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Students Connect With Kenyans Through The Art Of Mask Making

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High School students in Manhattan are making friends with their peers in Kenya in an ambitious project. NY1's Cheryl Willis filed the following report.

Every Thursday at half past noon, eleventh grade students enter their classrooms at Eleanor Roosevelt High School and they focus their energies on making masks.

The program is called the Kiboko Project. Students create their own masks using gauze and compound and exchange them with Kenyan students. It's a hands-on experience where students put their best face forward to share with counterparts halfway around the world.

Student Lelia Ledain says it's the best part of her school day.

"I'm so happy, because I think it's really important to get to know another culture," she says.

"They have misperceptions about us just as we have misperceptions of them, and this is a transforming experience for these students," says Jill Raufman, Executive Director of Kiboko Projects.

There is a mask from Kenya on display at Eleanor Roosevelt High School. Students say they've been able to bond with students that they've never met, yet feel so close to.

"I just think we can learn a lot about each other," says student John Christin.

And they do because the American students also film everything they do, as do the Kenyans.

"They're learning about students concerns over there. They are learning how different they are and how much they have in common," says art teacher Michael Stoltz.

One of those common concerns is AIDS. The Kenyan students told stories of how AIDS is ravaging their communities.

"They are just so devastated by the entire AIDS crisis that it makes you want to be able to do something, but we can't really help," says student Caitlin Masline. "There is no cure for it, and I just wish there was something we could do, but we can't."

But the one thing they are doing is reaching across the globe and lending an ear, hoping one day they'll be able to lend a hand.

- Cheryl Willis

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