

Go Ahead, Paint The Walls!

An artist shares his passion for murals with students



Timm Etters helps Taylor Merwin paint a mural at her school, in Aurora, Illinois.

WHEN ARTIST TIMM ETTERS was in third grade, doctors told him he was color-blind. Yet his murals vibrate with color and energy. When he was 16, he was diagnosed with cancer. Now 39, he is still going strong. At about the time of his cancer diagnosis, Etters was caught painting graffiti on a bridge. He still creates art on public property, but now he does it legally and gets paid for it. More than 270 of Etters's murals adorn the walls of schools, businesses, banks and sports arenas throughout Illinois.

It takes Etters about four weeks to create a mural. He sketches an idea, refines it on the computer and then uses an airbrush and spray gun to paint it on a wall.

When Etters was a teen, he started spray-painting on buildings and bridges. What he did was wrong, but he justified his actions by saying his murals had positive

messages. After decorating a bridge with a mural dedicated to Vietnam veterans, Etters got caught. A sympathetic police officer and a high school principal gave Etters a creative punishment: Paint a mural in the school cafeteria.

"It wasn't much of a punishment at all," recalls Etters. "I realized how much I loved working on such a large scale, and found what I wanted to do for the rest of my life."

As part of the Fresh A.I.R. (Artist in Residence) Program, in Illinois, Etters visits schools to teach kids about art. In 13 years, he has visited more than 130 schools. "The first thing I tell kids is not to paint bridges," he says. "If they are interested in [creating] murals, they can do all that in a notebook or on canvas." Etters inspires young artists through his teaching, his determination to overcome obstacles and, most importantly, his art.

—By Machaela Jensen

TIME FOR KIDS
DEAR TFK

Dear TFK,

It is sad to learn about what poor children in India are going through ["Can India Save Its Working Kids?" 2/1]. I'm glad that there are people who are trying to end child labor.

Jenna K., 10
California

The next time Seth Levy goes on a trip, he should check his suitcase for his cat first ["Missing-Cat Caper," 2/1]. I'm glad that Gracie Mae is okay.

Jennifer W., 10
Pennsylvania

It's cool how choreographer Stephen Mear used Heelys to make the actors look like they are swimming onstage in Broadway's *The Little Mermaid* ["A Mermaid's Tale," 2/1]. I'm really excited to see it.

Lauren F., 10
Texas

Jordan Romero is a brave 11-year-old ["Heading to the Top of the World," 2/1]. I hope that he succeeds in climbing Mount Everest. Keep following your dreams, Jordan!

Sarkis M., 10
California



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