

HEALTHY OWL TIMES

VOLUME 5, NUMBER 2

SPRING 2026

Using music to start conversations

Elle.Morris, a member of the hip-hop group ILL DOOTS, can't remember a time when she wasn't singing.

"I've been singing longer than talking. I didn't talk until I was five years old," said Elle.Morris, who adds a period between her first and last name. Music is where "I feel the most understood, heard, and seen. It's my favorite way of communicating."

Communicating is a passion she shares with her bandmates. In an interview with *Healthy Owl Times* reporters, members of the ILL DOOTS shared what makes music special to them and why they believe musical experiences are important to everyone's mental and physical health.



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Illustration by Kennedy Diggs

Discovering the health benefits of art

Art is not only beautiful to look at, it also has benefits for your mental and physical health, according to an expert at the Barnes Foundation.

"Art is therapeutic. It gives you time to de-stress your body and take a breather," said Ms. Diamond Gray. "It's a nice way to be with yourself."

Ms. Gray is the pre-K to 12 program specialist at the Barnes. She gives tours to students in grades pre-K to 2 of both special exhibition and permanent collections. She also develops in-school science and math-based art projects for students in fifth grade.

In an interview with fifth-grade *Healthy Owl Times* reporters, Ms. Gray described how she grew up loving art and in high school was introduced to print-

making by her art teacher, Traci Mims, who is a master printmaker and visual artist. The expertise, dedication, and guidance by Ms. Mims motivated Ms. Gray to do the same for other students, which led her into the world of arts and museum education.

Art can connect you with others by "creating pictures about someone for them or their family," said Ms. Gray. You can also find people with the same interests and make the same type of art or use similar materials.

Albert Barnes started The Barnes Foundation in 1922 in Merion, Pennsylvania, and Ms. Gray spoke

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Music can lead to good friendships

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Scott Ziegler called music “my purpose. It feels good and nourishing to do what you’re supposed to be doing.” Added Jordan McCree, music “gives me life—even if it’s just a half hour of the day.” Anthony Martinez-Briggs loves that music allows him to “share the warmth” of a good feeling.

Rooted in hip-hop, the ILL DOOTS play a variety of music, including funk and soul. It’s all a way to connect with their audiences. When people come to a concert, the ILL DOOTS want them to feel as though they were simply talking with friends at a bus stop.

“The effort we make to connect with an audience is how we just connect with anyone when we’re not on stage,” said Anthony, the lead vocalist, whose stage name is US.

“Music ... allows me to take that stuck feeling and get it out,” says Anthony Martinez-Briggs

“We use our music to start conversations.,” he continued. “Moving into the audience, singing closer to someone, leading them in singing something. I want you to feel like I see and hear you. Like

I’m talking to you.”

People in the audience can also bond through their shared experience of hearing the music and feeling the rhythm and beats, the group members said.

Scott, Jordan, and Anthony founded the band while they were students at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia. They’ve been creating music since 2009.

Their resume includes four studio albums, countless mixtapes, and six national tours. Each group member shares the responsibilities of musician, producer, writer, and performer.

The ILL in their name stands for I Love Living/I Love Learning, and DOOTS is a nod to two of their musical influences: Dilla and The Roots. The name reflects what they care about: social justice advocacy, being culturally relevant, and teaching art to others. Through creating music, working together, and touring together, they have a special unity, said Scott, who plays bass.

Anthony said music has helped the group work through feelings. Have you ever had a feeling “get stuck in your stomach or in your chest?” he asked. “Music ... allows me to take that stuck feeling and get it out. Expressing it makes me not feel stuck anymore.”



The members of the ILL DOOTS from left to right: Elle.Morris, Scott Ziegler, Anthony Martinez-Briggs, and Jordan McCree

Scott said music helps him tune into the rhythm of his day. “I have an accurate internal clock,” he said, “because I’m always keeping time and music is always running in the background for me.” And being in rhythm, he said, helps him “make healthier choices.”

The benefits they see in music are also described by some health experts. Music can have “major effects on many aspects of health, ranging from memory and mood to cardiovascular [heart system] function and athletic performance,” according to a 2021 article on the Harvard Health website that cited several studies.

Jordan summed it all up: With music in his day, he said, “I feel fulfilled like a bunch of Thanksgiving dinners.” —By *Healthy Owl Times* reporters

Healthy Owl Times

The *Healthy Owl Times* is a publication of Inquiry Charter School, which is part of the Belmont Charter Network. Fifth-grade staff members from the Hearts class include Logan Anthony, Moirei Bartley, Zafeera Bint-James, Rylei Brown-Kosia, Maximiliano Fernandez, Marlee Hames-Nesmith, Blake Marks, Taron McPhaul, Mason Mendoza, Karsen Simmons, Egypt Smith, Alaya Thomas, and Mahdi Wimley.

Reporters in the Skeletons class include Josiah Allen, Mariam Baker, Kaylianna Davenport, Kennedy Diggs, Imani Dixon, Kaylee Elmore-Nesbitt, Kareem Gardner, Mali Groce, Amirah’le Harmon, Ni’Ke Simmons-Mitchell, and Emanee Smith.

The *Healthy Owl Times*’ faculty advisors are Ms. Kelly Walsh and Ms. Alisa Footes and Inquiry Charter’s head of school is Ms. Claire Cohen.

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Doing or observing art has benefits

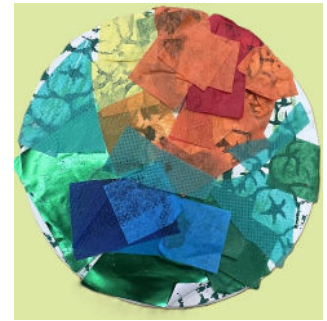
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about his background and why art was so important to him. Barnes, a medical doctor, was born in 1872. His father had lost an arm in the American Civil War and ended up taking a variety of jobs to support his family. Dr. Barnes eventually attended the University of Pennsylvania where he pursued a career in medicine.

According to barnesfoundation.org, Dr. Barnes became a successful pharmacologist and co-invented an antiseptic and made enough money that he was able to collect art. The Barnes Foundation now displays his art collection in Philadelphia.

Collecting art, according to Ms. Gray, helped Dr. Barnes connect with people. She said that even though he had a “rough childhood,” his love of art affected him in many positive ways. He established his first gallery as a place where students in the Philadelphia area could come and learn about art appreciation. He believed this was an important part of education, especially for students growing up the way he did.

Ms. Gray said that if visual art—paintings, drawings, and sculpture—isn’t for you, look at other art forms and see if you connect with those. Examples include stories, poetry, music, and dance. You could



Reporters created wearable badges called “New Worlds” as part of their research into the Lenni-Lenape People. They used leaf rubbings and recyclable materials. The badges above were created by Mali Groce (left) and Max Fernandez.

also look at visual art from various artists and time periods to see if one of those interests you. There is so much art to see.

“Making and consuming art benefits your mental and physical health,” said Ms. Gray. It’s a therapeutic process that helps you relax, allows you to connect with people by working together, and calms your mind. A lot of the time, we’re rushing around to school, work, and time with people, but “art can calm you down.”

—By *Healthy Owl Times* reporters

Cub Corner

Book review: *Why kindness matters*

Bernice Gets Carried Away

Written and illustrated by Hannah E. Harrison

Bernice goes to a birthday party on a gloomy day that matches her mood. Nothing seems to be going her way and she feels left out. When the balloons come out, Bernice grabs them all but they carry her up into the air. When she reaches the clouds, she looks down and sees that her problems are so small. She starts handing out balloons and her mood changes from gloomy to bright and sunny.

First-grade readers in Ms. Amanda Ehrhardt's class said they enjoyed this

book. They said the author wants people to treat people kindly.

The illustrations in the book are helpful because the weather changes as Bernice's mood changes.

Most of the students said they enjoyed the book because the story was short but taught a good lesson about being kind. Even when you're having a bad day, it can turn around.

This book would be good for all Inquiry students. Even if you feel like this book is too young for you, it still has an important lesson that everyone can relearn.

Cub Corner

Learning to appreciate others

The Invisible Boy

Written by Trudy Ludwig

Illustrated by Patrice Barton

The Invisible Boy is a great story for teaching empathy, say second-grade readers in Ms. Tara Quinn's class. The main character, Brian, feels invisible and alone. The kids in his class leave him out of games and birthday parties and he really dislikes going to lunch when everyone sits together.

When a new student, Justin, comes to class, he notices that Brian is an excellent artist and they start to become friends. It starts to inspire other children to be kind and notice him as well.

Students in Ms. Tara's class appreciated how the illustrations show how Brian changes as the story goes on. At first, he's

drawn with just a pencil line showing that he feels invisible, but as he starts to be noticed and appreciated, the illustrator slowly adds color to him.

Almost all the students said they enjoyed the book because they thought it helped teach them about empathy.

Empathy means to understand how someone else feels. Two students said that the book made them sad, because it made them remember how it feels to be lonely and left out.



Illustrations by Healthy NewsWorks reporters at Philadelphia Hebrew Public Charter (above) and MaST Community Charter School (left)

After reading the book, students talked about how a good friend notices what makes you special and spent time sharing what they appreciated about each other. After this, students said that it made them happy and important to hear the nice things about themselves.

This would be a great book for teachers to use in their classrooms to teach students how to be a good friend.