



ALBANY MUSEUM OF ART

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SIXTY STUDENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS AT AMA

Workshop on Race Is a Collaboration of AMA, Civil Rights Institute, Dougherty School System and Deerfield-Windsor

[For Release Sept 5, 2018 – Albany, GA] — In today’s socially turbulent times, race and racism are particularly sensitive topics. At a workshop Friday at the Albany Museum of Art, about 60 students from the Dougherty County School System and Deerfield-Windsor School will engage in *Courageous Conversations About Race*.

The program from 8:30 am until 1 pm is a collaboration of the AMA, the Albany Civil Rights Institute (ACRI), Deerfield-Windsor (DWS) and the Dougherty School System (DCSS). It aims to create understanding and provide open communication in a safe, neutral environment. The AMA conducted the first *Courageous Conversations About Race* on Feb 17, 2018, with about 100 youth and adults from the community participating. Friday’s event is tailored for high school students.

Facilitators for the workshop are Gloria J. Wilson, Ph.D., an assistant professor in the Department of Art Education for Virginia Commonwealth University, and Sara Scott Shields, Ph.D. an assistant professor of Art Education at Florida State University.

Gracie Swan, a Deerfield-Windsor senior who participated in the February session, says she believes it is important for her and her peers to engage in this type of conversation.

“I feel like it’s really important for our age group, specifically because we’re about to go out into the world, whether it be college, work or just out on our own journey,” she said Tuesday. “We’re the next generation of people who are making this new change.”

With the political, social and racial divisions today, she said, it’s important to engage thoughtfully with one another “even if these conversations don’t lead to complete agreement, just to have a better understanding.”

Frank Wilson, executive director of the ACRI, said, "I think conversation itself is an art form and there's no place better to have it than here at the museum. I think it's always good to be able to talk about race in a very open, non-threatening atmosphere."

"This conversation is one that needs to be had. At the Civil Rights Institute, we feel it's a part of what we do because it's important that we stay open and not fight with each other about race. It's OK to have an opinion about race as long as you have a conversation about it."

Chloe Hinton, director of education and public programming for the AMA, said the museum provides a "neutral territory" where students can openly discuss their views.

"I think the museum provides a safe place to do that," Hinton said. "Museums are open to ideas. They're open to people being able to express themselves freely, and that's why we take pride in being able to have this conversation here."

"Everybody, especially when they're dealing with difficult topics, likes to feel they're in an environment where they won't be judged, where what they have to say matters. The only way you can have these conversations is to create that safe space."

Debbie Allen, a high school English teacher at DWS who attended the February session, agreed that the setting is important in facilitating an open conversation.

"I think bringing it back with a mixture of all the Dougherty County schools and students—including us—maybe creates a common ground and creates a familiarity where they'll understand we're all students in the same place, that we all have the same problems, that we all need to have the same conversations," she said of the workshop.

Having a location like the AMA "creates this freedom of expression where the kids are not afraid to speak out or even have the conversation with each other," Allen said.

Conducting the workshop at a school would make visiting students uncomfortable, she said. "Here we allow this common ground. Everybody is equal. Everybody is fair. Everybody is listening," Allen said.

J.D. Sumner, spokesman for the DCSS, said the workshop has multiple benefits for students and the community.

"Anytime we can expose our kids to things that are new and different but also a way to interject certain conversations into their lives, this is the way we want to go about doing it, through partnerships within our local community," Sumner said. "The art museum has always been a great partner for the school system."

"This is an important time for our students to talk candidly about different things like race, culture and how all these things mix together. This will be a great way to do that through the context of art. This is a great way to bridge two things together—the social aspects of our world right now and these conversations, and art that otherwise cannot be seen."

The Albany Museum of Art, located in Albany, Georgia, adjacent to Albany State University West Campus just off Gillionville Road is accredited by the American Alliance of Museums. The Albany Museum of Art is open 10 am through 5 pm Tuesday through Friday and noon until 5 pm on Saturday. Admission is free.

For more information about the AMA please visit our website, www.albanymuseum.com or call 229.439.8400.

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