

## Master gourd artist works with local students

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### **Memo:** In a Class of Their Own

Artist Sam White transforms gourds into portals to ancient civilizations. For many of his fans, White's creations connect them with their ancestral roots and kindred spirits.

His revered works of art are in the homes of many collectors including famed attorney Johnnie L. Cochran, Jr., actress/dancer Debbie Allen and poet Maya Angelou. White, also known as Gourd Master Sam X, travels from his Sylvester, Ga., home to art shows, galleries, museums and special events around the world. He gives demonstrations and teaches African culture and history through storytelling.

White made a stop in Bradenton recently to work with students from the Neighborhood Leadership Initiative, a grass-roots organization focusing on education and economic empowerment in Bradenton's black community.

"I met Sam White while traveling around the country and asked him to come teach our children," said Initiative Founder and CEO, **Cynthia Newell**.

"I saw this man with these beautiful gourds, wonderful works of art, that were unbelievable. I had to bring him here."

Gourds are related to squash, melons, cucumbers and pumpkins. Their vines produce a hard-shelled fruit. The inside contains pulp and seeds similar to the pumpkin. The pulp and seeds are cleaned out before the gourd is dried. They have been used as carafes and other practical items for eons.

White is a self-taught gourd master. His work reflects many years of studying African art and culture, slavery and the Middle Passage, the longest, most horrific part of the slaves' trip across the Atlantic in slave ships. The gourds have images of African village elders, tribal chiefs and "Mother Earth." Many have intricate, colorful, African tribal designs forming exquisite patterns and shapes.

White's works have been featured at the National Black Arts Festival and displayed in several galleries and museums including the APEX Museum in Atlanta.

"He will come back down here again for a showing of his work," said **Newell**.

"I don't know how many people in this area collect gourds, but serious collectors will not want to miss his show."

-- Yvette Kimm

Caption: STAFF PHOTOS / LARA MECKFESSEL / lara.meckfessel@heraldtribune.com

Jalisa Cotton, 11, receives assistance with drawing lines on her gourd from Sam White during an African art class at the East Bradenton Boys and Girls Club.

From left, Jarrett Cotton, 13, and Shaniya Thomas, 8, work on their gourds during an art class at the East Bradenton Boys and Girls Club and sponsored by the Neighborhood Leadership Initiative.