

## **A Cape Cod Technical Vocational High School Art Educator, Jenn Reed, travels to Florence, Italy. 2025**

Thanks to the generous contribution from The Westgate Fund, I was able to travel to Florence, Italy—the birthplace of the Renaissance—to attend an intensive Art as Therapy course at the Europass Teacher Academy. Attending the course and traveling to Italy was an incredibly fulfilling experience for me as an artist and an art educator dedicated to student well-being. The course was a combination of lectures and a deep, experiential dive into therapeutic art practices and practical exercises, focusing on actionable strategies for all students, as well as those who struggle with anxiety. We engaged in hands-on, therapeutic art-making exercises ourselves, learning to utilize materials and processes—from intuitive mark-making to mandalas—as tools for emotional regulation and stress reduction. We explored and discussed what our students face that is different from what we faced at their age. We shared and reflected that anxiety among students is a global issue, rather than one specific to a particular country.

Taking this course immersed me in a dynamic, global exchange of ideas, conversation, and support with educators from around the world, each of us sharing our common challenge of supporting growing numbers of students with neurodiversity, anxiety, and apathy.

Our main objective was to understand, experience, and personalize exercises that could be immediately integrated into our classrooms and benefit our students. Beyond the formal program, I had the privilege of enjoying outstanding cuisine and touring historic sites, such as the Tower of Pisa, the Uffizi Gallery, and the Accademia, which provided a profound context for my understanding of Italy's art and history. Seeing the art of Michelangelo and the vast collection of Renaissance art was a powerful reminder of art's inherent capacity for communication and healing. The experience reaffirmed my commitment to teaching art not just as a skill, but as vital to society, emotional expression, and well-being.

Finally, the collection of resources and exercises I brought back is invaluable. Just a few examples include exercises for mindful drawing and collage, which use texture and repetition to anchor students in the present moment. I also gathered strategies for getting students to collaborate, draw inspiration from nature, and process their thoughts through reflection. A key resource I gathered from taking this course is a collection of mindful activities designed to be brief and help students transition into creating art, as well as reduce anxiety at the beginning of a class. These exercises encourage immediate and intuitive creativity, helping to set the tone for the rest of the class period. This entire journey re-energized my teaching and provided me with the space to reflect and recharge so that I could return in September to create a more supportive, responsive, and healing environment in my art classroom at Cape Cod Regional High School for my students. I am deeply grateful to the Westgate Fund for providing the grant that made this experience possible and the opportunity it has afforded. Thank you. Jenn Reed Westgate Grant Recipient 2025

Studio space within Palazzo degli Albizi-1376. Palazzo Albizzi is a historic building in Florence, Tuscany.



In this photo I am creating neurographic art focused on who I am. I did this with students at the beginning of the year.



Mindful exercise. Drawing from nature in Giardino delle Rose( Garden of Roses).



Thirteen educators from around the world gathered to make art , collaborate and learn.





View from Piazzale Michelangelo overlooking the historic center of Florence, Italy



Michelangelo's famous statue of David is located in the Galleria dell'Accademia in Florence, Italy. 1501-1504.