

Art Autobiography

Recall

My earliest memories of art in a structured setting goes back to kindergarten. I recall finger-painting with colored pudding. Yes, I said pudding. I feel this is obvious as to why it stands out. This was not only a fun activity for a group of kindergarteners but it was tasty as well. I'm sure our teachers struggled to keep us from eating all of our paint before we completed our picture. This activity was novel to us and caused an excitement among us all that we hoped for it almost every day. The novelty of it ensured that we would take an active role in the activity.

My next distinct art memory comes from fifth grade. My teacher decided that for a unit in art class we would all enter an art contest that was being offered by the 4-H organization. She gave us a number of pictures from which to choose that we could recreate for our entries. I chose an image of two beavers along a riverbank. I remember putting forth my best effort and working diligently to make my picture the best it could be. I can't speak for others in my class, but the contest provided extra motivation, above just grades, to do my best work on the picture. Although I did not win the contest, I was happy with the work that I did on this particular project.

Another art memory that stands out for me was in sixth grade. This memory doesn't revolve around a class assignment though, but on a comic character developed by my friend and I. We developed a character called the

Masked Moi and his partner Moola. These two intrepid heroes battled the forces of the evil Hoot Owl. We designed and drew fortresses, weapons, tanks, etc. to support our characters. We created scenes that depicted great battles between the two opposing forces. As I mentioned, this was not work for school, this was strictly for our own entertainment. We never shared our ideas with anyone except each other, but we kept it going throughout the entire year.

In tenth grade, I signed up for an art class as an elective. I enjoyed this class very much. This was the first time I actually learned techniques that helped me to create images from my own imagination that seemed more realistic. The reason this stands out for me is because I was developing skills that I never really had or understood prior to this time.

Up to this point, my experiences with art have been mostly in the visual realm. In college, I began learning how to play guitar. Throughout the years I started to write my own songs. This led me to one of my favorite uses of art in school. For my final presentation for my education program I wrote a song about the scientific method titled “The Scientific Method Blues”. Every year when I begin the section on the scientific method, I bring in my guitar and play it for the kids. It is a fun way to introduce them to the version of the scientific method that I use in my classes.

As a science teacher, I use art occasionally to help reinforce ideas and to give students who are more “right brained” the opportunity to connect with the concepts. For example, I have had students create and record news

report regarding how climate change affects specific organisms, compose a story about being an extraterrestrial that intercepts one of the Voyager probes 10,000 years in the future who then travels to Earth, a graphical representation of the history of water sanitation, and an “art walk” that displays the different stages of the nebular hypothesis. And, most recently, I have just published my first book titled “Everything Has Its Place” (shameless plug: now available on Amazon). It is a children’s book about how all organisms have a role to play in the world and everything has inherent value.

Reflect

Looking back on the experiences I described I feel that I see some commonalities which made these experiences meaningful for me. In all of them there was some interesting and/or unique aspect to it that made each one stick in my memory. Every one contains some form of motivation that specifically drew me in. In kindergarten, the novelty of being able to paint with pudding was enough to keep me engaged. In fifth grade, it was a competitive aspect that motivated me. In sixth grade, it was just for fun and the challenge of being creative with my friend. In high school, it was being able to learn new techniques that made me want to be more creative. In college, once again it was a creative aspect that drew me to write songs and want to use them to help students understand a concept.

Despite the fact that I am admittedly not the best artist, whether it be visual, auditory, or written, I feel that I am successful. In every experience that stuck in I have been extremely proud of the final product of my efforts. I believe that at least part of the reason for this is because I don't compare my art to what other people produce. I do the things that I do, I do them to the best of my ability, and I have fun doing it.

My reasons for saying I am successful at art leads into my definition of art. Art, in my opinion, is creation for the individual's enjoyment and well-being. My past learning experiences have shaped this definition because all of the art I have created, even though some of it was school related, was all based on intrinsic value: what I thought about it and how it made me feel. It was never really about comparisons to others' creation, but more about expressing myself and sharing something that was important to me.