

TEACHER OF THE MONTH

Jamil Steele

BY LIZ ROTH AUS BERTRAND



Art teacher Jamil Steele's students' work weaves inside and around Shamrock Gardens Elementary School, creating an endless learning canvas. Now in his 11th year with CMS, Mr. Steele strives to incorporate the arts into his school's culture.

Come visit and you'll see murals like Lucky the Dragon, the school mascot, painted by students last spring or a new butterfly mosaic, inspired by the school's butterfly garden. You may spot students painting outdoor spirit rocks or designing the yearbook cover.

Mr. Steele, a professional artist specializing in portraiture and illustration,

wants students to see the arts as more than a school subject but as a means of self-expression and a catalyst to careers. A Charlotte native, he attended West Charlotte High School before receiving his degree in illustration at UNCC.

As a kid, he never planned to be a teacher but credits his high school art instructor, James Dawkins, with putting him on that path.

"He was very influential and inspired me to go to college," says Mr. Steele. Now, it's his turn to inspire others who might not see the arts as a potential career.

While working on his

master's degree, Mr. Steele, who is African American, learned that many students of color don't consider pursuing visual arts careers, partly because they have not been exposed to many African American artists or teachers in the field. A key component of his teaching practice has become helping all students understand that art is for anyone who wants to pursue it, regardless of one's race or background.

Recently, during a unit exploring renowned Charlotte-born artist Romare Bearden's work, students created collages showing career opportunities in the arts – like makeup artists or fashion designers. Such projects help kids connect

what they're learning to their future possibilities.

He recommends aspiring artists take as many art courses as possible in high school and college and start building a strong support group for once they finish school.

"They shouldn't be afraid to explore new ideas," says Mr. Steele, "and should seek as many artistic opportunities outside of school as they can."

Luckily for his students, Mr. Steele is already showing them the way.

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