

The Traveling Paper Kimono Project

▶ VALERIE COLSTON

The Little Library Program That Turned Big

I enjoy creating programs that teach about various cultures through art. The Traveling Paper Kimono Program began when Emi Wong invited me to create a Paper Kimono and Art Exhibit at the Fountain Valley Library in Fountain Valley, California. The program turned out to be a success with a variety of ages attending, including tween and teen girls with their moms or grandmothers. There were several cultures represented and much discussion about kimonos. Participants told stories of kimonos they had owned or had seen. We all learned a lot about the cultural history of kimonos while creating them.

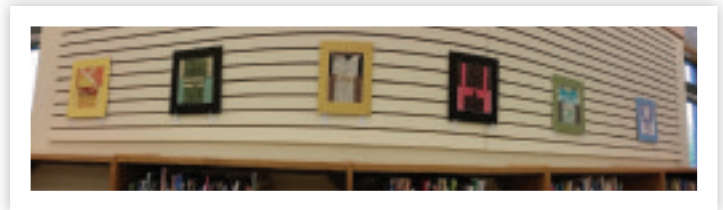
After I returned home, I edited the photographs of the event and created a video *Fountain Valley Kimono Program* (<http://www.artmuseums.com/fountainvalley.htm>). As I watched the video, I remembered the enjoyment and positive learning experience of the event. I thought about how other libraries might enjoy the Paper Kimono Program and Art Exhibit. I remembered the popular teen novel and film adaptations of Ann Brashares' **The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants** and thought perhaps the paper kimonos could go on their unique adventure. It turns out that librarians were interested, and the kimonos traveled to libraries in New York, Wisconsin, and Virginia.

This year, the Traveling Paper Kimono Program went *big* in February. The credit for the program supersizing goes to Librarian Associate Pam Verfaillie, known for her organizational skills, high energy, and collaborative skills. She loves what she does and whom she does it for—the middle and high school teens of Valdez High School in Valdez, Alaska. The administration, teachers, the local library and museum, and even the Valdez basketball team got involved. Technology also helped.

The Traveling Kimono Program Box and Art Exhibit was mailed from California to Alaska. The box contained an instruction book which included ideas for programs, resources, instructions, and templates for creating the kimonos. The package also included six 11-inch x 17-inch paper kimonos to be hung in the library.

I knew it would be a larger program than usual when Verfaillie reported—even before the kimonos arrived—that several teachers were possibly willing to work on the program including the world history/cultures teacher, the home economics teacher, and the art teacher, and the middle school students were coming for a field trip to participate. That was only the beginning. There were other teachers to contact and a possible STEAM make it and take it. The new youth services librarian is always up for collaborating with teens, as is the education director of the Valdez Museum. They hoped to get student-made kimonos into the community art show.

Verfaillie's energy and ideas for collaborations and cross-curriculum projects were amazing. Within days, she had approval from administration and the art, painting, and two world history classes. She wrote: "The museum and public library came over to meet with me on Thursday. The museum is thinking about whether or not be incorporated into the "After the Bell" program they are doing at the middle school. Not sure, because their plans were already pretty set. The youth services librarian from the public library will come and work with our high school students in an



PAPER KIMONOS ON DISPLAY AT THE VALDEZ HIGH SCHOOL.

after-school program in the VHS library. I have two high school art classes, one home economics class, and one middle school choir class confirmed to participate so far. There will also be an afterschool drop-in program at the high school. The home economics class is tweaking it a bit and using fabric instead of paper."

It is exciting that the program took on different directions in learning, to include the Alaskan Natives' history, Verfaillie explained, "With a couple of groups we are looking at possibly comparing kimonos to Native Alaskan kuspuku: When are they worn? Do you see them casually if you are walking around in Japan? Who is most likely to wear them? Are there differences in styles based on geographic area (i.e., Inupiat kuspuku have a hood, Sugpiaq kuspuku have a cowl)?"

In the art class, "Mr. Thompson introduced the elements of art (we had each one printed and laminated onto a separate card). Each student had to take a card and then study the kimonos in relation to their element. Then each student presented to the group," Verfaillie said. In science and home economics, "Denise O'Brien, our science and home economics teacher, was bringing her students to do the #PaperKimonoProject. The students first research kimonos and Alaska Native kuspuku to do a compare and contrast assignment. When O'Brien was working on her lesson for the students, she came across the Elements of Design printable from artclasscurator.com. She sent the link to me. I printed them, out, put them on construction paper backing, and laminated them to put on display while students were making their #PaperKimonoProject, a "things to think about" display. Tyler saw the cards and liked them, so he asked me to send him



STUDENTS CREATING PAPER KIMONOS AT VALDEZ HIGH SCHOOL



SAMPLES OF THE PAPER KIMONOS

the link. He came up with the activity for each student to select a card, look at the kimonos from the perspective of their element of design, and then do a short (very short) presentation to the class about their element and how it related to one or more of the kimonos.”

Even the basketball teams (including the opposing team) were invited to participate in the make it and take it kimono project. The kimono display was set up ahead of the basketball players’ arrival from all over the state, so that the teams could view the display. If they wanted, they could participate in the make it and take it paper kimonos.

Pam Verfaillie’s checklist in creating the Kimono Project:

- review the lesson plans
- consider which classes could make this fit into their curriculum
- get administrative approval
- sell the project to the teachers
- set up a meeting and present the project to the public library and museum
- decide on logistics for display in the library
- move books to create an open space in the bookshelves

TRAVELING PAPER KIMONO PROGRAM BOX

This was a free program for the library. Participants supply their art supplies and paper.

- 5 Paper Kimono Artworks are included as examples and for display in the library
- An eBook of instructions and resources that includes a list of art materials you will need
- Color plate examples of paper kimonos
- Instructions and pattern templates to create the paper kimonos
- Suggestions for where to buy supplies and ideas for using recycled materials
- A list of program suggestions and booklist for various ages
- Information about the history of kimonos.

- set up a maker station for students and guests to create their kimonos
- obtain materials (paper, glue, embellishments)
- copy and laminate templates
- decide how to display student work and obtain necessary materials
- create signage and social media posts to promote the project
- find a selection of Japanese music and photos to display while students are working on projects
- coordinate with foreign exchange student companies to locate Japanese students willing and available for a Skype presentation with our classes (and, prepare our classes for these videoconference experiences)

To give updates to students and teachers, Pam Verfaillie created #PaperKimonoProject hashtags on Twitter and Facebook and took photographs of the tweens and teens making the paper kimonos.

What I learned most from this experience was that amazing things could happen when libraries, schools, museums, and communities collaborate for a common goal of offering tweens and teens unique cultural experiences as their goal. It just takes one enthusiastic librarian to get it all started, and I found her at Valdez High School in Alaska. It may sound like much work, and it is, but Verfaillie would tell you that she loves collaboration and interdisciplinary learning, so this fits right in with things that make her happy.

When the Paper Kimono Program leaves Valdez, Alaska, it will be traveling for a while. It is going to Tanana Middle School in Fairbanks. The librarians are talking of passing it from school to school.

Thank you so much, Pam Verfaillie and everyone at Valdez High School, for everything you did to make this a successful program. It absolutely would not have been the project that it was without you. ■

TRAVELING KIMONO PROGRAM AT VALDEZ HIGH SCHOOL

Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/ValdezHighSchool/>

Pinterest. <https://pin.it/2aqa2v262ul6gv>

Twitter. <https://twitter.com/VHSAkLibrary/>

Valerie Colston lives in San Diego, California, and is the author of *Graphic Design—A Practical Guide for Librarians, 200 Projects to Strengthen Your Art Skills, and Teens Go Green! Tips, Techniques, Tools, and Themes for YA Programming*. She teaches art at American Public University Systems and Ancient Asian Art History at Barstow Community College. Colston also teaches a variety of librarian workshops through her company Art Teacher on the Net at Artmuseums.com.



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