



Matt: Hey everybody, this is Matt and Laura, and welcome to another episode of the Creatively Connected Classroom. We actually have a double feature today.

Laura: Yeah, it's really exciting.

Matt: We've got a really good friend by the name of Nic Hahn, you might've heard of her, Mini Matisse.

Laura: And a celebrity guest. Nic, would you like to introduce your celebrity guest?

Nic: Yay! I have Billy Kheel here from the hit show on NBC, Making It.

Laura: That's so exciting.

Matt: [inaudible 00:00:52] Whew!

Laura: Yep.

Nic: Yep.

Laura: We have known you for quite a long time from the internet and whatnots. And I know you're also known as Mini Matisse. But you have been an art educator, tell us, for how long?

Nic: Oh no. Let's see. About 15 years.

Matt: A long time.

Laura: Yeah.

Nic: Yeah.

Laura: So you're always doing creative and unique things. And I saw recently that this popped up, that you somehow had connected with the NBC show and somehow had reached out to Billy. And tell us a little bit about what's going on and also we need to know about Billy's background. I don't know anything more than this show.

Nic: Sure! Yeah, I'll get started on, kind of, my inspiration, how I reached out to Billy. And then of course, he has a lot of really fun information to add to that. But you



know what? My friends and I, including you guys, we all watched Making It together.

[Matt:](#) [inaudible 00:01:48]

[Nic:](#) Even if you were in Texas and I was in Minnesota. And then we'd hop onto Twitter and have conversations about-

[Laura:](#) You know we did.

[Nic:](#) ... celebrate that show. It was just really inspiring to have a show based around creativity. So at the end of the show, I would always check out the participants. And in doing so, I noticed that Billy actually has worked in the classroom, or at least some artist in residence, some visiting artist situations. So I simply emailed him and said, "Would you come to Minnesota? Would you consider this?" And he said, "Yes."

[Laura:](#) Wow.

[Matt:](#) A gamble.

[Laura:](#) In the winter!

[Nic:](#) On that, there would be a lot of troubleshooting, which we'll get into a little bit later. But that's what I did. I just asked. I just asked and he said yes.

[Matt:](#) Yeah. That's so awesome, I mean the connections you can make. Sorry, Billy, go ahead.

[Billy:](#) Then she did a lot to make it happen.

[Matt:](#) It wasn't just that easy, but-

[Billy:](#) Fundraising and a very impressive dogged determination.

[Laura:](#) That sounds like our Nic.

[Matt:](#) That sound like Nic.

[Laura:](#) Yeah, yeah. Definitely. Billy tell us a little bit about your background. We know from Making It that you're an artist, of course, but Nic just alluded to the fact



that you've also done some classroom visits and artist in residence, so tell us a little bit more about that.

[Billy:](#) Sure. I'm an artist based in Los Angeles. I live in Silver Lake, and I did an art project, I would say four years ago, where I did an installation in felt of the Los Angeles River. Which is, I don't know if you guys are familiar with it, but it's basically a concrete channel.

[Laura:](#) Yes it is.

[Billy:](#) Probably know it from Terminator 2.

[Matt:](#) Grease.

[Laura:](#) Grease. Grease Lightning. That's what I always think of, yes.

[Billy:](#) Yeah. So I've always liked to bike around there and have always been fascinated with it, because there are parts that are natural, but then there's parts of it with homeless people sleeping in it. So I did an installation where I ... but I really wanted to be true to what it was, so I used an inventory they make when they clean up the river. They list the items they pull out. This is a really interesting way to learn about the people that live along it and the culture, and then even the history. I started doing research on the history, the animals that are there in the past, invasive species that are there now.

[Billy:](#) Anyway, so I did this project and it garnered a fair amount of press in Los Angeles, and it happened to cross the desk of some teachers at a school in Korea Town in Los Angeles. They reached out and they said we have this artist in, they call it a visiting artist program, and they said, "Would you be interested in coming in and being a long-term visiting artist with us?" Which basically meant that I'd pitch them on a couple ideas for stuff to do with the kids over the course of a whole year. I'd come in the classroom about once a week. I was doing a totally different thing from the regular art teacher, it was my day, and this is what we did. Immediately I really enjoyed it, I have two kids of my own, and my wife is an educator. She's a school principal. I just thought that it was really cool because of my interests, and maybe the fact that I'm a guy, or whatever. I was able to reach different kids than maybe their normal art teacher was able to reach.



[Billy:](#) And it became apparent really quickly that kids maybe that were a problem for the teacher normally, were more interested maybe in the things I was interested in. They actually invited me ... they did a thing and they said, I think they said, "Who are your favorite artists? Who would you like to have?" And number one, I think was Banksy, and I was number two.

[Laura:](#) Nice.

[Matt:](#) Wow.

[Billy:](#) Yeah, so-

[Laura:](#) That's not bad company.

[Billy:](#) [Crosstalk 00:05:39] second year. So that was middle school and high school, and I really liked working with the high school kids. Middle school's, I felt was kind of hard, but I have really mad respect for you. I really liked it, and I kind of switched over this year where I'm a visiting sort of art teacher at a K5. So that's one or two days a week. Then being on the TV show, that whole thing happened and really some of the best feedback I got was just the fact that the stuff I was doing really was reaching out to people, kids that maybe weren't interested in art before.

[Billy:](#) To the point where someone was like, "What's this," what did they say? They were like, "Thanks a lot, my house is a mess with all this crap I've got left everywhere."

[Matt:](#) That's our house.

[Laura:](#) Yeah.

[Billy:](#) Just, I think that's, to me that's super important. For people to work with their hands and to really nurture their creativity, and to follow their passion. Funny enough, I had always, when I did the river project back in LA before Making It or anything, I always thought this would be a really great thing to bring to other places. This is just an idea that, I just think it's a really inviting, interesting way to learn about where you're from. Your environment, your history, your culture, and to kind of be hands on.



Billy: So I always was hoping to be able to do it somewhere else, and then I got a e-mail from Nic, and-

Nic: And here we are.

Billy: Yeah.

Laura: And here you are.

Billy: [inaudible 00:07:09] some ideas and she said she was interested in this one, and so we moved forward with it.

Nic: Yup.

Matt: That is so cool.

Laura: So you're doing a river project with the kids at your school, right Nic, so-

Nic: Yeah. Let's go into that ... Well actually, why don't we hit kind of the loopholes. Because I know when educators think about bringing a visiting artist, there are absolutely a ton of roadblocks.

Laura: Yes.

Matt: Yes.

Nic: So let's hit those, and then we'll talk about the project that's actually [crosstalk 00:07:37]

Laura: Sounds good. Sounds good. Yeah.

Nic: So when I approached my administrator about this, she was like "Yeah, that's a really good idea. We just, we need the funds for it. So why don't you ... we'll see, we'll see." Question mark, question mark, and I said "Okay, I heard yes, and that's where I stopped listening. So now I'm going to go make some money." So there was, always do the fundraiser of Art to Remember at the beginning of the year. Did that, it was successful as always, and then that brought in some funds. So I said, "I raised some money. Now I want a visiting artist."

Laura: Yes.



[Nic:](#) She said, "Maybe one more, 1,000 more dollars." I heard yes.

[Matt:](#) Oh yeah.

[Nic:](#) So I did that, and I went to Donors Choose, and I put that out there. Here's my visiting artist, this is my dream, this is why ... it was less about the project at this point, and more about bringing a celebrity so that we could have value behind the art. I find that, oh Ms. [Hahn 00:08:47] told me this, but if Billy says hold your scissors like this, guess what.

[Laura:](#) Yeah.

[Matt:](#) You're going to hold your scissors your scissors [crosstalk 00:08:52]

[Nic:](#) Star power is power. So I wanted that, but I also wanted this diversity. Something different than what I am drawn too, and I am not a person who is going to do sports in my artwork. I'm not a person who's probably going to bring a lot of fish into my artwork. So that's not in my wheelhouse. I wanted someone who was different than me, and that's who ... I want my students to see themselves in the artist that I introduce to them.

[Nic:](#) So I went to Donor's Choose. I put it out there. It took 24 hours before it was fully funded at \$1,000. What that included was parents that are very interested in art. They automatically went on and started donating, and then they told their friends on social media about it. I had one giant donation from Education Closet, and this, again, relates back to just my involvement, I believe, on social media. Being part of the tribe. Explaining my needs, and then that aligned with the donations that that company works with. They definitely donate quite often.

[Nic:](#) After receiving that thousand dollars, I received a check from Donors Choose because Donors Choose is so quick. You make the money and you get the money, it's really quick. We were able to send that to Billy right away, and then I said, "Okay, now we need to start working on the materials." That's where Billy came in.

[Nic:](#) I worked with one company called [Try Art Co 00:10:21], it's a local Minnesota business, and just asked for scissors. Within a day, a day and a half, I had a bunch of new scissors. And then Billy had some contacts as well, do you want to talk about those?



[Billy:](#) Sure. Yeah so after I did the TV show, a couple of companies reached out and were supportive and interested in what I was up to. I did a couple project right after, and they were very happy to send a lot ... JOANNs and Aleene's Glue were very happy to send stuff for projects I did right after. Some workshops and stuff and an installation. So after, it started really moving along, and then Nic and I agreed it would be a cool idea to just do this river project. It was pretty quick for me to assemble a little presentation on the other project I did with photos. This is what it's going to look like without as much trash in it.

[Laura:](#) Right.

[Billy:](#) And would you guys like to support? Both JOANNs and Aleene's glue were, got back right away and sent us a bunch of glue. We got a ton of bolts of felt, we got a lot of fabric, fabric paint. So it's been awesome because really, I'm not big into working with hugely expensive materials anyway, but I just think having this, just a lot of stuff to work with made it really great. Really pushed the project forward.

[Nic:](#) Yeah.

[Laura:](#) That's awesome.

[Matt:](#) That's so cool that all of that came together just based on asking.

[Nic:](#) Yeah.

[Matt:](#) That's awesome.

[Nic:](#) And it continues within our school. People are continuing to say, "How can I help? How can I help?" So I made this list. Okay, who can bring snacks, lunch, dinner on such and such days, and our families are signing up. They want to be involved. We're even having a family night tonight to thank the Donors Choose people, specifically those people. So they're coming tonight, their hands are going to be apart of this collaborative project, and I'd say much needed.

[Matt:](#) It is.

[Billy:](#) You know, put them to work.

[Nic:](#) Yeah, yeah.



[Matt:](#) That's much needed.

[Laura:](#) Oh my goodness. Were there any other roadblocks? And I only ask from my administrative hat, like safety and security is always an interesting thing in my world. Did you have to go through fingerprinting or anything like that, Billy, to come into the school and work? Just curious.

[Billy:](#) Not for this, but I had gone through that process for the last thing I'd done. So if it was something that was needed it was no problem. And they vet you, before you go on television they give you psyche evaluations, and they vet you pretty good before you go on the air.

[Laura:](#) Really?

[Billy:](#) [crosstalk 00:13:00] about you going crazy and wrecking everything, I think.

[Laura:](#) Oh my gosh.

[Billy:](#) I think I was solid there, but yeah I think that's [crosstalk 00:13:07]

[Matt:](#) No every artist has a touch of crazy, but you know.

[Laura:](#) Right.

[Billy:](#) Exactly, yeah. Well not crazy, I'm just not [crosstalk 00:13:15]

[Nic:](#) So that's a good point, Laura, that there is definitely things that you need to work with within the school. Such as safety, so most volunteers that come in do need a background check for my particular school. So going through your administrator and working with them as a team is really important. As well as who can be photographed during this time.

[Laura:](#) Absolutely.

[Nic:](#) All of those rules have to be gone over, and it's individual to your school. So working with your administration is extremely important.

[Laura:](#) I concur. So-

[Matt:](#) And yes.



[Laura:](#) Well I want to go back to something Billy said a minute ago. You said that you really prefer working in media that's maybe not so expensive, and things that are readily available. Can you talk to us a little bit about that and why?

[Billy:](#) Yeah sure. I just, for me I think there's just a real magic in taking mundane materials and creating something really fantastical, or crazy out of them. I think that, to me I kind of always see it as sort of like a double date kind of thing. Maybe if I do, if we do a river installation, maybe some people are interested in the fish and they have stories about their cabins, and their fishing, and the actual subject matter.

[Billy:](#) But then maybe there's other people that are interested in, they used to do sewing with their grandma, or they've used felt for X Y and Z costume. They haven't used it this way. I always think, for me, art is like a conversation, and I always think that the more ways I can open up to have people find a way into it, the more I can continue that conversation with more people.

[Billy:](#) So, yeah, and a lot of artist friends that I'm drawn to in Los Angeles work with cardboard, work with quilting, other materials that taking something maybe people had forgotten about, or people see one way, and just doing something with it that make it, they see it in a new light, I think is always really exciting to me.

[Laura:](#) Do you ever, as an artist, that sometimes it's looked down upon for choosing a media like cardboard or felt?

[Billy:](#) Yeah, sure. I think you sell, you can charge a lot more money for something made out of gold.

[Laura:](#) Well, I was actually thinking about Damien Hirst. That's so funny.

[Billy:](#) You know what I mean, a friend of mine and I almost as a joke, we were like why don't we just pour gold all over this stuff.

[Laura:](#) Right?

[Billy:](#) It would help with the price a bit, you know what I mean?

[Laura:](#) Yes.



[Billy:](#) I think that is, I definitely think there's something to be said for that, but I think if you can really, if you can push through and take a material like that, and make it something that it achieves some kind of artistic intent, or completion to it, then I think that's even harder to do then ... Like a Damien Hirst may be working with money, or working with diamonds or something.

[Matt:](#) It's funny that you said [crosstalk 00:16:21]

[Billy:](#) I think there's an interest, too, and I think this is part of it, and this is what the show tapped into is, a lot of kids may be the most, they use their hands [crosstalk 00:16:32], and so what about ... I had an old football coach who was a poet, and this is crazy, and he always used to say before practice, he used to make us move our fingers around like this, and he always said it activated a different part of your brain. I think that's really true, I think ideas come when your maybe working on something with your hands, that maybe wouldn't have come when your attention is taken up by a screen or something else.

[Billy:](#) So activating these old things, and maybe these old crafty kind of techniques, and processes, and materials in a new way, I think is a way to get maybe kids and other people interested in that. It's important [crosstalk 00:17:09]

[Matt:](#) That's so cool. I loved, going back to what you were just saying about the cardboard, you said very mundane, and it's funny because that's a lot of the things that I use in the classroom with my middle school kids. It's something that you, every day item that you look past almost, because you're just like well it's just a piece of cardboard. What can you do with that? And we've used it for all kinds of things like print making, and sculpture, and all kinds of-

[Laura:](#) Change [crosstalk 00:17:34].

[Matt:](#) Yeah.

[Laura:](#) Just like Billy said.

[Matt:](#) And then going back to what you were saying about ... I find it really interesting that you're mentioning your football coach, talking about, who is a poet, and also is talking about that kinesthetic, getting your fingers moving around to activate another part of your brain because a lot of kids kind of think, "Oh, well, I'm just a sport kid," or "I'm just a this kid or that kind," and they only lump themselves into that one thought.



[Laura:](#) Agree.

[Billy:](#) Yeah, this Beyond the River project, I like doing a lot of stuff that's sort of sports themes. I'm a big fan of sports, and memorabilia, and that kind of stuff. Exactly. I think that that was one way that a lot of kids that were not interested in art at all became interested in it.

[Billy:](#) And I think it's a really great time for that because I've been really involved lately with the NBA and sneaker culture, and they are really into customization. And they are into the materials that these shoes are being made out of, and it's just a little bit step further to start thinking about, customization is art. Customization is something creative made for you, and so that's [crosstalk 00:18:50] to me right now is kind of expanding out on that, and I don't think art should be a walled off garden. I want it to be like everybody should have creativity in their life, and maybe even if they don't make something at least buy it, or appreciate it, or follow it on Instagram.

[Laura:](#) Yeah.

[Billy:](#) That, to me, is really important, and part of the conversation.

[Matt:](#) Absolutely. That's awesome.

[Laura:](#) Kind of lead us back into the River Project, and how you're connecting that at your school, Nic, and what you guys are doing to really pull the kids in, and the community in.

[Nic:](#) Sure. With the River Project, one of the requirements, or requests, that my school administration had was ... Well I showed Billy's version for LA, and just, you kind of mentioned those things earlier. There's things that represent that area. There might be some trash, and there might be, there was a gun in it because of the movies that are filmed there, and there's a lot of things in that that my administration just wanted us to go a different direction.

[Nic:](#) So that helped us out, we new we wanted the River Project, but we were going to keep it ... and in Minnesota we do have some really nice clean water right now.

[Laura:](#) Yeah.



- [Nic:](#) It's nice. So we decided to highlight more our native fish, even maybe some of our-
- [Billy:](#) Invasive.
- [Nic:](#) Invasive, yeah invasive species. We also have a little bit of tribute to our Native American roots, and our, we have a top hat in there. And this has been a question that Billy's asked for every group, do you know why we have a top hat in a Minnesota scene? Do you guys have a clue?
- [Laura:](#) Um, no.
- [Matt:](#) No.
- [Laura:](#) Yeah, I'm not ... I got nothing for you.
- [Billy:](#) Yeah, well we did a little research and a big industry up here was the furriers.
- [Laura:](#) Pelting, oh beavers, yeah.
- [Billy:](#) They made the hats out of beaver pelt. And then one kid brought up, I got to say this was amazing, because the kids said that then they think that the oil from the beavers seeped into people's heads and made them crazy. Like the mad hatter in Alice and Wonderland.
- [Laura:](#) Oh. Smart little cookie.
- [Billy:](#) And it's like [crosstalk 00:21:06] wow.
- [Laura:](#) Yeah.
- [Nic:](#) [inaudible 00:21:06] hats from second grade, right?
- [Laura:](#) Yeah. [crosstalk 00:21:08]
- [Laura:](#) Wow.
- [Nic:](#) Yeah, and it's been fun so, for those of you who have never been to Minnesota, we're big fisher people. We're on the lakes, we're on the rivers, we're Land of 10,000 Lakes.
- [Billy:](#) Even when they're icy.



Nic: Yes.

Matt: Sure, those fish are still alive underneath all that ice.

Billy: I hope so.

Nic: Yup.

Laura: They don't freeze in it?

Billy: No.

Nic: But that has been the beauty in this products, because as Billy shows, our northern pike and our muskie, and our walleye, and all the different types of fish, the kids are saying, "I caught that one with my grandpa, I caught that one last week." And one kid, what was your favorite one, the one that was like, "I've caught every single one of those."

Billy: Yeah. Because you know a part of fishing is lying.

Nic: Yes.

Laura: Right.

Matt: Fish tales, hello.

Matt: [crosstalk 00:21:57]

Matt: Yes.

Laura: That's fine.

Matt: That's why they're called fish tales.

Nic: Yes, yes.

Billy: Exactly, right.

Nic: Yup, so we're experiencing a lot of that culture, and I think that's the beauty of this is that kids are relating to the piece of artwork that we're creating. And creating it collaboratively is always, it's creating community within our school, and beyond their individual classroom. It's a powerful, powerful experience.



[Billy:](#) It's funny because we worked with Nic's husband, who is also an educator, and he helped us build some beautiful frames to put our project in, and so then we put blue in the back and we started layering fish in as we went. Earlier in the week everyone was staring at me and excited that I was here, and then as it went on they're just staring at ... I was like what about me? You're looking at the thing now, but what about me.

[Laura:](#) It's what you wanted to happen. Art becomes the center.

[Nic:](#) Oh yeah.

[Laura:](#) Yeah.

[Nic:](#) So jealousy from Billy to the artwork, and then I've never had students ask me for my autograph, but this guy ... I have to play his bouncer and say no more autographs. [crosstalk 00:23:15]

[Laura:](#) They just don't know you're famous with art teachers now.

[Nic:](#) Right, right. That's the thing. They just don't know.

[Susan:](#) Hi there, this is Susan Riley, founder of Education Closet. If you love these conversations with Team Grundler and friends, please be sure to check out K12ArtChat on Twitter. The chat is held every Thursday at 8:30 pm central, and it's a great way to continue the conversation. Just go to twitter.com and search #K12ArtChat. We look forward to chatting with you over there soon. Now let's head back to the show.

[Laura:](#) You know, I was going to ask about the frames actually. Because I saw a picture on Instagram of the family moving in all these massive ... like what's the size we're working with here because just from the picture it looked like there were multiple frames, and that they were very large.

[Nic:](#) Yeah. We decided to go with a standard size. Tim, like Billy mentioned, my husband being a shop teacher, a tech ed teacher, and Billy being a person that works with his hands as well, we know that a four by eight sheet is a standard size. Do you know the name of the material? The backing?

[Billy:](#) It was a kind of a biltrite, I think. It's a kind of really industrial fiber board that he used.



[Laura:](#) Oh, okay.

[Nic:](#) Yeah so he kind of steered us in the, he told us what we wanted. And it worked-

[Billy:](#) It was light as well.

[Nic:](#) It's really-

[Laura:](#) Oh, okay, good.

[Nic:](#) Figured it out that we could make these frames eight by four weighing less than 50 pounds.

[Matt:](#) Oh wow.

[Nic:](#) With felt being the subject inside, that wasn't going to add anything, or much. And that's important too, because after this of course we want to mount these in a place of honor. So we have two frames at that size, they're going to be next to each other so it's an actual 16 by four image.

[Laura:](#) Wow.

[Billy:](#) A diorama [crosstalk 00:25:17]

[Nic:](#) Yeah, right.

[Laura:](#) Yeah.

[Matt:](#) Yeah, you add layers, yeah.

[Billy:](#) Yeah, we're going to stuff it and hang so it's going to have a couple of layers to it, but yeah.

[Laura:](#) Oh, so you're going to hang some fish and things, too?

[Billy:](#) Yeah.

[Nic:](#) It's so cool.

[Laura:](#) Oh, I can not wait to see this. Awesome.

[Matt:](#) Yeah, I want to [crosstalk 00:25:31]



[Billy:](#) Yeah, we have wire coming up from the bottom, so there will be plants coming up from the bottom.

[Nic:](#) Yup.

[Laura:](#) Wow.

[Matt:](#) Okay. All right. Nic, you were talking about the impact that having the community, and students, and everyone feeling like they were a part of it. Did you feel at any point that ... see a bigger change, or was there ... was it something that needed to be done, or was it something that was extra in a community that maybe is really supportive?

[Nic:](#) I think what this has done is really pulled out my art supporters in my community. So I knew that I had some, I didn't know who they were. Now that ... and I would say that in my conversation, anyone who is gung ho about bringing an artist in, it took a lot. It took a lot of me saying, "It's the best, you're going to love it. It's going to be great." But until they're here, until they're creating, until the principal and the other teachers are walking in and seeing what's happening, until I'm posting things on Seesaw telling everybody about it, they don't understand the same way that I knew in my heart. Now that the reality is happening, I'm finding that people are reaching out, they're excited about it, they can't wait to see this. We have new followers on probably both of our Instagrams just because now they're aware. Like, oh this is where I go to find out more information about it. And I think, you know me, I love to celebrate what's happening.

[Matt:](#) That's not a bad thing.

[Nic:](#) In a creative world it's not about bragging, it's not about anything like that, and people are resistant to it, but it's all about celebrating the creative abilities of your students, and the creative ideas within your classroom.

[Laura:](#) Yeah.

[Matt:](#) That's awesome.

[Nic:](#) So, that's what's happening.

[Matt:](#) Really.



[Laura:](#) That's awesome. Billy I have another question for you. I grew up in Oklahoma, and there was a collaborative that, kind of a fine arts organization that had grants available for artists in residence to come be long term artists in residence in our schools. So growing up I had a couple different experiences with artists being in our schools for three to four weeks, and honestly one of those experiences is one of the reasons I love print making so much. Print making is really, I love it because of this experience I had with this artist.

[Laura:](#) I'm curious if you are aware of any organizations like that that help bring in artists in residence or if you ever worked with an organization like that. I've personally been looking for something like that in Texas for a long time. I have a very difficult time finding artists in residence. You have to have a really gung ho teacher like Nic to do all the extra, and it's just, that's hard for a lot of people. So I'm trying to find other avenues, grants, other ways to bring in artists in residence.

[Billy:](#) I wish I, I do not. Honestly, my first experience, and just speaking on behalf of artist friends of mine that do the same thing, were mostly with private schools that had extra money to do it. And had the appreciation for it. That was my first experience. I didn't know it was even really a thing so much, and until a private school reached out to me and it was great. Then my friend's done it at a couple private schools in Los Angeles, and he just did one in Massachusetts, but this is my first year actually the school that I'm working at in LA now, and then this experience here in Minnesota are both public schools. And what you said, what I've seen so far it takes either a very determined art educator, or a very determined, what do you call it? Like friends of, like a parent-

[Laura:](#) Yeah, friends of the arts. PTA.

[Matt:](#) PTA, or.

[Laura:](#) Yeah.

[Billy:](#) [crosstalk 00:29:27] PTA. They're the ones in LA that are actually, are funding us coming to the school, and that just is such a huge thing because we're able to make up, we're kind of making up our own curriculum and doing our own projects. We're not assigned to some school in LAUSD, we got to go to our local school and do it. If you hear of any, please let me know. I think it's a great thing, and to this day kids that I was visiting with three years ago still come and intern with me in the summer.



[Laura:](#) That's awesome.

[Billy:](#) Still reach out to me all the time on Instagram and stuff, go check out my projects. I don't think, like you just said with the print making example, I really think it can have an effect on kids. Just seeing a different point of view, and bringing in someone different sometimes. Someone that's really committed to what they're doing, passionate about it.

[Laura:](#) I appreciate what Nic said, too, about ... she's not going to have a lot of sports aspects, or outdoor aspects, and that's just not her personality. I just think that we all bring a lot of our personality into our classroom, and really good teachers share who they are with their kids. It is really nice to see someone else, but then there's this, also, part of me that loves the idea of kids seeing a working artist. That it's a real career. That it's something you can do for a living, and that it's something-

[Matt:](#) Not just for fun.

[Laura:](#) Yeah, it's not just for hobby, or it's not just for fun, and that it's worthy. I know that sounds weird, but I've had, as a high school teacher I've had students that were tremendous artists. Loved being in class, and making, and creating, and they would get through your art one level class, and their parents would say no more because you're going to go do something-

[Matt:](#) Be a doctor or a lawyer.

[Laura:](#) Yeah, exactly. Doctor, lawyer, that that's not something that's going to pay dividends later, so you need to move on. I think having the experience of showing the community a true working artist is a really wonderful aspect to this as well.

[Nic:](#) Agreed.

[Billy:](#) Yeah and it's fun too. When I came into this, I had had some progress in LA so it was kind of like, hey this guy does stuff. [crosstalk 00:31:56] writing about it, or doing interviews with him. Then I go on a crazy TV show, or I do an installation for Jordan brand sneakers, or Amoeba records, and these kids are following the whole journey. This is what I tell kids, too, I know half the people with law degrees I know aren't lawyers.



[Laura:](#)

Yeah. So true.

[Billy:](#)

I can't find a doctor in LA, you know they're all quitting. So today with social media and everything, if you're passionate about it, and you want to make it happen, then there's a way to do it. So I think it's cool that these kids now, even afterwards, can follow what I'm doing. I get posts and they comment, and they still reach out. Like you said, they're seeing that, and they can see it through the years which I think is a really cool thing, too.

[Laura:](#)

Well, I think they get to see their teacher making something happen as well, there's that aspect of it as well. Is that persistence is a huge part about being an artist, and just being a go getter. If you're going to be an artist, you've got to get out there and-

[Matt:](#)

Make things happen.

[Laura:](#)

Exactly. They're seeing Nic do that, they're seeing you do that with your career. What an amazing experience for you kids, Nic.

[Nic:](#)

Yeah. Truly is.

[Laura:](#)

Congratulations. What a win. This is really cool.

[Billy:](#)

If anybody said to me, they're like, how did this happen? I just point to her, and [crosstalk 00:33:34] you know what I mean?

[Laura:](#)

Yeah.

[Matt:](#)

Yeah.

[Billy:](#)

I've had a number of emails about all kinds of stuff, and some of it got followed up on, and some of it didn't. This was one that is really, I was just really impressed with her planning ability, and her organizational ability, her fundraising ability, and her determination, and I said, "I want to honor this. I want to come and show these kids that if you have an idea, and you want to do it, then you can do it."

[Nic:](#)

Even in the middle of February.

[Matt:](#)

Lucky you from LA.



[Laura:](#) I was actually [crosstalk 00:34:03] going from LA to Minnesota in February. Yikes.

[Billy:](#) People thought I was crazy.

[Laura:](#) And that was mainly one of the obstacles.

[Nic:](#) We had a snow day.

[Laura:](#) You had a snow day during this?

[Nic:](#) Yes.

[Laura:](#) Oh no.

[Matt:](#) And that's when he has that look on his face, I know, like oh my gosh what have I done?

[Nic:](#) [crosstalk 00:34:22] that we adjusted schedules, all the educators in the school were like yup, we'll make the, when do you need us? So we doubled up on some classes, and we had some kindergarten with fifth graders which has been fun. Really there is a lot of treats, Bob Ross's favorite saying, right, happy accidents, and it truly has been. We're lucky because we had time to prep, we had time to make these frames, it turned out okay.

[Billy:](#) Yeah, and from my point of view, Nic and her family were so sweet. They're like, "Do you want to go ice fishing? Do you want to go sledding? Do you want to go snowmobiling?" And I do want to do all those things, but I was like, "Wait. You have a really sweet studio, and your husband has a nice wood shop."

[Matt:](#) Go make some stuff.

[Billy:](#) I'm still an artist.

[Nic:](#) Let's go make.

[Laura:](#) Let's go make. That sounds even more fun to me.

[Matt:](#) Yeah.

[Laura:](#) That's awesome. As we come to the end of our conversation, we always like to ask what's one takeaway or some words of wisdom that you'd like to share with



the educators that are listening to the podcast, so I'd like to ask both of you that question. Nic and Billy. What are some takeaways from this experience, and some words of wisdom that you would share with any educator?

Nic: One thing that I'd point out to educators is this wasn't easy in any way, shape, or form, but it was worth it. I think it will be something I'm proud of. I'll be able to look at this artwork, and so will the students that come into the school for many, many years. So that's why it's worth it. It's a reminder of the moment that we had with Billy. It's a reminder of art and creating and crafting, and it's worth it. So, that's mine.

Billy: Yeah, mine is that I think that I continue to learn as much from the kids as I can teach them.

Laura: Every day.

Billy: When Nic mentioned the snow day, this project was not conceived as a lesson for children. This was just my crazy idea, and people responded to it, and then this is what we decided that would be great for this. We decided let's try and make this work, and we did a lot of planning. We did a lot of preparation. That first day we learned a lot. We really learned how we can do this, and how we can make this work for five, six different grades of kids with different abilities, and different interests, and everything. On top of that, also, is they are inspirational. I come away with ideas. They say things I never would have thought of, and things that add to my project, and my work in ways that I would never imagine. So that's what I think it is. I feel like when I come into a classroom, I'm there to learn as much as I am to teach anybody anything.

Matt: That's so cool.

Laura: I'm so inspired.

Matt: Yeah.

Laura: Yeah, you know. And I actually ... Can I ask you one more question, Billy?

Billy: Yeah, of course.

Laura: Why are you an artist?



[Billy:](#) That's a good ... you know what it is? I think I had ... I was a creative director when I was younger at a design firm. I've made TV commercials, I've done animation, and just the more I was in creative fields, the less I wanted clients or a boss if I could avoid it. [crosstalk 00:37:50] I want to be my own boss purely as much as I possibly can, and I want to create ideas. Then as I've done it, after I had that initial idea, as I've done it it's been a total two way street.

[Billy:](#) This whole experience I never would have imagined a couple years ago. That something like this would happen, and that ... At this point I'm building a vocabulary of rivers. A vault of river templates that I can, that I really enjoy. That I can do anywhere, and that people respond to so that's the main thing for me. Is being able to be as creative as I can at all times, and if I have to go back and get a day job, I have to go back and get a day job. As long as I can get away with it.

[Matt:](#) Let's hope that doesn't happen.

[Laura:](#) There is the trinity river here in Dallas, just so you know.

[Billy:](#) Hey, I'm available.

[Laura:](#) If you're interested, it's quite a-

[Matt:](#) And I think it would be really interesting to see how all three rivers are different, right?

[Laura:](#) Yeah. Totally.

[Matt:](#) So.

[Billy:](#) Yeah I'm ... I always think of a river walk in San Antonio.

[Matt:](#) Oh yeah.

[Laura:](#) Oh yeah.

[Matt:](#) Oh gosh.

[Billy:](#) [crosstalk 00:39:05] future now, and I used to live in New York a long, long time ago, and I was fascinated with the New Town Creek, with the Gowanus Canal, and it's been rewarding to me. After I did the Los Angeles project, I was invited ... there's actually like a crazy, there's a big swirling ideas about what to



do with the Los Angeles river, and recently they brought in the architect Frank Gehry, and one organization put him in charge. They invited me to their fundraiser to install my river at their fundraiser that Frank Gehry ... his first thing was to do a study of all the water. There's a Compton Creek, you know what I mean? It's just-

[Laura:](#) Yeah.

[Matt:](#) Oh yeah. It leads into so much more.

[Billy:](#) Yeah, and it's like, people want views from their house. People want water front property, people ... It plays into people's lives in such a way that it's really interesting to me. It's a portal into so much more, you know?

[Laura:](#) Yeah.

[Matt:](#) Wow.

[Nic:](#) Yeah the ecology aspect of this has been tremendous. To have the kids learning about the fish, or teaching us about the fish. We've-

[Matt:](#) Yeah.

[Laura:](#) Yeah.

[Nic:](#) We've learned a lot about our underwater creatures.

[Billy:](#) The environment, yeah.

[Laura:](#) I always think it's funny that we're so STEM oriented, and it's really STEAM. Everything connects back to art. You can pull it all in, so it's really exciting to see you guys do some STEAM and some science in there. So, yeah.

[Matt:](#) [crosstalk 00:40:40]

[Matt:](#) We can't thank you guys enough, and we appreciate you taking away your time as, to join us today.

[Laura:](#) Yes, at the end of the day before you go back to it here in a few minutes.

[Nic:](#) We have family night tonight, so.



[Laura:](#) Yup.

[Nic:](#) It will be [crosstalk 00:40:53]

[Matt:](#) Can't wait to see pictures about how that all goes, so.

[Laura:](#) Yeah.

[Nic:](#) Yup, you bet, and always a pleasure talking to you guys. Thanks for being such advocates for us, and letting us celebrate.

[Laura:](#) Well, it was wonderful. Clearly we could have kept talking, so thank you so much for taking the afternoon to visit with us.

[Billy:](#) Great to meet you guys. Thank you so much.

[Laura:](#) Yeah, you too.

[Matt:](#) Yeah, you too, Billy.

[Laura:](#) Thank you.

[Matt:](#) All right, we will talk with you guys later.

[Laura:](#) All right, bye guys.

[Matt:](#) All right, bye.

[Speaker 8:](#) Heads up, seven up, friends. If you've been enjoying these episodes, be sure to subscribe to the Creatively Connected Classroom podcast. You'll get a notification every time we release a new episode each and every week. And, take a screen shot and put it on your favorite social media. Twitter, Insta, Facebook, you name it. Tag Education Closet and K12ArtChat so we can reach out, and say thanks. And if you really love us with all the feels, give us a review and or a rating over on iTunes. It helps others find the show, and connect with our incredible community. Thanks for all your support.