

Meet the Artists

Karen Riley

Make a difference. Karen Riley believes that we can improve the world by cultivating creative solutions involving art and environmentalism. Karen, the Executive Director and founder of the S.C.R.A.P. Gallery (Student Creative Recycle Art Program) leads a high impact environmental arts education program. Working primarily with recycled and reused materials, her body of work includes collage, assemblage and mosaic.

“Art is a very powerful tool that everyone should have access to. Connecting your hands and mind to paper, clay, cardboard or whatever medium to communicate is a unique and whole human experience. Sharing this opportunity with students is truly rewarding for me!”



James Coats

James Coats is an award-winning author, poet and educator from Southern California. As a creative change agent, he believes the arts can inspire the youth and influence positive change in the world. Four-time San Bernardino County Poetry Out Loud Judge and three-time Riverside County Teen Poet Laureate Judge. He is the winner of the 2021 San Gabriel Poetry Slam, and has been featured nationally. You can find him attending poetry readings throughout California or follow his poetry via his Instagram @MrLovingWords. He became the Artist in Residence at The Garcia Center for the Arts in 2022. Additionally, you can take a poetry workshop with him through his organization Lift Our Voices Education which hosts an award-winning workshop monthly called Be The Change: Social Justice Writing Workshop. He also has four poetry collections: If I had Lived published in 2018, All The Ways You Are Wonderful in 2020, and Home Is A Voice in 2022. His newest poetry collection Midnight & Mad Dreams published by World Stage Press, released in 2022. He is a 2023 Poetry Pushcart Prize nominee.

"I believe in poetry's ability to inspire and influence positive change; that's what I try to bring to these community schools, a safe place for creative self-expression, where students can investigate their experiences and build empathetic connections with each other, it is truly a transformative gift that means everything to me."



David Ricks

David Ricks has been dancing and teaching for nearly twenty years. He is experienced in all age groups and setting, with the unique ability to connect and communicate. David puts people at ease and helps them began to use their bodies effectively to communicate stories, ideas and emotions. Though David has performed countless times, featured in videos, and is a force behind local community dance events, his highest calling and legacy is teaching dance to young people.

“One of the things I enjoy most about teaching is helping people discover their artistic voice through movement. Helping others find the courage to be themselves and have fun while doing it, is a pleasure. I think that being in the court and community settings is exciting because the youth light up, relax and enjoy themselves without worrying about what anyone else thinks. Dance has a unique way of bringing joy to any situation. Being the one who brings that joy and shares it is the coolest thing about teaching. We find joy together!”

