



From the personal to the collective

Two artists and an art historian - the educational team from Yellow Brick - begin by exploring sustainability, involvement and unearthing history through the lens of memory, cultural identity, personal and collective history: 'How can a personal narrative of a family history be sustained through time? How can the personal become collective? What connections can be found between students' family stories in a multicultural city like Athens (e.g. family roots, genealogical tree, cultural traditions)? How can these personal stories find common ground without being absorbed into a linear history?' We invite a group of children to an initial workshop to think, design and dream what form a collective project around art and sustainability could take, asking 'If we imagine art together, what would it look like?' Their ideas are used to design a subsequent series of workshops which take place in the three schools. With input from teachers from our participating schools, we explore different educational methods (role playing, group work, presentations e.t.c), approaching these concepts in a playful way.

Body cartographies: Imaginary lands

It's the first workshop of many to follow. A joyful morning unfolds with curiosity and wonder. Warm welcomes and playful introductions set the tone, as we introduce ourselves in a game with yarn unravelling words revealing colours, interests, and names. Large sheets of paper invite the students and teachers to immerse and draw our body contours. The overlapping body cartographies are filled with dreams, memories, families, and friends, as we find our common symbolic paths. 'If you look carefully, you will see the piano that Maria loves; further down, flowers encircle the grandparents of a child'. All over, words in a foreign language mingle with those of another. We come from different places, and everybody has something to share. We invite them to make a family tree and as small historians write notes on the stories of their family members.

Interweaving our paths, re-rooting

As a forest spreads its roots deep into the soil, metaphorically connecting societies within natural and urban environments, and connecting, nurturing and healing one another as trees do. The second time we meet the students make a collage with roots connecting symbols, people and objects. In stories of past and present, the imaginary forest spreads all over the classroom, and interconnections between history and oral history start to emerge. We invite them to immerse in their family history and bring an object meaningful to them for the second workshop. "Can I bring a recipe that my mother always cooks on Saturdays? Can it be from my moms homeland before coming to this country?"



Unveiling Stories: An Enchanting Journey with Children

A branch of an old oak tree becomes the wooden stick of an old grandfather. A handmade, white cloth, full of embroidered flowers, stands before us, passing through generations to accompany the women of this family to their wedding days. Through storytelling the students share their objects, and we follow them into distant fields. As the workshops continue they are full of questions and they cheer with enthusiasm when they recognize an object, weaving common threads in their stories, eager to tell us what secrets they hold. An emotional ambiance fills the room; we start to tell each others' stories, as if they were our own. The students draw, collaboratively or individually, objects and elements of the stories onto huge cards, designed to interlock and build up spatial structures where they can play, narrate stories and hide within.

STORIES OF INVOLVEMENT – EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

We are all pieces of one puzzle!

Location

Yellow Brick
1st Elementary school Ilioupoli
5th Elementary school Dafni
35st Elementary school / Athens
'Aspalathos' artist runspace
Collaboration with "Lotus Eaters" - elementary and high school, Ithaki Island

Time: May & November - December 2023
And in collaboration with Poem Design & Fine arts, in Nauplio, a worships in until spring 2025 with the participation of several public schools

People involved:

11 Educators, 150 students of elementary schools, 4 public elementary schools, public event in an artist run space downtown Athens, 20 days, the Poem Design & Fine arts, in Nauplio and the local community and the art scene of Athens

Building collective histories

Our oversized cards are now painted! An impromptu storytelling game is ready to play in school. Each time you pick a card, you can add the narrative elements you want, real or imaginary, for our collective stories. Every time you play with it, you can rebuild it, reshape it, and rephrase it.

Walking together we re-root a shared history!

In a playful way, students explore their cultural histories. Through a series of participatory workshops, role-reversal, drawing and playing we interweave our roots and unravel family stories. Multicultural narratives bring up emotional moments and connection to personal experience of history, which teachers and students can reflect upon together. The project offered teachers the opportunity to explore methods of cross-disciplinary learning. Collaborative art-making encourages engagement in a collective learning process, empowering the students' voices and initiative. The oversized card game designed at the end of this project worked as a playful tool for connecting with others through impromptu storytelling and making, which will remain in the school and can be reactivated in the future. Expanding the project beyond the school boundaries, the students discovered how it is to share their artworks at a public event by reactivating the card game. A site of connection was created between the students and the broader community, constructing new narratives and prompting new dialogues around histories.

Involving others, the forest exists in its roots

The Shaping Patterns school programme was explored further in relation to the idea of history and oral history, looking into the family roots and memories that derived from the personal experience of each student. For Greece, as a geographical entry point into the 'west' and thus always experiencing movements of population, migration is an ongoing reality which weaves a diverse social fabric throughout the country. Students were asked to bring objects and stories representing their cultural and family backgrounds. Through storytelling, playing, painting and drawing, they shared their personal stories with their peers. Together we "wove" common threads in their stories, considering history, art, sustainability and involvement. The workshops resulted in the creation of a giant three-dimensional card game that can be used to build up ephemeral structures; through the images painted by the students in the cards, new narratives are invited from viewers and participants. During the open day at the art space "Aspalathos" in central Athens, we invited the local community, children and adults into a dialogue around sustaining personal memories and cultural traits.

