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Mesa Arts Center announces Project Lit: Igniting Critical Literacy through the Arts

Educators could win a free residency for their school at Educator Preview Night



July 14, 2016 (Mesa, AZ) – Mesa Arts Center is launching a new Engagement initiative designed to develop critical literacy in K-12 students using tools of creativity, such as storytelling, humor, improvisation, visual arts, spoken word, hip hop and more. Through Project Lit, teaching artists will deliver programming that uses the arts to help students develop traditional literacies like reading comprehension, writing and speaking, in addition to critical literacies such as social, emotional and cultural.

Educators and school administrators are invited to learn about this new initiative and other programs offered by the Engagement Office at Mesa Arts Center's Educator Preview Night on August 18, 4:30-6:30 p.m. To register for this free event, email engagement@mesaartscenter.com. Educators will be entered to win one of three free Project Lit residencies for the school year just by attending the event.

Director of Engagement Mandy Tripoli said of the project, "Building on several years of Engagement programs in K-12 classrooms, we're excited to expand upon and apply the framework of this collaborative initiative that cultivates a safe space for students to express themselves creatively, and works toward developing critical literacy among the participants through the arts."

Project Lit is an umbrella under which several art forms will be utilized to build literacy in Valley youth. Tomas Stanton, director and co-founder of literary arts organization Phonetic Spit, will administer the program in his new part-time position as Critical Engagement Specialist with Mesa Arts Center. In his new role, Stanton will train Project Lit teaching artists to work within the initiative's framework, helping to strengthen curriculum models and teaching best practices in student engagement.

Several avenues of learning through the arts will become available through Project Lit, and programs will be delivered in partnership with Valley-wide arts organizations. The Project Lit initiative will offer the following programs in the 2016-17 season.

Literacy through Improv, delivered in partnership with [Humor Writes](#)

Fourth through eighth grade students will use improvisational comedy to develop writing skills. Students participate in individual and group exercises to motivate imaginative thinking and

ultimately write their own scripts. After preparation and mentorship with Humor Writes, students perform their final piece live on stage.

Literacy through Spoken Word, delivered in partnership with [Phonetic Spit](#)

Middle and high school students will engage in critical conversations and reflections through poetic narrative and performance workshops, producing and performing their own spoken word poetry at the Young Voices Rise Youth Poetry Festival.

Literacy through Drama, delivered in partnership with Arizona State University College Film, Dance and Theatre's Theatre for Youth Program

Kindergarten through third grade students will create context when reading through performing arts workshops and live theatre productions. Students engage in interactive storytelling, creative movement, collaborative conversations, and independent exploration, toward the goal of increased comprehension.

Literacy through Performance, delivered in partnership with MAC's Performing Live Series

Students will learn critical thinking skills through observation and discussion of live performance and integration with classroom learning. This year, Performing Live will explore deeply the work of The Acting Company's World Premier of X – the assassination of Malcom X – presented through the lens of Shakespeare's Julius Caesar.

Literacy through Hip Hop, delivered in partnership with AZ Beat Lab

Delivered in partnership with AZ Beat Lab, students dive into core elements of Hip Hop through the practice of beat making. Through collaboration, observation and listening, this process-driven approach explores both electronic and folkloric rhythmic styles. Students will gain a better understanding of how people around the world use music and rhythm to communicate.

Other community partners working with Mesa Arts Center through Project Lit include Mesa Public Libraries and Kids Need to Read Foundation.

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About Mesa Arts Center

Mesa Arts Center, owned and operated by the City of Mesa, is a unique, architecturally stunning facility located in the heart of downtown Mesa. Arizona's largest multidisciplinary arts center is home to four theaters, five art galleries in the MCA Museum, and 14 art studios. Guests, patrons, and students come to Mesa Arts Center to enjoy the finest live entertainment, performances and festivals, world-class visual art exhibitions, and outstanding arts education classes. The Mesa Arts Center mission is to inspire people through engaging arts experiences that are diverse, accessible, and relevant. For more information, visit mesaartscenter.com.

About Mesa Arts Center's Engagement Programs

The Engagement Office at Mesa Arts Center offers programming that supports engagement in the arts as a critical component to a healthy and active community. Programing endeavors to ensure that lifelong learners have access to unique and high quality arts opportunities, students

engage in meaningful learning opportunities in creating art, experiencing live performances and developing skills critical to a 21st Century education, and community members participate in relevant and accessible arts initiatives. For more information, visit mesaartscenter.com/engagement.