



Communicating science through art

April 26, 2022



Students in introductory soils classes who have fun with soil will be more interested in why the soils are different colors, opening the door to discuss chemistry and mineralogy.

The world is filled with wonder. As scientists, educators, and researchers, we catch glimpses of that wonder and gain insights into the processes that drive our natural and agricultural ecosystems on many scales, from microscopic to landscapes to planetary systems. Too often, though, we fail to effectively communicate our insights to a populace largely lacking scientific literacy. Art can be a tool to reach that audience and ignite interest among students of all ages. Art can communicate difficult concepts and introduce an audience to a world they otherwise cannot see. Art can connect people on a deeper level, sometimes evoking emotional responses that can serve as a catalyst for change.

My Oklahoma Home

Below is an excerpt from "My Oklahoma Home" by Sis and Bill Cunningham, recorded by Pete Seeger, 1961. This song can be used to introduce a discussion of a changing climate and the effects of drought on land, crops, and people, or the three sustainability components: people, profit, and planet.

Well it blowed away

It blowed away

All the crops that I've planted blown away

Well you can't grow any grain

It you ain't got any rain

Everything except my mortgage blown away

Well it looked so green and fair

When I built my shanty there

I figured I was all set for life

I put on my Sunday best, with my fancy scalloped vest

And I went to town to pick me out a wife

She blowed away

She blowed away

These concepts have been acknowledged by K-12 educators as they upgraded from STEM to STEAM—Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics. Art is now recognized as a cross-cutting discipline; it can be used in all disciplines and to bridge disciplines. Art bridges other gaps, as well, encouraging diversity and more inclusivity of people from different backgrounds, cultures, beliefs, and practices.

Broadly defined, art is a language of communication with three primary forms of expression that often overlap: visual arts, performing arts, and literature. Most people are more creative than they realize, and scientists who use art can become more effective communicators.



With a little creativity, corn husk dolls can be a fun way to introduce students of all ages to the agronomy and crop science of corn.

Symposium, Art Exhibit in Baltimore

Communicating Science through Art will be a symposium and art exhibit at the Annual Meeting in Baltimore this November, supporting the theme "Communication and Public Engagement for Healthy People and a Healthy Planet." The goal of this session is to expose members to ways they can express their creativity through the arts and give them opportunities to participate in creative expression.

The exhibit will run for the duration of the meeting and will include an open mic night for poetry, readings, storytelling, and compositions. The symposium will have speakers talking about collaborative art, using art and social media to promote soil science, living art of microbial activity, and storytelling.

Do you have a creative bent? Have you ever created or painted or composed something with or about your science? We invite you to strut your stuff. For more information or to participate, please contact Clay Robinson (Ph.D., CPSS, and CCA) at cdrdirt@gmail.com or 806-236-5956.

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