

**The New York Times**

# Student Question | What Has Arts Education Done For You?

By **Katherine Schulten** May 5, 2016 5:09 am

Have you ever taken a class in the arts — whether music, painting, photography, dance, theater or anything else — that made a difference in your life?

Whether you took it in school or out, what did you learn, and how did it change you?

In “Eli Paperboy Reed Lifts Young Voices in the Gospel Spirit,” John Leland writes about a free after-school program called Gospel for Teens. The piece begins:

There was a moment in Eli Paperboy Reed’s gospel quartet class recently, at the end of Blind Willie Johnson’s plaintive “Let Your Light Shine on Me,” when Asher Bethune, a reserved 19-year-old, hit a note so low, so unexpectedly, that the other students jumped and shouted. No one had heard Mr. Bethune sing like that before.

Luke Waldron, 17, declared the presence of the supernatural.

“He’s in this room!” he shouted.

Mr. Reed, the teacher, beamed and shook his head. Quartet singing will

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In “Against Tough Odds, a High School Arts Program Fosters Success” Miranda S. Spivack writes about a high school in Maryland that has been “a crucible” for young artists:

DISTRICT HEIGHTS, Md. — Inside a crumbling school building in a neighborhood dotted by pawn shops, fast-food restaurants and strip malls, a security guard is shouting into the girls’ restroom to make sure there are no problems. Outside, a gaggle of boys is smoking. Trash overflows from a bin just beyond the school’s fence.

Oblivious to the grim surroundings, young artists are hard at work inside the building, Suitland High School. Those artists are eager participants in a rigorous, four-year academic and arts program that has survived budget cuts, neighborhood violence and a constant shortage of art supplies. Although the program, the Center for Visual and Performing Arts, founded in 1986, has had dwindling enrollment, it has been a crucible for emerging artists, many of them African-Americans, and some now rising to national prominence.

Sam Vernon, Suitland class of ’05, is represented in three current shows in New York City, including one at the Brooklyn Museum. Eric N. Mack, Suitland ’05, is preparing a show that opens in the fall in Paris. The two artists said that the world inside the Annex, as the arts center is known, was where it all began — where they spent up to four hours a day with art teachers, all practicing professionals. Close friends since ninth grade at Suitland, both Ms. Vernon and Mr. Mack went on to Cooper Union and later Yale. Several of this year’s Suitland graduates are also headed to well-regarded college arts and design programs, many with substantial financial aid. Among them is Malik Mills, 17, who managed to produce finely detailed pen-and-ink drawings even as his family members faced eviction from their home. “My photography teacher was the first person to introduce Conceptual art to me,” he said.

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**Poulin**, arts education manager for Americans for the Arts, a nonprofit advocacy group. Yet programs such as Suitland's, he said, are always at risk in public school systems with tight budgets.

**Students:** Read both articles, then tell us:

— Would the programs described in these pieces interest you? If not these, what kinds of arts program do you wish your school offered?

— How much arts education have you had during your formal education so far? Has arts funding been cut while you've been a student? How did that affect you?

— What are the best classes in the arts you've ever taken? Why were they so good? What and how did you learn from them?

— What impact would you say arts education — in or out of school — has had on your life so far?

— How important do you think arts education is for students in general? Why?

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Students 13 and older are invited to comment below. All comments are moderated by Learning Network staff members, but please keep in mind that once your comment is accepted, it will be made public.

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