

Hopkins Hill schoolchildren install their peace art piece

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Hopkins Hill Elementary School second-, third-, and fourth-graders participated in Sunday's United Nation's International Peace Day Monday by making pinwheels with messages and images of peace on them and then planting them in the school's front garden

BY HANNAH CLARKIN

COVENTRY — Gusts of wind swept across the parking lot at Hopkins Hill Elementary School in Coventry on Monday as second-grade students filed out of the building. Carrying brightly colored pinwheels that stood out against the muted tones of the overcast day, the students listened as Lauren Burke, a student teacher from Rhode Island College, told them how to plant their pinwheels in the front garden.

Mounted on yellow pencils, the hand-made pinwheels were sealed in place with peace stickers. In yellow, gold, blue, and green, the paper wheels were decorated with student drawings of the meaning of peace on one side and their own words to describe peace on the other.

To second-grade students, according to a sampling of the messages, peace means “being nice,” “getting along,” “silence and calm,” “petting my dog,” “getting a big cookie,” “when my brothers get along,” “being happy” — and a litany of other things.

Art teacher Sarah Hemendinger and Burke collaborated to lead second-, third-, and fourth-grade students at Hopkins Hill in their participation with the international art and literacy project, Hemendinger said.

Started in 2005 by two art teachers in Florida, Pinwheels for Peace is a way for students to express their feelings about what is going on in the world and in their lives, Hemendinger said. Sept. 21 is the United Nation's International Peace Day, she added.

Last year, more than 1.2 million pinwheels were spinning in over 2,500 locations, Hemendinger said, including the United States, Europe, Asia, Australia, Canada, the Middle East, Africa and South America.

The project is meant to be non-political, Hemendinger said. “Peace doesn't necessarily have to be associated with the conflict of war; it can be related to violence or intolerance in our daily

lives and to peace of mind.”

To her, Burke said as she instructed students to sit still and wait their turn to tell about what peace means to them, peace means “listening to one another.”

As the front garden prickled with spinning pinwheels, freshly planted, Hemendinger said, “imagine, whirled peace.”