





## **soda studies: materiality, agency, and collaboration**

Beginning in late summer and continuing into winter 2023, Hannah Jickling and Reed H. Reed of Big Rock Candy Mountain engaged grade 5 and 6 students at Robert Service School on Tr'ondëk Hwëch' in traditional territory (Dawson City) in an extended project examining processes and materials involved in making bottles of soda. After briefly critiquing industrial manufacture, and in the context of collaborative art making, students entered into multiple facets of small-scale soda production.

The grade 5 students worked together with the grade 6 students, sharing classroom space. Kids collaborated with adults, and teachers and community experts joined in. Local sources of flavour were foraged and tasted with Kiki Barua (aka Öllis). Fran Morberg-Green made herbal teas with the students. Giulia Cecchi, one of the Hän language teachers at the school, translated local plant names into Hän. A tincture was made; glass bottles were designed and manufactured; a gallery exhibition was mounted; and a celebratory community dinner was hosted, to name just some of the activities.

Each student designed a glass soda bottle. Their drawings were sent to glassblower Jesse Bromm of Goodbeast Studios in Vancouver who produced bottles according to the students' designs. What could be more thrilling? Students also were given the opportunity to make small, precious glass objects with hands-on support from Luann Baker-Johnson and Mel Johnson of Lumel Studios, glassblowers based in Whitehorse.

Students began to think about materials in expanded ways. They became aware that objects have a history, that bottles have evolved over the last century. Products that we take for granted are painstakingly designed. Flavours are made from plants! Thinking, research, and drawings can be the origin of an object. Through hands-on work, students learned that artists and designers shape our daily lives.

Soda Studies granted agency to students. Often art instruction in elementary school is focused on outcomes (known in advance) and on formal concerns (line, shape, colour, texture). Art instruction is often isolated from central questions of materials, communities, and politics, and is often rooted in a formalist model of art that is decades old. In contrast, Soda Studies was all about exploration, experimentation, and the senses. Hannah and Reed set some parameters within which students worked (and played!) freely, enthusiastically, and collaboratively. Soda Studies was about process. It was a shared journey of discovery.

**In late August, about 25 students walk the dusty boardwalk down 5th Avenue then up the steps to the Dawson City Museum. Inside, they mill about the collection of century-old objects.**

**In a back room at the museum, students make drawings of historic bottles using only their sense of touch--reaching into a paper bag to feel an unseen bottle, pencil in the other hand.**

*I think that the glass Bloing was a 1 time opportunity as a kid ... You can worck together. It's hard to come by a big art project as a kid you should spend your time preciously make it worth it.*  
~Louphil

*What I liked about the project is that we explored different kinds of art in terms of cooking, designing bottles, learning about different types of plants and what benefits they have and even when we did our own glass blowing.*  
~Sarahanne

*I felt amazed by going out to the museum also the art gallery was special ... The experience was Incredible. We had so much to do.*

~James

*Dawson City Museum: Poison, Diseases, Rudimentary Surgical Devices, Explosives, Old Chainsaws, Glass Eyeballs; Bring your tweens!*

~Craig (grade 6 teacher)

**In the classroom, grade 5 and 6 students gather to listen to a slide talk by Hannah and Reed, introducing them to contemporary artists who have critiqued the concept of branding and have made glass bottles. Students learn that small-batch soda-making can allow more flavours (and experimentation) than large-scale industrial production.**

*drawing the bottles was fun.*

~Abel

*We learned that some bottles have rounded bottoms!*

~Nico

*You feel differently towards the world when you make things.*

~Milton Glaser (1929-2020), American graphic designer

*my favourite part of the Soda Project was glass blowing because I made a bird.*

~Ollie



**In the school metalworking shop, a portable glass blowing furnace has been set up by Lumel Studios of Whitehorse. Under the guidance of two professional glass blowers, students learn how to turn molten glass into colourful shapes—birds, marbles, and paper weights.**

*The most exciting part was glass sculpting because it was interesting seeing how things are made.*

*~Sam*

*I liked drawing the bottles because I got to use my imagination.*

*~Khloe*

*The bottle unveiling was Exiteing and cool.*

*~Rylan*

*I wanna be buried with my bottle.*

*~Colm*

*When I was opening my bottle I was very excited my heart was pumping very fast and I reached in the Brown packing paper and I pulled out my bottle and I opened another one for my lid and it looked like a bubble. When they put it out in the gallery it really stood out because it had red nerds in the lid. I love this experience so much!*  
~Taliyah

*A dear friend once said to me that if your goal is to make 'art' then you are going down the wrong path.*  
~Jeffrey (educational assistant)

*In the olden days blue bottles contained Poison!! Don't trust blue bottles!*  
~Nico

*To understand Soda Studies you need to first imagine a blender made of pure joy filled with treats, vibrant art supplies and endless opportunity—then blend until frothy and contagious, but drink immediately so you can maybe get seconds.*  
~Craig (grade 6 teacher)

**In the home economics room with Bo, students learn to make Boba. Donning aprons and chef's hats, they take the work of flavour design seriously, but within an atmosphere of fun and excitement. Smoothies of many flavours are made. Using fat glass straws, they taste the Boba with its magical flavour beads.**

*I liked the boba because evrey body works together.  
...kids have big imaginations.*  
~Piper

*What a joy to see everyone have a taste of Boba magic!  
Smoothie operators concocted some iconic tasting  
flavours to pair with the BoBas.*  
~ Bo (high school foods teacher)

*The boba tasted sooooo yuuuumy.*  
~Colm

*Top Secret: The Godess Shake, extra sugar.*  
~Tyson

*Art doesn't go to sleep in the bed made for it. It would sooner run away than say its own name: what it likes is to be incognito. Its best moments are when it forgets what its own name is.*

~Jean Dubuffet (1901-1985), French painter and sculptor

*I was suprized how well done our bottles turned out but I wasne't suprized we had fun!*

~Nico

*The time that when Fran came and showed us the tea and she gave us some of the tea to taste.*

~Dezy

**Fran Morberg-Green lays out a series of mason jars, each containing different locally harvested plants: sprucetip, rose petal, raspberry leaf, juniper, fireweed, labrador, and highbush cranberry. While they brew in hot water, Fran teaches the group about the healing properties of each plant. At the end of the session we taste each tea, plus an iced tea blend mixed with lemon and honey.**

*Fun fact in the 1800s blue bottles were Poison.*

~Sam

*Making the boba because it was really fun.*

~Rudy

*I relized how important sight is and I am gifted.*

~Quinn

*For me, it was the opening of 'presents' at the museum + KIAC, it was so exciting.*

~Bridget (educational assistant)

*I Love macking Boba soo fun. I learn that Boba is hard to make.*

~Jack



**On a cold, sunny winter afternoon, students walk on icy streets to the Typhoid Graveyard at the north end of town where they meet Ollis, a forest dweller, who teaches them how to find and harvest cramp bark (highbush cranberry). Later, in the classroom, Ollis demonstrates how to make a tincture using the bark, another potential soda flavour.**

*Is Ollis real or are we in a crazy dream where they kidnap us to look for \*Cramp Bark\*?*

~Sarahanne

*I like drawing.*

~Aaliyah

*Everyone is an artist!*

~Jaimie (grade 5 teacher)

*Are we getting paid?*

[on hearing about a planned gallery exhibition of the second edition of students' bottles]

~Abel

*I'm going to enter like it's a catwalk!*

[on hearing about the upcoming community dinner at KIAC]

~Colm

*I loved making the boba it was yumy.*

~Steven

*Boba is delicious.*

~Hank

*What?! Glass is made of sand? I thought that was in Minecraft only!*

~Tyson

**In late November, students sample locally-made birch syrup. Sylvia Frisch, of Uncle Berwyn's Yukon Birch Syrup, visits the classroom and teaches students about the process of making syrup, from tree biology, to tapping trees, to boiling sap. Tasting samples, they discover that early-, mid-, and late-season syrups have distinctive flavours. They consider the possibility of birch-flavoured soda.**

*these are where the tastebuds are on the tongue: salty,  
sweet, sour, umami, bitter.*

~Isaiah

*To pay attention, this is our endless and proper work.*

~Mary Oliver (1935-2019), American poet

*Wene we made the boba it was one of the cool  
expereanses out of all the amazing expereanses in my life  
so fare so thanks for all the cool things.*

~Isaiah

*I wanna drink it so bad.*

[on seeing a bottle of artist-made soda in the ODD Gallery]

~Sam

Jeffrey Langille wrote this text as well as collected and assembled the student's quotes on the occasion of SODA STUDIES, a 4-month engagement between Hannah Jickling & Reed H. Reed of Big Rock Candy Mountain and the grade 5/6 students of Robert Service School. Curated & supported by Tara Rudnikas at the ODD Gallery.

## **HANNAH JICKLING + REED H. REED - PINKING INDEX**

ODD Gallery, Dawson City, Yukon

October 19 – December 1, 2023

Initiated by Reed H. Reed and Hannah Jickling, BIG ROCK CANDY MOUNTAIN is an artist-run taste-making think-tank where artists and children explore themes such as: pop aesthetics and marketing; kids and capitalism; adult/child power relations; food security and the dynamics of an international economy. Within public education, Big Rock Candy Mountain proposes the school as a kind of candy factory. At Hät'r'unohtän zho/Robert Service School specifically, artists and children ask – Who decides the ingredients of soda, the shape of its bottles, the persuasion of its advertising and the after-life of its waste?

As such, this is an exhibition of leftovers – warmed up, re-processed and transformed. Subjected to pressure and heat – plastic, foil, glass, textiles, wood and paper are revealed differently. Shifting in states – between gallery and classroom – these works aim to process the sensory noise of collaborative experiences. Zig-zagging is a method for moving in and out of contexts. As material form, it is enabled by pinking shears and horizontal flow wrapper systems that produce our food packaging in enormous quantities. In the making of this show the artists wondered how a small place like Dawson could impress itself upon the mass-produced materials that arrive here in a constant stream. An hours-worth of garbage picking on Robert Service School grounds – inked and indexed.

**HANNAH JICKLING** and **REED H. REED** have been collaborating since 2006. Their projects take shape as public installations, social situations and events that circulate as photographs, videos, printed-matter and artists' multiples. They have facilitated many collaborative research projects with children, most notably Big Rock Candy Mountain (2015–ongoing).

Born in Ontario, **JEFFREY LANGILLE** now lives in Dawson City. He studied art history, attended film school in Vancouver, and holds an MFA from Simon Fraser University. He began filmmaking in the '90s using super-8, editing film on his kitchen table. His practice has retained this connection to materiality, including work with tape loops, analog synthesizers, and 16mm film.

The artists would like to thank Jesse Bromm of Goodbeast, Tara Rudnickas of the Odd Gallery and Val Loewen of Malaspina Printmakers Society for their major technical, material, and logistical contributions to this exhibition. This project wouldn't have been possible without the collaboration of Craig Hunter & Jaimie Hale at Hätr'unohtän zho/Robert Service School, along with the Grade 5 & 6 students of Dawson: Aaliyah, Abel, Colm, Dezy, Eric, Hank, Isaiah, Jack, Jackson, James, Khloe, Louphil, Lyla, Nico, Oliver, Piper, Quinn, Rudy, Rylan, Sam, Sarah, Steven, Taliyah, Tyson and Ved. Thanks to other school staff: Brendaline DeGuzman, Bridgit Amos, Guilia Cecchi, Nathan Dewell, Peter Menzies, as well as Jeffrey Langille who compiled the accompanying text for this show.

In the lead-up to our SODA STUDIES BOTTLE BLAST event, Bo Yeung, Fran Morberg-Green, Kiki Barua, Sylvia Frisch, and Lu & Mel Johnson of Lumel Studios hosted hands-on workshops with eclectic, drinkable ingredients and hot, molten glass. Thank you to Charles Atlas Sheppard and Liz Charters for feeding so many of us. Many other people contributed to conversations, feedback, documentation and installation support along the way – big appreciation to Amy Ball, Angharad Wenz, Arcane Perry, Aubyn O'Grady, Bob Jickling, Cari Tangedal, Cassandre Gaumont, Chantal Rousseau, Colleen Dunn, Dennis Dunn, Georgia Sauv , Hayden Grace, Maura Doyle, Miriam Behman, Rachel Wieggers, and Ryan O'Donovan.

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