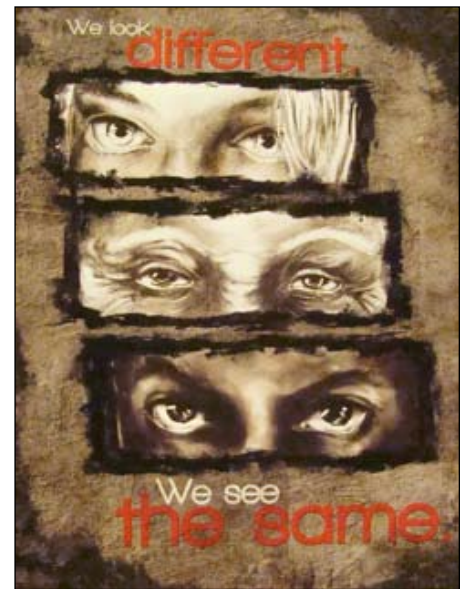
The works submitted by middle and high school students have increased in number and quality each year. Many of the student art works displayed a thoughtful and reflective attitude toward the theme. The meaning of the students' work was made more clear by the artist's statement affixed to each artwork.

The artwork in Figure 1 is by Michelle Partogi, a high school student of Jennifer Price at Gwinnett School of Mathematics, Science and Technology in Georgia. She won 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the Georgia 2010–2011 IC Art Contest and 3<sup>rd</sup> place at the Southeastern level. Part of her artist statement is included below:

I began by analyzing “walking in another’s shoes” down to its bare minimum. The idiom playfully reminds us to imagine a situation from another person’s standpoint, and I based my graphic design’s slogan to combat the reason people are so fixed on seeing only through their eyes.

After repeatedly being chastised for pulling all-nighters, I concluded, “It’s been forever since my Mom was a student. She can’t possibly understand what I have to go through with high school.” However if I look at it from her point of view, she would naturally be concerned when viewing her daughter’s health diminishing because of school projects. In this situation, I initially deemed our age gap as the reason we couldn’t see eye to eye. However, once I empathized with my mom, I grew to understand her motives, opinions, and dilemma.

“We look different ... we see the same” emphasize that regardless of physical differences, people have the ability to empathize with one another. My slogan plays on the parallelism and double meaning of “look” and “see.” The two words can be synonymous. However, in this instance “look” refers to the appearance while “see” relates to situational viewpoint. I desired to concentrate on the theme of “viewing,” so my design centers around three pairs of eyes staring intently at the viewer, seemingly with something to say.



**Figure 2**

The top winners of the art contest were invited to participate in a dialogue trip to Turkey for 7–10 days accompanied

by their teachers and IC representatives. What a great way to encourage the development of understanding between people!

The fact that the IC representatives are attending art education conferences and reaching out to art teachers in their efforts to connect broadly and dialogue positively with the art education community encouraged my further involvement with the Istanbul Center's cultural and educational programs.

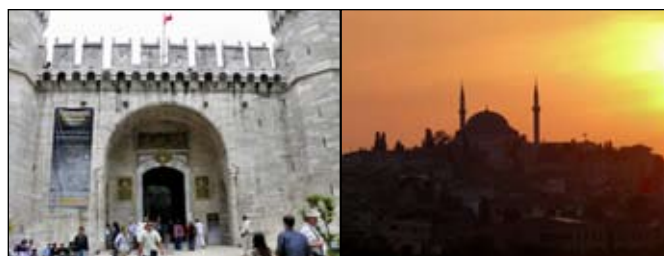
One of the opportunities provided by the Istanbul Center (IC) was the possibility of a "Dialogue trip" to Turkey for those interested in furthering their knowledge and appreciation of Turkey, its peoples, their heritage, culture, educational institutions, and the striking physical beauty of the land itself. My wife and I were fortunate to be included with a group of about 10–12, including representatives of the IC. Our group was invited to take part in an early summer tour of Turkey.

Soon after our trip, I accepted an invitation to be a judge for The Istanbul Center's Art Contest for middle and high school students. The contests (art and essay) reflect the Istanbul Center's cultural and educational mission. The themes chosen for these contests are also central to the guiding philosophy of the IC in the belief that the Istanbul Center should strive to help build a world where non-violence, respect, understanding, friendship, cooperation, and love prevail. The themes chosen recently were: 2009–2010; "Who's My Neighbor?" And 2010–2011; "Empathy: Walking in Other's Shoes." These themes challenge students to think about and express ideas that pushed students to reflect on their roles and responsibilities to the greater community of mankind.

The IC Art Contest (and visual arts education generally) promotes the development of our youth in significant ways. In recent research Winner and Hetland<sup>11</sup> found that there are important thinking skills or "*Habits of Mind*" developed by visual



**Figure 2:** Our tour included the richly textured urban and historic city of Istanbul itself with many sites such as The Blue Mosque. (Photo by Lanny Milbrandt)



**Figures 3 and 4:** We visited many historic sites, including the Topkapi Palace and had a wonderfully aesthetic boat trip experience on the Bosphorus in the late afternoon with the sun slowly settling behind many beautiful mosques and the Istanbul skyline. (Photos by Lanny Milbrandt)



**Figures 5 and 6:** Central Turkey proved to be almost otherworldly with trips to the Goreme Open Air Museum in Cappadocia where towering spires of tufa (compressed volcanic ash) called "Fairy Chimneys" were often capped by harder volcanic rock that produced a landscape of unusual dramatic beauty. The Istanbul Center's Director of Academic Affairs, a baseball-capped Isa Afacan, guided our tour through the Underground City. It is a subterranean tufa environment that was constructed by tunneling for miles and miles. The tunnels are low and required crouching to traverse and connected full living spaces for inhabitants for the 1<sup>st</sup> century and later. (Photos by Lanny Milbrandt)

1. Hetland, L., Winner, E., Veenema, S. & Sheridan, K. (2007). *Studio thinking: The real benefits of visual arts education*. New York: Teacher's College Press, Columbia University, p. 6.

arts engagement including: *Persistence, Expression, Making Clear Connections* between schoolwork (or art contest themes) and the world outside the classroom, *Envisioning, Exploring* and *Taking Constructive Risks*, and *Reflective Self-Evaluation*. The Istanbul Center Art Contests are consistent in educational purpose with many and perhaps all of the above “Habits of Mind.”

Other reasons to applaud and support the Istanbul Center’s Art Contest include the development of *Higher Order Thinking Skills* in students engaged in the arts. If one looks closely at the kind of student behaviors going on in art making activities we find that they are often engaged in the highest levels of cognition (or thinking).

Art students including those who participate in the Istanbul Center’s Art Contest are involved with visual thinking. Visual thinking is unique in that when one sees a work of art or other visual field they are taking in that visual information at a time rather than over time or sequentially as one does when reading, writing, computing, listening to music, etc. The linking together of sequences in reading (words, sentences, paragraphs ...) in some coherent way may result in meaning being conveyed to the reader or meaning being expressed by the author. The visual arts, however, are not limited to sequential learning. A pot, painting, or photograph may be perceived holistically or at a time rather than sequentially over time. A student viewing their artwork or any other artwork sees many multiple relationships at a time rather than over time. They can then go into the work perceptually and roam around from one part to another but the whole can also be seen at once. Visual thinking is a cognitive (thinking) attribute, advantageous in that it allows one to hold, in the mind, multiple relationships of the parts of an artistic composition (or any visual field); its colors, shapes, textures, content, etc. This ability to apprehend a visual field and hold many relationships at once, at a time, rather than sequentially over time may have been a factor in the kind of cognition required by Einstein to solve his famous theory. He perhaps thought at least to some degree as an artist thinks and sees. Einstein,<sup>22</sup> in a letter to the French mathematician Hadamard early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, explained that his theory was arrived at in part *visually*, and later translated into mathematics so other mathematicians could understand it.

It has been said that literacy and a literate citizenry is what education is about. Too often literacy is regarded as reading, writing, and numbers but when one asks “What is the process of literate behavior



**Figure 7:** South from Istanbul along the coast we found the antique city of Ephesus with its ancient stone columns, library, temples, and amphitheatres. (Photo by Lanny Mibrandt)



**Figure 8:** Here art teacher, Debi West, is instructing her high school students at North Gwinnett High School in Suwanee, Georgia. Many of her students win prestigious state, regional and national awards. Often these students continue their arts training well into higher education, emerging as high performers in careers related to the arts. (Photo by Katherine C. Whitehead)

2. Einstein, A. (1952). Letter to Jacques Hadamard. In *The creative process*, ed. B. Ghiselin (ed.) New York: Mentor Books, p.43.



ior?” we find the concept of literacy expands. The process of literacy or behaving in a literate manner may be defined as the process of recovering meaning or expressing meaning. In literature one recovers meaning by reading something or expresses meaning by writing something. The process of literacy however is not limited to verbal and mathematical symbols. The process of literacy is to recover or express meaning in many forms of knowledge (including artistic).

The arts are an important ingredient in any child’s education. In any thoughtful review of educational purposes and programs the arts should be considered essential.

Congratulations to the Istanbul Center for initiating and maintaining their annual Art and Essay Contest. It helps to provide for the artistic development of the young people who have demonstrated their consideration for others through their artwork. For those students and teachers who have been fortunate to actually travel to Turkey and connect with the warm and welcoming people of that land there have been and will be opportunities to build those bridges of understanding between peoples.



**Figure 9:** Some students (and teachers) who won top awards in the 2009/2010 IC Art and Essay Contest posing on the famous Curetes Way of Ephesus. (Photo by Katherine C. Whitehead)



# “Eat Sweet, Talk Sweet”

April Munson

The waiting area of the Istanbul Center is welcoming. Two camel-colored leather sofas face two camel colored leather loveseats. The artifacts on the end tables and in the display cases appear to be carefully placed. A Turkish flag sits next to an American flag on a small table. The only non-permanent items in the room are two posters taped to the glass, one advertising the art contest, the other advertising the essay contest.

The Center appears to be a place of great activity — many faces pass by, multiple conversations occur. Despite the activity, the individuals at the center appear calm, some may say serene, not overwhelmed by what seems to be a very full plate.

While waiting, a young woman entered the room quietly carrying Turkish coffee on a beautiful silver tray. “Have you had it before?” I answer, “No.” She smiles and quietly says, “I’ll bring some water.” She returns with waters and candies, again quietly leaving but pausing to ask, “Would you like the door open or closed?” This hospitality reflected the very mission of the Istanbul Center — Education through dialogue, through presence. Outside of active involvement in the many projects they support, the staff and volunteers of the Istanbul Center share their mission even in a brief period of waiting for a meeting to begin.

Dr. Sandra Bird approached me in the fall, 2009, and asked if I would offer evaluative feedback concerning the Annual Istanbul Center Art Contest. The Annual Istanbul Center Art and Essay Contest is the largest part of the Istanbul Center’s Education Component, and, is an estimated 30% of the overall work of the Istanbul Center. Over the four years of the contest’s existence, the rate of participation has been explosive. And, with the vision of both Gurkan Ekicikol, the Director of Education Programs, and Tarik Celik, the Istanbul Center Executive Director, the contest will continue its explosive growth to include reaching students outside of Georgia, including the greater South-eastern United States, with the understanding that eventually it will reach the national level, and then the international level.

The purpose of these remarks is to give some indication of the quality of the program, as well as issues that should be addressed with a formal evaluation process. These remarks are, of course, limited, as the data gathering and analysis has



**Figure 1:** The Istanbul Center takes pride in the way they represent “Turkish culture” to their office visitors. The front office and waiting rooms are decorated with traditional objects and books. Many of these items have been donated by Turkish artists, politicians and scholars. (Photo by Sandra Bird)

been largely casual and constrained in nature. Despite the limitations, these remarks are specific to the Istanbul Center Contest, without a goal of generalizing. These remarks are intended for the staff of the Istanbul Center, the advisory board, and stakeholders.

The organizing question for these remarks is: Based on limited involvement are there suggestions for improving the contest or contest process? These remarks stem from data gathered using the following methods: interviews with Dr. Sandra Bird, university coordinator for the contest; interview with Katherine Whitehead, PR Coordinator and Ekicikol, Director of Educational Programs; group interview with Dr. Sandra Bird, Whitehead, Ekicikol, and Executive Director Celik; observation of judging component of the contest; brief observation of the center, itself; informal interviews with judges; and, brief data review of Istanbul Center Program Information.

Those involved in this contest, including the staff of the Istanbul Center, as well as judges, are passionate about the mission and eager for the growth and impact. There is some concern about how to attain broader understanding of the impact of the investments. Anecdotal remarks indicate that those involved desire to gain understanding of both quality of the contest, and ability to evaluate the contest for future high *quality* growth.

At this point, the rapid rate of growing involvement is an indicator of success. Judges stated that the quality of work is rising yearly. Istanbul Center staff indicated that more teachers are choosing to encourage student participation. Additionally, the contest has been replicated by other agencies. These pieces of evidence are vital. Along with having this information, further analysis of the information could help the center continue in lines of quality to implement the great ambitions for the contest. Staff indicated designing a survey to gain data concerning the contest, distributing it to teachers, students, and parents would be beneficial/desired.

### *The Judging*

*I arrive at the Istanbul Center on a grey Friday morning. It's cold, and the forecast is snow. I easily navigate parking, and a friendly stranger in the lobby points me in the direction of the right elevator. I find the Istanbul Center suite, and the locked door is quickly opened. Sandra Bird appears in the entry and directs me to a back room where Michelle Marlar from Morehouse College sits, looking at student work. The table is covered by student work. The other judges arrive shortly, and Dr. Bird offers remarks about the judging process. "My students have gone through and made initial assessments using the rubric attached to the piece. They placed the higher ranked works in Pod 1, and the rest in other piles."*



**Figure 2:** April watches Assistant Professor Don Robson as he judges middle school artworks for the 2009–2010 IC art contest.

The judges were told that they had complete freedom to make their own decisions based on aesthetics, which could include moving pieces from “excellent,” “middle,” and “poor” categories. Dr. Bird indicated interest in possible discrepancy between students and judges. Throughout the process, there were pieces pulled from “poor” and “middle” and moved to “excellent.” And, at times, pieces in the “excellent” category were moved down. The presence of the rubric component concerned some judges. “Are we supposed to fill one out, too?” was a question asked by a puzzled judge. “I have never been a part of an art competition where I was asked to follow a rubric...” Some pieces were missing rubrics that had fallen off during transport; confusion occurred when pieces were ranked the same number, but placed in different categories. Melody asked why there was this discrepancy. It was evident that students assessing the work struggled with the task of assigning a number and category of rank.

Don asked if the focus should be more on use of elements or aesthetics, “to determine level of judgment.” Early in the process, judges learned that while certain pieces were disqualified for not meeting size requirements, those missing an artist statement were included because the Istanbul Center decided “not to throw out an excellent piece.” Carole was puzzled by the decision to allow pieces that had not followed requirements, while dismissing others. Sandra indicated that disqualification was largely based on studio criteria, not overall criteria.

The concern with the rubric continued to be a part of the conversation throughout the morning. Carole mentioned that an entry had not dramatically altered appropriated images, and moved it to the “poor” category. Don pulled a piece from the poor category commenting, “I don’t know if is the best work, but it is interesting...” Additional conversation brought the question, “Do you pay more attention to craftsmanship or concept?” There were strong pieces that did not focus obviously enough on the theme of the contest. Judges agreed they were looking for more than “good student work.”

After a short time judges were treated to a Turkish lunch. Gurkan had collected the donated dishes from various homes that morning. Judges sat and ate with several members of the Turkish center, conversations ranged from talk of the center, education, art, and others. The lunch lingered, and judges slowly returned to the task. While initially judges were gathered in around a small table stacked with pieces, when lunch was cleared stacks were carried out into a larger space to be spread out for judging.

As judges spread the work on tables, I had the opportunity to briefly interview Cassandra and Gurkan concerning the art contest. I explained my role, to offer evaluative feedback, and asked that they help me understand the broader goals of the contest. Gurkan quickly began, “Our mission is to contribute to the edu-



**Figure 3:** In this photograph April listens to Judges Professor Carole Mauge-Lewis, Dr. Melody Milbrandt and Dr. Lanny Milbrandt as they discuss the final selections for middle and high school IC art contest winners for the 2009–2010 art contest. (Photo by Sandra Bird)

cational system; to help youth understand global concepts and values. The human nature theme (reaching a global theme) helps the Istanbul Center to build relationships affecting youth. We want to help students learn how to think bigger so they can change the world.” Entries grew beyond 2,000 this year, and included 135 public schools and 5 private schools from 51 counties. Gurkan and Cassandra both indicated that they wanted to examine the impact of this growth.

The final judging process occurred with little discrepancy among judges. The top ten pieces were ranked after conversation and adequate assessment time. Snow began to fall outside the Istanbul Center, and the judges, having successfully completed their task, made their way to their cars.

Weeks after the judging of the competition, the Istanbul Center hosted an awards ceremony for the winning students, their teachers, their superintendents, the judges, and other friends and supporters of the center. Described as a “lavish” event, it was reported an overall success. Two individuals indicated concern that there may need to be more balance in celebrating the achievements of winners and promoting the mission of the Istanbul Center.

With the many successes of the art contest in terms of mission of the Istanbul Center, it is easy to understand the larger scope that members of the Center have for the contest. But, as the contest grows, a formal evaluative component of the benefits and operations of the contest should occur. Through my limited study of the judging component of the contest, I am left with two questions that should be considered in the development of an evaluation component. The first, specific to judging, is “Who should design the judging component of the contest?” The second is “How can the Istanbul Center gather and analyze data that would promote quality growth in all aspects of the contest?” It was mentioned that parents, students, and teachers would be surveyed as a step in this direction. However, even in the survey design, great care should be placed on understanding the strategies involved in gathering quality feedback for reflection and growth.



# Fruits: Expanding Boundaries

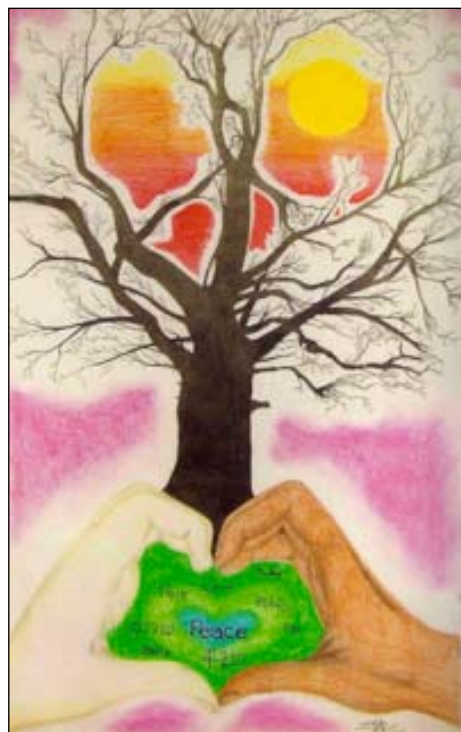
Sandra Bird

Jeanette and I walked into the Executive Leadership Center at Morehouse College, after a brief battle between her GPS and the traffic gates that blocked our intended entry to the visitors' parking lot. The disadvantage of hosting the Istanbul Center's Southeastern Art and Essay Contest Awards Ceremony at Morehouse is the traffic, but that issue is hard to avoid anywhere within the busy Atlanta Metro area in the late afternoon. Morehouse traffic officials had been very helpful in directing us back toward the official entry to the college, where we were at once greeted by a gatesman who mapped out the rest of our route to the Leadership Center. We came to this event on March 25, 2011, to celebrate with the winning students, teachers, sponsors and Istanbul Center representatives. These ceremony participants represent over 2,500 entries from schools in the Southeast who participated in the art and essay contest this year.

Once inside the building we knew we were in the right place. The smell of Turkish spices in the air immediately awakened our senses. After signing in, we were invited to visit a make-shift exhibition hall adjacent to the center's lobby, where the winning art and essay works were mounted on mattboards and set up on easels around the room. Since the welcoming reception had not officially started yet, we wandered into the "gallery" area and enjoyed looking at and reading the display. We equally enjoyed seeing the students and their families posing for photos near their work, with smiles stretching across their beaming faces.

Once the reception started, we all made a beeline toward the tables of food. There were fruits and sandwiches in the center tables; and along both sides of the lobby were several tables of Turkish pastries. Several IC volunteers were serving the food and drinks while chatting with the various attendees. Several people had come from outside of Atlanta (from various points in Georgia, Florida, Alabama, South Carolina and even some sponsors all the way from Turkey). So, the spread of food was a very welcoming way to begin this celebration. The lobby was full of chatter, as people freely introduced themselves in the warm environment that the Istanbul Center created for this day.

After about an hour of eating and "schmoozing," Sedat Memnun (Director of Educational Programs and Tarik's left hand for this event) started corralling the audience into the auditorium. Debi West was serving as the "Emcee" of the



**Figure 1:** Artwork by Erika Bevers of Chamblee Middle School, 1<sup>st</sup> Place Winner of the Middle School Art Contest in 2010. Her imagery completes our metaphor for the "Tree of Life." At the root of her tree, we see the protectors of life bound by a universal desire for peace. From the work of those hands, the seedling grows into a giant that touches all boundaries and thus creates an awareness of brotherly love to become our light into a new day.

ceremony — a logical choice for such a position due to her effervescent personality, as well as her students' experience in the competition. The adjudication has always been a blind process at all levels and judges are only aware of a number for each entry. Debi's students typically win awards, including honorable mention, third, second and first place. The first year her student won a trip to Turkey, Debi got hooked into the "life-changing" outcomes of this program. Now when her students gain those coveted awards, she hands off the teacher's trip to one of her colleagues at North Gwinnett High School.

Following a speeches by Tarik Celik and some of the other program co-sponsors, the awards were presented to the students. As the winners' names were called, the students and teachers came to the stage to receive their certificates and monetary awards. The Emcee asked some of the winners to quickly deliver a prepared description of their winning piece. Michelle Partogi, the second place winner for the Georgia high school art contest and third place winner for the Southeast high school art contest reinforced the importance of this year's theme, "Empathy: Walking in Another's Shoes," particularly in consideration of her own nerves as she quickly critiqued her own winning graphic design in this public setting. Other students, such as Gowan Moise of Trickum Middle School in Georgia, seemed to be ready to start his stump speech for a future election. All in all, the spirit of the students' work set a tone of hope and promise for a new day, toward what Fethullah Gulen describes as "an island of peace."

The first time I heard the expression, "creating an island of peace," I was astounded by its poignant simplicity. It was shared at an Istanbul Center "Dialogue Dinner" led by Kemal Korucu (2005), who cited the "heaven-bent" messages of Gulen toward building authentic spaces where tolerance and understanding may grow.<sup>1</sup> "If we build an island of peace, even if it is a small space, we can connect it to another small island of peace and thus create a region of peace. Our next step is to connect this region of peace to another region of peace, and in doing so we create a state of peace.<sup>1</sup> Following the original intention, we then connect one state of peace to other states of peace and thereby we have a peaceful nation. Finally, we connect the peaceful nations together and (eh voila!), we have a peaceful world." Talk about peace is easy to do, but actually working toward it requires small steps that gradually bear fruit. Dalia Mogahed, member of the US Whitehouse Advisory Council on Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, has recognized the Gulen movement as "a model and inspiration for all those working for the good of the society" largely because of his emphasis on education and altruism.<sup>22</sup>



**Figure 2:** Sarabrynn Hudgins, the IC Program Coordinator (and Tarik's right hand for this event), was at the orientation table speaking with several students, parents and teachers as they signed in for today's ceremony. All winners, from the Georgia and the Southeast contest were be called up to the stage to receive their awards on this day. (Photo by Sandra Bird)

1. For more information on the Gulen Movement, see: <http://allaboutgulenmovement.blogspot.com/>

2. <http://en.fgulen.com/press-room/news/3355-gulen-movement-an-inspiration-for-all-says-obamas-muslim-advisor-mogahed.html>

As we complete the fifth year of this contest, we now have a better idea of how the contest can positively impact our communities at precisely this level. For each of the individuals who have written about their experiences in this monograph, we see commitments to learning that lead well beyond the comfortable boundaries of ordinary experience, whether it is searching for one's roots, establishing new roots in a new land, or comparing different cultures at multiple levels and transforming that corrupting agent of fear into a willingness to give unselfishly. Each written experience echoes the importance of synergy — to create something together that is much better than what the individual can produce alone. College students, secondary students, teachers, administrators and parents meet new cultures in an authentic way and learn to accept people's differences as a "spice of life" rather than an invading force. In the process of discovery, they discern that the differences between their culture of origin and the new cultures (they come in contact with during the course of the contest) have a valuable place in the definition of our collective humanness. The arts, both visual and literary, are the most perfect vehicles for this.

The broader implications for developing respect for "the other" through habits of thorough examination are reflected in many religious and philosophical systems around the world:

"In Buddhism we speak of the world of phenomena (*dharmalakshana*). You, me the trees, the birds, the squirrels, the creek, the air, the stars are all phenomena. There is a relationship between one phenomenon and another. If we observe things deeply, we will discover that one thing contains all things. If you look deeply into a tree, you will discover that a tree is not only a tree. It is also a person. It is a cloud. It is sunshine. It is the Earth. It is the animals and the minerals. The practice of looking deeply reveals to us that one thing is made up of all other things. One thing contains the whole cosmos."<sup>3</sup>

In many of the writings of Thich Nhat Hanh, this Buddhist Master refers to habits of "looking deeply," involving a natural recourse to compassion and empathy, as a kind of horizontal consciousness. Master of American Buddhism, Bhante Henepola Gunaratana,<sup>3</sup> labels the development of these habits as the practice of "universal loving friendliness."<sup>4</sup> The Christian theological term, "agape" (selfless love), also conforms

3. Hahn, T.N. (1999) *Going home: Jesus and Buddha as brothers*. New York: The Berkley Publishing Group. pp.4-5.

4. Gunaratana, B.H. (2002). Afterward, in *Mindfulness in plain English*. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications. Pp. 321-324. Gunaratana comments on the role that *metta* or "loving kindness", or as Gunaratana prefers "loving friendliness", plays in the building of positive relationships.



**Figure 3:** IC volunteers interview the winners of the art and essay contest. The footage they filmed will be used in future videos explaining the mission and activities of the Istanbul Center. (Photo by Sandra Bird)



**Figure 4:** Never underestimate the power of food! Here an IC volunteer serves the delicious pastries for those attending the IC Awards Ceremony Reception. For many of those attending the food-fest, this was their first opportunity to try traditional Turkish foods. They were not disappointed. (Photo by Sandra Bird)



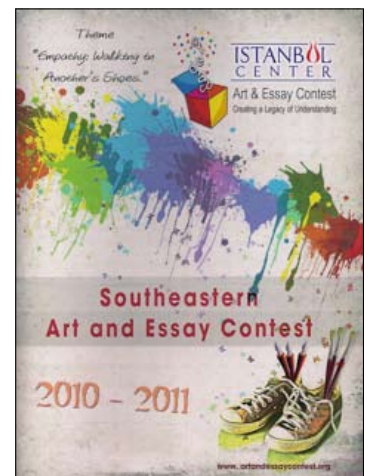
to Gunaratana's sense of loving friendliness — a love that is distinct from romantic or erotic emotional feelings. Agape also refers to the sharing of a ritual meal, such as the “love feast” practiced within early Christian settings. The ancient agape meal was probably similar to the Jewish Passover meal and became the foundation for the Eucharist in Christian churches. A pre-cursor to the American “pot-luck dinner,” all members were expected to bring something to the charity supper and share in the readings or testimonies associated with the event. The tradition was dismissed by the Catholic Church in 393 C.E., but the Founding Father of Methodism, John Wesley, tried to revive the practice of the “love feast” in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The practice unfortunately died out in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

It is a very sad for me to see the intentional limitations that some “religious people” cling to in our contemporary world. The angry response that Muslims have received in Murfreesboro, Tennessee (or even New York City, or Lilburn, Georgia) as they try to build an Islamic Center to serve the area's Muslim community is voiced by the cry of an angry Protestant on national television, “I didn't say we hate them ... we just don't want them here!”<sup>55</sup> It is clear that this person has not met the true nature of Islam. The Islam I know is a religion of tolerance, compassion, and peace. It is also the Islam that students and teachers meet as they explore the themes of this contest. The lovely people who host them during their winning trip to Turkey provide a clear example of the kindness and gentleness that is generally associated with the Muslim practitioner.



**Figure 5:** Representatives from the Georgia Department of Education, one of 85 co-sponsors for this contest, enjoyed this crossroad of food. (Photo by Sandra Bird)

I hope that the goal of teaching universal “loving friendliness” or “agape” will continue to find ways into our educational venues and can eventually overcome the well-worn corrupted views of “the other,” especially concerning differing religions and philosophies. Our children will need this expansive attitude, this horizontal wisdom, to survive the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And it will require the synergy of multiple organizations' professionals working together to nurture the development of our humanness in the educational process.



**Figure 6:** The 2010–2011 Awards Ceremony program that included reproductions of the winning artworks and essays. (Graphic Design by Gonca Unca)

5. O'Brien, S. (Special correspondent). (2011, March 27). *Unwelcome: The Muslims next door*. Atlanta: CNN.



# Art with Purpose

Debi West

I have been teaching for 18 years, but I do more than teach art, I teach children! I teach them through the vehicle of the visual arts. As head of the Visual Art Department at North Gwinnett High School, I always strive to push my students to think. My goal is to get them to think critically, creatively, and divergently as they work through their technical skills to create masterpieces. Several years ago, I received an e-mail from our Gwinnett County superintendant, Mr. Alvin Wilbanks. We rarely receive e-mails from the superintendant, so when he does contact us, we listen! He was advertising this awesome competition being hosted by the Istanbul Center, a state-wide art and essay competition about “The Alliance of Civilizations”! That was the kind of lesson I wanted to share with my students, one that made them think deeply.

When I began to think about making this contest into a lesson that would become a part of my drawing and painting curriculum, I knew that I wanted kids to think and I wanted to “see” that thinking, it became a driving force of the success of the lesson. As I started the lesson, I wrote on the board, in large letters, “WHAT DOES EMPATHY LOOK LIKE” — or in the previous years, “WHAT DOES AN ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS LOOK LIKE”, or “WHO IS YOUR NEIGHBOR ... REALLY, WHO is your NEIGHBOR”? Students began to brainstorm in their sketchbooks the visual answers to these questions. I used the guiding questions given to us by the Istanbul Center, but I went a bit further and had students visually tell their personal stories in regards to the theme at hand. I encouraged them to think beyond the obvious. They had to complete 10 beginning thumbnail sketches and then merge ideas to create 4 new ones based on their first sketches. As these ideas grew and expanded in depth, we again, asked the questions loudly. We then conducted group critiques, sharing ideas and exploring new symbols or words that could enforce the answers to the questions. Once students selected their final thumbnail sketch to enlarge, I allowed them to use the medium of their choice and create their pieces on any media they wanted (within the Istanbul Center’s guidelines).



*Figure 1: A winning high school student’s thoughts on what an “Alliance of Civilizations” looks like... This artwork is by Jenni Paek, the 2<sup>nd</sup> place winner of the Istanbul Center Art Contest for Georgia and an Art II student of Debi West in the 2008–2009 academic year.*

Most of my students in the drawing and painting class have learned the basic technical skills needed in traditional art making, at this point. They have been taught how to properly use graphite, charcoal, watercolor, acrylic, pen and ink, colored pencil, collage, etc. They were encouraged to utilize an array of media in their final pieces. As students began to work on their final artworks, they were excited with where their solutions to the problem had gone and were even

more motivated that they had the tools to see the art come to fruition! I think they were also excited about having their art “judged” with a possibility to move forward in this state and now, regional competition. This gave them the extra push that not only gave us tremendously successful art, but also prepares them for Draw/Paint II and ultimately, their Advanced Placement art courses.

Our final “Istanbul Center” art exhibit is always well received in the school. Teachers, students and community members truly enjoy seeing the answers to the annual questions answered so creatively and with such attention to technique. This has become, without a doubt, one of my most successful Art II lessons.

For the 2009 contest, our school selected 18 of the 60 to submit their works. Several months later, the results were released: We had garnered 4 state honorable mention awards and a 2<sup>nd</sup> place state award, which meant that Jenni Paek and I would be going to Turkey for a 10-day summer excursion!



**Figure 2:** The Summer 2009 traveling group pose with Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc. (Photo by IC Staff)

And what an experience that was! Spending ten days in Turkey with art and essay student winners, top-notch visual art and language arts teachers and being immersed into a culture that very few of us knew anything about, was quite literally, life changing! From Istanbul, to Ankara, to Izmir, and back to Istanbul, from being featured on the “Today Show,” to meeting host families, to experiencing the every day kindness of the people of Turkey, I left with a changed heart! And changed hearts create changed minds! What a powerful lesson for our students in Georgia!

The Istanbul Center offers this educational experience for middle and high school students throughout the Southeast now! This year we had the wonderful opportunity to get our kids to think about

“Empathy: Walking in Another’s Shoes” and the results from my students were powerful once again! Students were engaged in the process of learning and caring about others and the results of their art were incredible! This year our Suzie won first place in the Georgia competition AND first place in the Southeastern competition! I am so proud of the work that is coming out of my students when they are given lessons that force them to think outside of the box. I would like to personally thank the Istanbul Center for helping me push my students to be the best they can be while caring, appreciating and understanding others in our world!



**Figure 3:** Display from the IC brochure, “3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Istanbul Art & Essay Contest Winners’ Trip to Turkey,” highlighting an excursion for Debi’s group in Ankara. The brochure was prepared by Katherine C. Whitehead and Gonca Uncu.

Istanbul Center Art Project<sup>1</sup>

Written by: Debi West, Ed.S, NBCT

Title: "Empathy: Walking In Another's Shoes"

Suggested Grade Level: 7–12

Objectives: To have students think about the theme of the Istanbul Center lesson and think deeply, critically and divergently about a visual answer. To have students use various media and art techniques on one piece of artwork to answer a question about global unity.

Materials: 12" x 18" white drawing paper   graphite   visual examples / references   Sketchbooks  
mixed media   Istanbul Center rubric

### Procedures:

1. Students are asked to think about the question written on the board – in this case “WHAT DOES EMPATHY LOOK LIKE? WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE AND MEAN TO WALK IN SOMEONE ELSE’S SHOES!
2. Students are introduced to the Istanbul Center’s Art and Essay competition, and this year’s theme.
3. Students are given a copy of the rubric used in the state judging.
4. Students will brainstorm ideas and write a list of words and symbols to help them visually solve the question.
5. Students work in their sketchbooks and create 10, 2” x 2” (approximately) thumbnail sketches, solving the problem visually.
6. Students will narrow down their ideas by combining thumbnails to create their final 4 ideas (4” x 4” approximately) in thumbnail form.
7. Students will have a group critique to gather more information for their final creations.
8. Students will begin their final pieces using mixed media and embellishing the art using materials they are most comfortable with (collage, graphite, charcoal, acrylic, watercolor, colored pencil, oil pastel, etc.).
9. Students will mount their work onto black or white poster board, adhering to the proper size requirements.
10. Students will write their artist statement based on their journey of the art making process as well as the final piece.
11. Students will display the art in a hall or community exhibit.
12. Student work will be judged by staff members using the Istanbul Center’s rubric form and selected works will be sent to the Istanbul for state and regional judging.

Assessment: Student's art will be hung in a class exhibit. Students will discuss the importance of self discovery as they work through this creative and critical problem solving and they will grade themselves using a project evaluation rubric form, complete with a written reflection and artist statement.

Vocabulary:

empathy      color layering      mixed media      global unity      composition

1 dewestudio doodles©2011

**Figure 4:** Debi West's ART II lesson that coordinates with the IC art contest.

The more I think about the impact this lesson has on my students, the more I begin to form my ideas about where I want my dissertation to go as I work through my doctoral studies at the University of Georgia. I am now taking religion courses, along with my art education course work, and tying in faith with action learning, service learning projects, and character education curricula. The Istanbul Center promotes international awareness, creative problem solving, and critical thinking skills that are preparing students, our youth, to compete globally and become responsible citizens in an ever changing world. The visual arts can, and should, teach this as well. When we create curriculum that encourages our kids to think at these high levels, the art becomes more than another pretty picture, it can begin to change the world. Art with Purpose is formed from the philosophy created by the Istanbul Center!

*My art comes from the idea that underneath all of our pretensions and physical barriers we are the same. Regardless of race, age, sex, or any other features that distinguish us from our neighbors, we feel the same emotions and can all relate to each other more than we believe. Upon hearing the prompt "Empathy, Walking in Someone Else's Shoes," I knew that I wanted to create something that could make people stop and think. The painting shows two women from completely opposite spheres of the world — an American woman and a Muslim woman. Though they are so culturally different, they can still relate to each other from a very personal point of view. I used the same colors to paint both women and connected them using these colors to symbolize the sister-like relationship between the two women. This artwork hits close to the heart because though we live in such a multi-cultural, globally-connected world, most people don't stop to take time to think about how similar we really are. I believe that my art speaks for itself, and can grant us all the opportunity to discover what we haven't discovered before — that we can and should all try walking in someone else's shoes — I think we'll find those "shoes" aren't so different!*



**Figure 4:** Artwork by Suzie Lee, the 1<sup>st</sup> place high school winner of both the Georgia and Southeastern Istanbul Center Art Contest for the 2010–2011 academic year. Suzie is a student in Debi's Art II class, who seemed to have blossomed this year under her influence. Suzie's artist's statement is included below, to provide a sense of the empathetic awareness that such a project instills in young minds and hearts.



# Cultural Body Maps, Schemata, and the Art & Essay Contest

Katherine C. Whitehead

*If there is a Horizontal Line that runs from the MAP off your body straight through the Land shooting up right through my heart Will this Horizontal Line when asked know how to find Where you end where I begin*

— Tori Amos<sup>1</sup>

For the past two years, I have accompanied top-winning students and teachers to Turkey on behalf of the Istanbul Center. The Contest's aim is to broaden the horizons of all students and teachers by promoting inter-cultural relations, understanding, dialogue, tolerance, and the awareness of one's place in the now "glocal" civic society (*glocal* — "global" plus "local" — is a post-modern catchphrase that illustrates the increasing interconnectedness of international commerce, politics, and people).

The prize of being able to go to Turkey is not meant to be a vacation. It is an extension of the hard work winners have already put into each piece that eventually served as their chance to travel. The jam-packed trip is also an extension of the high caliber of understanding top winners already exhibit by virtue of their placement of 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, or 3<sup>rd</sup>. The schedule of the prized trip to Turkey is demanding. Most days start at the latest by 9:00 am, including having had breakfast independently at the hotel. Students and teachers are expected to hit the ground running until sometimes after midnight, especially if a planned host family dinner goes well. To be able to properly interact with local Turkish hosts, evening dinner programs encompass three to four hours of introductions and engaging conversation, exchanging gifts, and of course, eating at least a three-course meal, which does not include courses of Turkish tea, coffee, dessert, and fruit afterwards. Phew! Anyone being obliged to this sort of schedule deserves, indeed, to be an ambassador.

Americans are habitually used to big endeavors being planned out in advance — at least several months in advance, especially for a trip hosting minors abroad. In Turkey, it is normal to plan major events within a short period of time, sometimes no more than two weeks in advance, depending on the endeavor. The itinerary may say we're going to Miniatürk, but if the Superintendent of Istanbul tells our boss (Tarik Celik, Executive Director of Istanbul Center) that he can meet with us, we will attend. No questions asked. It is a bit difficult to describe this attitude towards planning to American teachers and parents beforehand as well as when circumstances change, because the purpose of the trip abroad is not just for Americans to see as much of Turkey as possible, but for Turkish people to get to know more Americans. Real Americans, that is. Not the kind you see on television and Hollywood.

1. Amos, T. (2002) "Your Cloud." *Scarlet's Walk*. Sony Music Entertainment, Inc.



**Figure 1:** Cultural Body Map (2010) by Kasan (Katherine C. Whitehead). Mixed media using maps, photographs, cardboard, oil pastels, spray paint, collage, and watercolor. Kasan is currently a graduate student at Florida State University, working on her masters degree in art education.

Sliding between the Turkish and American mindsets of planning and communication is tricky. Each culture has its own system of thought governed by expectations, rules, and behaviors that dictate one's actions and reactions. In psychological terms, many identify this system of thought as a schema, a term in psychology that has evolved from the works of Jean Piaget, Sir Frederic Bartlett, and R.C. Anderson. The American side of me wants the schedule to be certain. The Turkish side of me takes a rather *laissez-faire* attitude and knows intuitively well that everything will work out. I acquired this faith over time in being the only American working at the Istanbul Center as we would work diligently to create content-rich programming. It took me a long time to understand that what I had interpreted as a *laissez-faire* attitude was actually a deeply profound trust in doing your best, yet allowing the universe to take its course.

Students and teachers that I accompany on the trip are challenged to incorporate new schemata, or systems of thought and ways of seeing, into their body of knowledge about the world. These are primarily in relation to Turkish people, Muslims generally, and even the traveler's own cultural and spiritual awareness. Students and teachers are placed into unfamiliar surroundings, albeit with guides, where their schemata for functioning within their own societies back home are used to decipher how to function abroad. Their mental acuity for processing stimuli from their environment is altered, and indeed made more sophisticated by the psychological and sensory challenges of a highly foreign environment. Each experience a person has provides a psychological imprint into that person's memory to be drawn up again when needed by the individual to process one's surroundings and act appropriately. As many of the students and teachers who joined me on the trip knew relatively nothing about Turkey, they had no idea what to expect. Their expectations were in fact that Turkey was a country consisting of purely a desert climate, which, to most Americans, usually means a country that is synonymous with the Middle East, terrorism, repression of women, and Muslim extremists.

In my work with the contest, much of my personal fulfillment comes in watching students and teachers react as they experience Turkey's hospitality and its surprising, modern dynamics. They venture to one of the oldest places on the planet and always think that the day we just completed was their favorite day of the trip — until the next day — when they have changed their minds and decided that: "No, *this* day is my favorite day!" Students and teachers who participate bear witness to the inability to express themselves in words after returning to the United States. The flowering experience of traveling to a new land with drastically different ways of doing



**Figure 2:** This is a photograph of the infamous itinerary for the Art & Essay Contest's student-teacher groups after I got back from Turkey in late June, 2010. I carried around this piece of paper religiously while co-leading the traveling group. (Photo by Katherine C. Whitehead)



**Figure 3:** Artwork by Lindsey Park, the 2<sup>nd</sup> place winner for the Middle School Art Contest in 2009–2010. She was a student of Janet Hein at River Trail Middle School in Georgia's Fulton County.

things than one's home country matures and sharpens students' and teachers' perceptions, attitudes, and critical thinking. They will never watch or listen to a newscast in the same fashion because they know that it might not all be true.

I always ask the same open-ended question: "So what do you think about Turkey?" The tie for first place goes to 1) the deep warmth and hospitality of the Turkish people and 2) how impressively modern Turkey is compared with what our guests had been taught back home. A close second is how similar Turkish families are to American families, namely, how important family life is to Turks, just as it is to Americans. In addition to this realization, I am not able to think of any one of our guests telling me that they would *not* want to come back to Turkey again, whether it is to take a vacation, teach or continue exploring. A second part of my personal fulfillment comes when I read the evaluations of the trip.<sup>2</sup>

*Feedback: Later, throughout the trip, is when I discovered the trip's sentimental and cultural impact onto my life and it gave me the sudden realization that I had won something more than just a trip ... We were embarking to a life changing journey to change our perspectives of people different than ourselves and to learn of a culture by stepping right into the middle of its country ... I believe that I had only an idea in which throughout the years, the news and media had constructed in my mind, of what I was to expect going into a Middle Eastern country. I was dumbfounded each and every day of our trip of how much my perspectives were severely misguided.*

— Jenni Paek, 2009 2<sup>nd</sup> Place Winner, Art High School Category, North Gwinnett High School, Suwanee, GA.



**Figure 4:** Artwork by Faiza Hoque, the 2<sup>nd</sup> place winner of the High School Art Contest in 2009–2010. She was a student of Anna Laura Baldree at Berkmar High School in Georgia's Gwinnett County.



**Figure 5:** Lindsay Park giving pencils to Turkish school children. (Photo by Katherine C. Whitehead)

2. Websites of interest, responding to the students' travel experiences: Travel Blog of the 2010 Winners' Trip to Turkey, <http://artessayturkiye2010.blogspot.com/> and a U.N. photo essay, <https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=explorer&chrome=true&srcid=0B3sOnYVc1l4LZTlINDg5Y2U0NzQ5OC00M2Y1LTg5NmUtN2E0YzQ3ZGIyYWVh&hl=en>.





## 1<sup>st</sup> Place Essay Winner – High School

Tiffany Simmons, 12<sup>th</sup> Grade  
Northgate High School, Erin Teets

A man died at the age of eighty. He was known for his generosity and goodwill towards his neighbors, at the end of his life. And in his will, he asked a story be read at his funeral that he had written.

*When I was a boy of about four, I remember meeting my neighbors for the first time. They were the Franklins' and they had a little boy a few years older than me. They talked like us, dressed like us, and went to the same church as us every Sunday. They drove the right car, had all the right friends, their grass was always cut and green. They were exactly like us. I played with their boy Richard. Mama would stand at the fence talking to Mrs. Franklin for hours. If it was too hot, they might lounge on the porch. Daddy and Mr. Franklin would sit in the garage talking cars. If they needed help or a cup of sugar, we gave, because they were our neighbors.*

*When I was six, the Franklins moved away. The house sat empty for a few weeks before a new family moved in. I recall how I sat waiting to see them. But when I finally did, I realized something was wrong. They didn't look like me. They had dark skin like the molasses mama kept on the high cabinet in the kitchen. I stared at them in wonder; the tall man and the woman, with her rich laugh that carried on the air. They had a little girl with pigtails in pink and a boy of twelve. Their mailbox said Jefferson.*

*We never talked about them. They didn't come over for diner and we didn't go over there. I was never actually told not to play with the boy or girl; but it was an unspoken rule. They didn't go to our church, talk like us or drive a car like ours. Sometimes their grass would get long. Mama would complain about how "their kind" were destroying the neighborhood. When I asked if they were our neighbors she replied, "No, they just live next door. They're not **really** our neighbors."*

*When I was a boy of nine or ten the Jeffersons' moved out. Fall turned to winter before another family came and bought the house. I was walking down to the mailbox, the first time I saw them. There was a couple and their two sons. They had yellow skin and jet black hair. They didn't speak English most of the time. They didn't go to church at all and once I saw them praying to a little yellow man through a window. When I asked my mama why they did that, she simply told me to stay away from people who weren't good Christians like us. They did not speak to us and we didn't talk to them. The Yips' were not my neighbors.*

*Time passed, my hair darkened and my hands grew. The Yips' moved on and we stayed. The Johnsons' moved in and they were just like us. We welcomed them with open arms and they were our neighbors.*

*The summer of my eighteenth year the house stood empty. I left for college. My parents grew old. When I was twenty-four and married, I came home to bury my father. Mother moved to Florida and left me the house. An older quiet couple lived next door there. They looked like me, talked like me, but they were Jewish so they were not my neighbors.*

*The year my son was born, and the year I turned twenty-six; a Mexican family of six moved in next door. Spanish was their first language and they were always yelling. Whenever my friends came over, we would joke about the dirty wetbacks next door. They were not my neighbors. They stayed for little over a year and then they too left.*

*When my daughter was two, the Raje family from India settled into that house. The father worked in some international corporation. The wife and daughter never went out without being completely covered. They didn't speak to anyone. And we didn't speak to them; they were shunned in everyway. They kept the house and yard neat, drove a nice car and had money. However, they were not my neighbors. After a few years, Mr. Raje was transfer and they moved away. The house stood empty for years until a nice couple moved in and we had neighbors again.*

*I aged and my children grew up, left, married and gave me grandchildren. My wife passed on and left me there alone. Then the Parker family moved in. I was an old man stooped with age. They reminded me of the Jefferson's' from long ago.*



One day, there was a knock at my door. I opened it to find their six year old girl, Sophia. In her hand, there was a plate of food and my mail.

"What are you doing?" I barked at her. She looked nervous, but she finally replied.

"Giving you some of mama's cooking and it's cold out, so I got your mail too."

"Why would you do that?" I demanded, reaching out to grab my mail.

"Because we're neighbors." She simply said.

"But we don't look alike, or talk alike or go to church together, so why would we be neighbors?" I muttered, ready to close the door.

"Because we both have the same kind of soul and that makes us exactly alike." She said with the innocence of a child. And that was how I discovered who my neighbors were. With that simple sentence she showed me the errors of a life time. And after she left, I wept with the joy of that discovery.

So I ask all those who are gathered here. Who is your neighbor? Please don't wait a lifetime to find out.

When his son looked out onto the audience gathered, he saw all the people his father had touched. He saw his father's neighbors.

**Figure 6:** Essay by Tiffany Simmons, 1<sup>st</sup> place winner of the High School Essay Contest. Feedback: The trip helped me mature as an individual and as a future college student. It was a terrific growing experience at a time in my life that I needed it most.

— Tiffany Simmons, 2010 1<sup>st</sup> Place Winner, Essay High School Category, Northgate High School, Newnan, GA



### 3<sup>rd</sup> Place Essay Winner – High School

Nicole Sikes, 10<sup>th</sup> Grade  
Houston County High School, Ms. Rebecca Staines

I've ridden this same bus, with the same people, for at least three years now.

Their faces are familiar, even though I don't know any of them well. I don't talk to any of them outside of the confines of this bus. Occasionally I spot a recognizable face among the mass of students in the hallways, sometimes coming out of the movie theater on a busy Saturday evening, now and then I catch a glance of one as I browse through the isles while shopping for groceries. Sometimes there's the awkward moment of eye contact. 'Do I say anything? Would they be embarrassed to know me? Should I be embarrassed to know them? Do they know who I am? Do I know them?'

In all honestly, I don't know.

Sure, I see their faces every day. Sometimes, on a day when it's especially crowded, someone may ask to sit next to me. And of course I agree, even though the rest of the trip will be spent uneasily shifting around for some distraction, the atmosphere too uncomfortable for conversation.

And as I sit alone today, head propped against the window, my mind wanders as it often does. These people, I know their faces but not who they are. Some are distinct, like the boy with the dot on his forehead. That makes him Buddhist. Or was it Hindu? Some aren't so distinct, like the two Asian girls one seat over. They get off at the same stop, so they must be related, right?

And it's not just the minorities. As the bus doors close at the first stop I see a young teen, hair flat-iron straight around his head, studded belt around his waist, standing on the sidewalk. His books fall out of his arms, papers dancing in the wind, but yet he wears the same solemn expression he does when he gets on this bus. I hear a snicker behind me. I have to wonder what the boy is thinking; what he's *feeling*. Is he embarrassed? Angry? Does he even care? I can't pick one over the other, each seem just as likely as the next. That's proof of how little I must know him. The bus pulls away.

I'm still staring out the window, thinking. From behind this pane of glass, this translucent wall, life goes on all around. A man mowing the lawn, a mother and her child walking out to check the mail, the elderly woman tending to her small garden; I saw snippets of their everyday lives. I see the next group of kids off the bus. Another young man, completely different in style from the first, was trudging home, backpack slung across one shoulder. The bus doors shut with a sharp hiss and the bus gradually picks up speed. But my eyes were transfixed on the student padding slowly down the grey concrete sidewalk. Was he reluctant to go home? Just tired? Or was it just the sluggish air? The more I thought, the more possibilities there were. There was so much I didn't know about the people around me.

But in a second he's gone, lost to the mix of asphalt and lawn roaring by. The next stop, the final one, was mine. I'm still thinking to myself as the bus begins to slow. *'Who is my neighbor?'* I don't know them at all. So as I get up and move to the isle, feeling the presence of the only other soul in the back of the bus behind me, I come to a decision. I'll start small. Whoever this person behind me is, be they boy, girl, rich, poor, pretty or not-so-much, black, white, or anything in between, Baptist, Methodist, or Buddhist, I'm going to get to know them. And maybe then can I change a life for the better, theirs or my own.

**Figure 8:** Essay by Nicole Sikes, 3<sup>rd</sup> Place Winner of the High School Essay Contest. Feedback:

This trip really opened my eyes in terms of other societies outside the United States. It also showed me just how wrong stereotypes can be. It helped me learn to embrace other cultures and not to judge them by what you see, as an American, on the outside. It's given me a whole new perspective on both other cultures and my own. As an artist, it's opened a whole new door of ideas and expressions....The Istanbul Center arranged a great schedule- not once in the entire 10 days did I feel like anything we were doing wasn't important in some aspect. They showed us aspects of Turkish life and culture that you just couldn't see going as a tourist. All of this gave me a new perspective on other cultures as well as my own. I was amazed at how people, who didn't even speak the same language, can communicate kindness and generosity. The Istanbul Center did more than promote cultural understanding, they fostered an understanding of people, no matter their origins or culture. I give my whole-hearted thanks to everyone who made this life-altering experience possible.

— Nicole Sikes, 2010 3<sup>rd</sup> Place Winner, Essay High School Category, Houston County High School, Warner Robbins, GA



## 2<sup>nd</sup> Place Essay Winner – Middle School

Olivia Stehr, 8<sup>th</sup> grade  
Trickum Middle School, Kim Benefield

Everyone has friends of different ethnicities, whether from school, work, or their neighborhood. People of all races and colors flock to Gwinnett County, hoping to provide a good education for their children. However, sometimes it is a struggle for people to understand those whose cultures and customs vary from our own. To alleviate this quandary and become a good metropolitan neighbor, Gwinnett County Schools should offer a world culture class where students can revel in other people's beliefs and customs rather than practice xenophobic tendencies. This kind of class would implement a course of study to dispel cultural prejudice and myth and enable students to develop a more neighborly understanding of their ethnic peers.

People naturally draw back in new situations, usually because they are scared. When people are exposed to 'strange' or 'novel' situations or ideas, they react timidly. However, if students learn about other cultures and experience other cultural activities as a group or class then they can overcome the trepidation of the 'strange' more easily. When faced with a new cultural situation in the future, the students can then react better and thrive rather than be surprised. They will not only change their actions in unique environments for the better, but they will also develop an understanding of their peer's culture, making them a better student neighbor.

A world culture class would increase students' knowledge of the world outside our borders. In this class, students can learn new languages, eat new foods, and experience new customs as seen through the eyes of their classmates of other ethnicities. The revelation may inspire students to travel to new places and meet new people, expanding their cultural horizons. As a result, Gwinnett County's students will become more well-rounded people who are able to appreciate the difference between people, making this county a model of neighborly understanding and cooperation.

A prime benefit of a world culture class in Gwinnett County Schools would be to dispel myths about other people's cultures and to help overcome prejudice by showing students how their neighbors aren't as different as they may seem. The tolerance learned by being immersed in other peoples' cultures and customs would have an effect on personal relationships as well as on a larger scale city level. As Marguerite Gardiner once said, "Prejudices are the chains forged by ignorance to keep men apart." If we could find some way to abolish these prejudices, our society would be significantly more friendly and accepting of one another. The best way to approach this dilemma is to begin teaching children that we are all alike, despite our cultures and customs, and a great way to do this would be to offer a world culture class in Gwinnett County Schools.

Our area must step up and break the mold; it is mandatory for cooperation that we all understand and appreciate each other's backgrounds and beliefs. We are all slaves to prejudice and ignorance, and the only way to amend this is to take the time to be aware of other countries' and peoples' cultures. Gwinnett County has the power to resolve this towering issue with knowledge, and we must take this opportunity into our hands and make the best effort possible. A class that taught world culture would benefit students of all nationalities and ethnicities, and students would value their peer's differences. In this way, the chains that have bound us to ignorance can be transformed into bonds of friendship.

**Figure 9:** Essay by Olivia Stehr, 2<sup>nd</sup> place winner of the Middle School Essay Contest. Feedback:

This trip increased my ability to get along with people who are very different than me, and it taught me that, just because someone may live halfway around the world, it doesn't necessarily mean we have nothing in common. In fact, I am more similar to the Turkish people than I had once believed.

— Olivia Stehr, 2010 2<sup>nd</sup> Place Winner, Essay Middle School Category, Trickum Middle School, Lilburn, GA.

Jenni's account of the "sentimental and cultural impact" in her life exhibits the profound changes that occur for each participant of the trip. Her "life-changing journey" is quintessential of sentiments felt by many, if not all, of the contest's winners as they return from Turkey. Jenni will now think twice in meeting someone from a foreign land. She will also think critically about anything she may hear about a foreign country or people. In addition, her own appreciation for where she comes from is also embellished. Jenni's growth exemplifies how her 'cultural body map' has grown. She has added layers of experience that have allowed her to think much deeper about her world than most young people. She has morphed into a mature, young woman. Tiffany Simmons' offers a very mature reflection also indicative of her growth as a person.

Nicole Sikes' "life-altering experience" is something that can never be taken away from her because the experiences she had in Turkey added layers of new thoughts, ideas, and perceptions unbeknownst to her before. Additionally, her own perception of her native American culture is now more sophisticated.

Olivia Stehr, like her compatriots, also has a deeper understanding of the world around her. As she continues to mature as a young adult, her approach to solving problems with people will be different than if she had not participated in the trip to Turkey. Further, her own view of humanity is refined because she learned that she is "more similar to the Turkish people that I had once believed."

Melissa Kuester, 1<sup>st</sup> Place Winner in the Essay Middle School Category from Trickum Middle School, could not help but cry at the airport as we waited in line to check in our travelers for their flight back home. Her tearful, emotional reaction to leaving Turkey marked how strongly she felt about her love of the country and its people. It also showed the depth at which she felt affected.

Half-way around the world, American students and teachers are learning life lessons about growth, perception, belief systems, and societies very different from their own. They also learn how large of a role culture and stereotypes play a part in their own schemata. The cognitive learning that I witnessed

this past June for the second year in a row still excites me. Each June, the previous year's work for the Art & Essay Contest culminates when I see not only the maturation of winning students, but also the making of life-long friends.



**Figure 7:** Artwork by Danny Kim, 1<sup>st</sup> place winner of the High School Art Contest. Danny was a student of Michael Scheifflee at Alpharetta High School in Georgia's Fulton County.



**Figure 10:** Sailing in Turkish waters, Kasan (standing in back) with Georgia students and teachers. (Photo by IC Staff)



The message of the Istanbul Center Art and Essay Contest is substantial, so too is the impact the contest presents to its participants and the community at large. Students and teachers who visit Turkey continue to talk about their remarkable encounters. These students and teachers will view neither themselves nor others the way they did before visiting Turkey. Each individual's 'cultural body map', as well as schemata, have changed via extensive, life-changing occurrences abroad, adding profound layers of knowledge, depth, sophistication, and fond memories of a distant land and its people.



Middle East Institute