



The Harrisonburg High School Fine Arts Academy, developed and implemented in 2013, is an interdisciplinary, collaborative, and experiential learning community that prepares students for a lifelong career, passion, and/or appreciation of creativity through the arts. The curriculum, built around the value of learning and understanding through the lens of the community, is also designed to ensure individual student growth. Critical thinking and advanced problem solving is demanded from each student through their development of creative intensity. Students are accepted into the academy through an audition process as an 8th or 9th grade student. Students may choose to audition in five strand areas: Visual Art, Movement, Drama, Music, or Creative Writing. In addition to auditioning in their strand, students interview with faculty discussing their interests, ideas, and inspirations in all art forms to ensure students value multiple disciplines. Six teachers, each bringing an expertise to the community, teach collaboratively, in concert and individually, to bring the curriculum alive to the students. In addition to their community learning class, students are required to study in their specific art strand to develop their craft. Assessment is based on an artistry rubric, developed by students and staff, used to encourage emotional creativity, risk, revision, and quality. This is all done through a sequential four-year program that is taught collaboratively focusing on fundamentals, history, culture, and community arts project based learning.

Year One offers students the opportunity to learn about specific fundamentals in each strand area, and study the cross-curricular building blocks of creativity and art. Examples include line, shape, form, structure, color, and intensity to name a few. All students engage in all strands through experiential learning to grasp an understanding of these interdisciplinary concepts. Students are challenged to create artistic representations of each of these fundamentals and given diverse limitations to ensure personal risk and growth.

Years Two and Three offer students the opportunity to study history and culture through the lens of artistry. Historical art, artists, and events are presented in deep context to learn not only about the art itself, but also about the world the art lived. Students are able to use this perspective in academic history classes and are encouraged to make connections outside of the academy. The cultural curriculum not only focuses on world cultures of art, but also personal cultures of fear, improvisation, technology, and failure, to help students gain access to their personal story through an examination of others.



Year Four in the Academy offers our most mature students the opportunity to develop capstone community arts projects. Armed with their knowledge, capacity, and passion for learning, students are given three areas of focus: creation over replication, community connections, and collaboration. Teachers become facilitators and guides as the students brainstorm, build, create, and implement projects. Creativity and collegiate preparation pepper the curriculum, while students spend half of their year planning these projects, and the second half implementing them.

In addition, students are expected throughout the four years to attend concerts, exhibits, field trips, guest artist lectures, and individual artistic performance showcases. Our partnerships with James Madison University, The Arts Council of the Valley, the Virginia Commission for the Arts, and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, offer students the opportunity to engage with artists in short-term and long-term residencies during their time in the Academy. Finally, an emphasis is placed on continuing the development of their art in the greater community, to ensure that their growth and work are not limited to the four walls of our community classroom.

The Fine Arts Academy at Harrisonburg High School provides a vast, in-depth study of the creative arts in ways that other secondary schools do not. The intentionality in development of the program ensures a diverse and unique curriculum that is not found in a regular arts or performance classroom. We believe that our students leaving the Harrisonburg Fine Arts Academy are more prepared for 21st century learning principles and ready to engage in the sharing of those principles with future collaborators in their next artistic and life endeavors.