

YWCA Santa Monica / Westside Girl House Art Project

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Girl House Art Project: Over a 10-month period, a diverse group of girls ages 11-13 will explore gender issues, express their findings through art, and empower themselves in the process. Using a small cottage and surrounding area on the YWCA Santa Monica / Westside campus, the girls will create an art environment that reflects their issues and educates the public. The project runs from September 2005 to June 2006.



The fantastic Girl House girls (l to r): Mariah, Leanna, Amanda, Angelica, Cynthia, and Kaitlyn

**“The only tired I was, was tired
of giving up.”**

**Rosa Parks, Civil Rights Activist
1913-2005**

For the Halloween session, the girls learned about the people who were accused of being witches (75-80% of them were women) during the European witch-hunts from about 1400 to the 1700s. Estimates of the number of women killed range from the tens of thousands upward. Among them were the elderly; widowed **women with property (which was confiscated!)**; mentally ill women; and outspoken women who refused to be submissive to the men who held the authority in the community. Men who were persecuted were usually related to the accused women (sons, husbands, etc.).

The girls were asked to think about how the power dynamics in the witch-hunts related to other groups of people who have been persecuted, such as Africans in the slave trade and Jewish people. The girls learned that *whatever the gain -- be it money, status, or power -- one group of people often justifies its oppression of another group by saying that the “other” group is inferior.*

The girls formed teams for a **contest** to see which team had retained the most information about the **witch-hunts**. Each correct answer resulted in an outline (as in a coloring book) of a powerful, kind-looking woman (with a cone-shaped hat) being filled in. Suppressed feminine power was -- in a small way -- reclaimed.

The **art activity** for the session was for the girls to **decorate their own hat** (see photo, left) with beautiful sequins. They could also write on labels the types of women who were accused of practicing witchcraft, and then glue the labels onto the hats.

The new Girl House assistant, Betty Marín, is a University of Berkeley graduate in Peace and Conflict Studies who works part-time at the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC). She lives in Wilmington, has four siblings, enjoys painting portraits, and is interested in combining art with social justice. Betty says, “What drew me to the Girl House Art Project was my belief in the need for spaces where women and girls can learn about their power and share that with each other. There’s nothing more exciting than being able to explore/express that power thru art!”

Recent Girl House Topics/Activities: Playing “human” bingo; creating worry boxes; doing an “Assumptions” exercise; using a microphone to express themselves boldly; defining feminism; learning about Bell Hooks’s thoughts on race and gender; journaling; problem-solving using role-playing; decorating binders; and so much more!



Wonderful Betty Marín, 23, standing in front of the Girl House “art” cottage.

The Girl House Art Project is free to participating girls. Your tax-deductible donation, directed to the Girl House, would be greatly appreciated!