

# Basic Survival Strategies

## Get Off to a Good Start

### Get to Know Your Students

Students are at an important stage in their lives. They are capable physically of doing almost anything an adult can do and are in the process of becoming independent thinkers and responsible members of society. You have an opportunity to contribute to their general knowledge: things that *educated* people know. This is possibly the last time the student will have a formal art course, perfect personal skills in art, and prepare for a career in art. Perhaps you are the teacher who develops in a student a lifetime appreciation of and love for art.

### Friendliness and an Interest in Your Students

These will go a long way toward fostering an ongoing relationship. Avoid sarcasm, as it is often misinterpreted, although humor and an appreciation for your students' sense of humor will be a saving grace. Find out what your students are involved in (work, activities, other classes). Go to some student events in which your students participate (sports events, plays, or concerts); you will be glad you did. They also like to know that you have a life outside the day at school, and they don't mind hearing about it once in a while. Use a conversational tone while sharing problem-solving techniques as if the students were your colleagues.

### Fairness to *All*

Fairness to all students should be ingrained in your teaching. It truly is important to remember that all students deserve equal time: those to whom everything comes easily deserve your attention as much as those to whom nothing comes easily. Start conversations with the in-between or nondemanding student; you will always learn something about him or her that you hadn't realized before. Be sensitive to the possibility of gender bias.

## **Encourage Good Decisions**

Albert Burr, one of the greatest principals I've ever met, says that we are teaching high school students to become decision makers. If they show poor judgment, we need to give them greater guidance, or even make decisions *for* them, if necessary, until they learn to make better decisions. Help students develop skills, responsibility, respect, and the ability to build personal relationships. Let them know you have very high expectations for achievement in your art class, as that is the tradition in *this* school.

## **Think about Each Individual**

Try to spend a quality few minutes with each student every class day. I found it was useful to review the class list, really reflecting on how each student was progressing and also reviewing whether that student and I had spoken about his or her work that week. Tell them that each of them is entitled to 1 ½ minutes of your time every single class period, and while they may not get exactly that amount every time, over the period of the week they will receive their 7 ½ minutes. I've had students come up and say, "I'm ready for my 1 ½ minutes today."

## **Mentoring**

A number of school districts now include mentoring programs for new teachers. A mentor and mentee might meet up to six times a year, perhaps getting a release day to visit a school in a different district. Colleagues whose schools have such programs support them strongly, stating that it benefits both teachers. If you are a new teacher and your district does not have a formal mentoring program, seek advice from experienced teachers or your state's art education teachers' association blog.

# **The Day-to-Day Stuff**

## **Arriving in Class**

Keep a table next to the door on which you place handouts and art paper if needed for that day's lesson. As students pick these up on their way in, it piques their interest. Ask students to get their work in progress from the storage area and be seated and ready to work in time for attendance.

## **Attendance**

In most schools attendance is tracked online. To make class start faster, call the names only of those you think are absent—just in case they are not seated, but are somewhere in the room.

## **The Seating Chart**

It took me almost fifteen years of letting students seat themselves anywhere to realize that posting a seating chart on the door on the first day of class would improve my teaching. Photo rosters are available to teachers in many districts with an online database. Make a

seating chart by cutting up and pasting the faces and names on paper with restickable glue stick to make strategic seating moves within the first few days. Make a copy for your convenience or that of a substitute. After a week you can leave students seated where they are and take down the chart, reserving the option to move a student or two if necessary. A colleague says that her daughter told her that allowing students to sit anywhere without a seating chart only helps kids who already have friends in the class, because they always sit together. But it isolates the kids who don't have friends in the class and makes it harder for them.

### **Develop a Studio Atmosphere**

You've tried to make the room as functional and *artistic* as possible, and you can expect students to get out materials and be ready to work, allowing you your few minutes at the beginning of class. The perfect studio atmosphere fosters independent learning and self-motivation. Ideally your principal could walk into the room, bringing important visitors, and your students would all be working as you quietly walk around having soft conversations with individuals or small groups.

### **Motivation**

Sometimes reality isn't too far away from this ideal if students know that you expect work to be completed within a given time period and if they are working toward a personal goal such as developing a portfolio or completing something for an exhibition. Teacher and student assessments are other motivating tools, as students are aware that you expect them to be on task while they are in the art room. Include a rubric in your lesson so students know what your expectations are. Common Core State Standards for the Arts will emphasize independence and creativity.

### **Getting Students' Attention and Keeping It**

Consider yourself the coach. You're there to give the pep talk and get on with the game. Because you are smart enough to know that your instructions should be short and sweet, you will notice when students are not watching you. I have found that the most effective way of control is to interrupt yourself in the middle of a sentence and just look at the student who is talking or involved in something else. You can look at the ceiling; act as if you have nothing else to do in the world but stand there patiently waiting.

When he or she notices that the class has gone silent and finally looks at you, give the kindest fake smile you can summon and continue. You don't have to do this very many times for your students to get the message that you expect their attention. It is far easier to allow students to control their peers than to *demand* respect. But don't push your luck. Notice when you are beginning to lose even the most polite of students. Students of that age have about a twenty-minute attention span (as one of my students pointed out to me).

### **Nonverbal Discipline**

Even though you may have no official rules, you still have rules (or expectations, if you like). Let students know you like secondary school students and you like teaching them.

If someone is giving you problems, *never* call him or her out in front of peers, but find a chance to get the student outside the room and ask, “What did I do wrong today?” This usually stuns them, and they realize their behavior was inappropriate. Sometimes you find out the major problem that student is having that particular day and can be of help. Sometimes you realize you’d better let it go with that student for that day.

### **Silent Signals**

With so little time to talk with each student in a class period, there are many ways to send quick, *silent signals*. A smile, silent nod of approval, or thumbs-up lets someone know he or she is remarkable or at least is on the right track. Sometimes a raised eyebrow or widened eyes give the student the idea that you’re less than pleased with behavior. It can convey the unspoken message “I can’t *believe* you are doing that” or “Oh, how you have disappointed me.”

### **Electronic Devices**

Every school has different policies concerning cell phones and other electronic devices. Working within that framework is important so that students can expect the same policies from every teacher in the school. Some districts allow cell phones in class, and teachers are encouraged to develop lessons in which students can use these remarkable research tools. Some schools leave it up to the individual teacher, and you need to make a decision and clearly state it to students, abiding by what you have said you will tolerate. A conversation about the use of cell phones can be a good lesson on respect. Would you use a cell phone in church? During a stage play? A teacher deserves the same respect that is shown in these settings.

### **Take Advantage of Technology**

Most schools have computer technology in place, and art teachers have access to labs or have computer classrooms in the art department. Many schools have interactive whiteboards and document cameras that allow the teacher to put together a slide show of large visuals to share with the students. Some of these programs offer interactive games and art-related videos. Have students take digital photos of their own work, title it, and place it in a digital folder labeled with the project name. Or you can take the photographs, placing the work on the floor or on a neutral-colored wall to record. You can use selected examples to show students if you teach this project the following year.

### **Original Resources**

Although students can easily learn how to copy something, such as a scene from a magazine or a celebrity portrait, that process is teaching *copying* rather than teaching how to make art. They might go to the Internet or a book for research, but unless they make significant changes from images that are not their own, it neither fosters the feeling of achievement nor results in originality. Instead, encourage students to develop personal ideas from their own sketches, photographs, and interests.

## Vary Your Teaching Methods

Students respond well to a variety of methods of presentation. As you select projects or techniques to explore, think of ways to present them that do not involve long lectures. Demonstrate, write on the board, present selected portions from videos, introduce them to artists through the many beautiful books available at libraries or images on the web, pose questions, host visiting artists, take them on field trips (even within the school)—anything you can think of to keep them involved in and excited about their own learning. Help students develop listening skills through good questioning techniques: “What will we do first? Then? Then?” Use adequate wait time; it may save time in the long run. Move freely around the room when you are teaching something—*proximity* is a wonderful way to keep students involved. Try not to end an introduction with “Any questions?” Most students have them, but don’t want to admit ignorance. If a student asks a question about something that you thought you had already made clear, act as if it is the greatest question in the world; someone else will also appreciate the answer.

## Give Open-Ended Assignments

Try to avoid “classroom” assignments in which you already know what the end result will be. Instead, teach projects that foster independence and the opportunity for divergent thinking.



### The Sovereign Feline

Nicole Brawley. This cat brings a smile to the owner of any animal. Parkway North High School, St. Louis, Missouri, teacher Grant Kniffen.

If you state that you expect creative solutions, you will usually get them. If you give general expectations within such an assignment, there is still a great opportunity for personal reflection. Secondary school students are particularly introspective, and “about me” projects often yield exciting outcomes.

## Each One Teach One

If you are teaching something complicated, you will need many different approaches and repetitions to get information across. Enlist your students as teachers! When they notice a classmate who might not understand the process, ask the student to be a teacher for a minute. It won’t hurt them, and having to explain a process to someone else may clear up any misunderstanding they themselves have. It never hurts to have the steps written on a poster or the board and to expect students to take notes.

Students in Grant Kniffen’s advanced class were challenged to do a large acrylic portrait.



### **Self-Portrait**

Alexandria Stanley, acrylic, 48 × 60 inches. This student's portrait includes items of furniture, discarded jeans, and a favorite teddy bear. Parkway North High School, St. Louis, Missouri, teacher Grant Kniffen.

When an open-ended assignment such as this is given, one can expect excellence and creativity.

### **Self-Appraisal**

In order to develop confidence in art making, students must feel comfortable taking risks. When you talk with a student about his or her work, find a balance between praising the work too highly (unless it deserves it) and appearing to hate it. Art is personal, and criticism has to be tactful. Rather than saying, "This needs improvement" (in which the student hears "My, what an ugly face you have"), encourage the student to appraise the work with questions such as "What do you think might happen if you moved this line?" or "What is the next thing you might do

on this?" Let them know that yours is only one opinion, and that ultimately they must make the final decisions. I have found that when students ask a couple of fellow students for suggestions, it is helpful to both parties.

### **Grades in the Art Class**

Most secondary school art teachers grade work primarily on completed art projects, and there may be only six per semester. Tell the students that these are the "big exams" in your art class. Try to work your evaluation expectations into your grading sheets for each project, allowing students to determine whether they have met the criteria before the artwork is turned in to see if more needs to be done. Some "perfectionist" students may not meet deadlines, and you can issue an in-progress grade that will be raised if the student completes the project shortly. Let them know that the grade will be revised to reflect the complexity of their work.

Grading must be completely objective according to your criteria. Students easily relate a percentage grade in art to those they receive in other classes. Since units can run very long (sometimes weeks), these grades become very important to the semester grade. A written test is usually given less weight in the semester art grade. Although most grades are entered on a school's website, with both students and parents having access to them, you may find that students still need to be reminded of their responsibility to keep track of their progress to avoid being surprised that a missing project will result in a lower semester grade.

Schools and districts handle excessive absenteeism differently, with students usually being allowed to complete all work missed for *excused* absences such as illness, doctor appointments, and religious holidays, but some penalty given for a certain number of unexcused absences.

### **Portfolio**

In general, all art students will keep their work in a portfolio. Independent study students and students in Advanced Placement will maintain an online portfolio that might be used later to apply for admission to an art school.

A journal is particularly useful at this level. Students can paste in works or sketches they drew on a scrap of paper outside of class. Art teacher Cara Deffenbaugh found that her students sometimes left her sticky note observations in their sketchbooks as artifacts. These journals became part of the students' portfolios.

### **Overcome the “I Can’t Draw” Syndrome**

Art is so much more than drawing, and while students can be taught to draw, they need to be told that each person is valued for unique experiences and ideas and that you will build on the skills and knowledge they already have. Reassure them that just as they couldn't expect to play the piano or baseball without learning the basics, *anything* new has to be learned and practiced. Students who have been taking art since early elementary years may arrive in secondary school with greater confidence in their abilities to problem-solve and ready to try anything. One art teacher tells students that “talent” is less important for success in art class than the ability to listen to directions and work hard.

The first project should be nonthreatening, one in which all students have the same opportunity to succeed, no matter how well they draw (perhaps a collage). If students get off to a good start, they are usually willing to try different things later.

### **Never Draw on Students' Work**

If you want to show students a way to improve their work, use a piece of tracing paper, place it on the artwork, and draw on the tracing paper, then wad it up and throw it away! Or *draw* it with a fingertip or pencil eraser. Teacher Joan Larson says she is famous for her “air drawings” over student work. Or make a hasty line or two on a sticky note. If you make changes for them, you are essentially telling them that you are a better artist and that their work isn't any good.

### **Teach Art History Often and Keep Them Moving!**

Teacher Helen Moore feels that art history should be part of every project, every medium. She teaches classes in several subjects, introducing students to art history through games. She places posters on tables around the art room, giving students various standards for selecting a poster or portion of a poster. They use sticky notes to place on a poster that they think meets certain stated criteria, and have lively discussions as they look, examine, defend their selections, and learn! When the teacher plays devil's advocate, asking questions that challenge students to consider why they made their selections, everyone stays involved.

### **Teach Visual Literacy**

The purpose of art education is to teach students to see and interpret. Students will become design-literate consumers by becoming aware of beauty, whether it is found in nature or created by designers. Good taste is not necessarily instinctive. Discussion, criticism, and analysis of good and poor design should be part of every art course. Get students to find examples of “kitsch” (good design taken a step beyond its intended use—for example, a reproduction of the *Venus de Milo* with a clock on her stomach). Explain that every time they select something

to wear or decorate a room, they are making choices about design. Seeking to develop creativity, imagination, and originality is basic to the teaching of art.

### **Keep the Room Clean**

All students should be expected to do their share in keeping the art room respectable. Most are more than willing to clean up their own mess, but have to be encouraged to share work throughout the room. Assign a small, different group each week to be responsible for the extras: the paper cutter table, the sink, scraps picked up from the floor, and work tables. It certainly isn't fair to expect the last class of the day to clean up after all the previous classes, and that class usually is already responsible for putting chairs or stools on the tables. The evening cleaning crew should never have to clean anything but the floor. One teacher labels the art tables or rows with numbers and rotates the cleanup of the common areas by the numbers. To show the system is fair to all, a large calendar is posted with a number written for each class day.

### **Closure**

Having discussed how you handle the first few minutes of class, the last few minutes are also important. Begin cleaning in time for students to do a good job and not leave it for you to do (five minutes for normal work, ten minutes for 3-D work). After work in progress is stored and work spaces are cleaned, students may remain at their desks or tables to visit. When students line up at a door, some feel they need to get an early start to the next class. Have a moment of closure that might sum up the good work that was accomplished that period or talk about the coming day. If you begin the year with the expectation that they will remain seated, it is relaxing and calming for everyone.

## **The Art Classroom**

### **Add Visual Excitement**

There are always a few days before school begins when you can think about the first impression your classroom will make as students walk in the door. As a visual artist, you have access to an unlimited number of art reproductions, timelines, and instructional placards. Yes, these are wonderful and useful in teaching, but in profusion can become a little too much of a good thing. Change them frequently if you want students to notice them.

### **Where Is the Color?**

Are your walls the same as other walls throughout the school, or might you request the opportunity to paint at least one of them in an up-to-date museum color? Or as teacher Meg Classe did, paint each wall in a *different* museum color: dark purple, Naples yellow, magenta, and cornflower blue (or lime green). Perhaps you can use fabric as inspiration, draping it somewhere just to soften things a bit. If you have a bulletin board, cover it in color before adding pictures to it. If you have collected folk art or souvenirs from your travels, display them. Make your art room an exciting place to be.



## **Teacher’s Desk or Work Table**

Arrange your room so you can see every face and the door from your desk. Don’t allow students to sit with backs to you or to sit behind you. Make sure you can see students’ eyes when you are talking. Try not to sit behind your desk much, as you will be a more effective teacher when you move around—a lot! The desk is a barrier between you and students that can make it difficult for the shy student to ask you a question. You’ll never find the “hidiers” unless you move around. Be flexible when arranging student desks and tables. What works well for one project may need to be completely moved around for the next one. If you work with students in a computer studio, perhaps your desk should be placed more to the side so you can monitor students’ progress. Students will often be seated at a stationary table, but should have freedom to be up and moving as they get materials, observe other students’ work, or find a different spot from which to draw.

## **Equipment and Materials**

### **Where to Put It**

There is seldom as much counter space as you need to keep materials out for easy use. Normally materials are brought out as needed and stored in a closet until needed again. Make every effort to find a place for everything, and keep it there until needed. Have locking storage for expensive or specialty equipment. If there is something that you know you might need one day but don’t have room for now (clay or paper, for example), perhaps it can be stored in a closet not too far from the art room.

### **Storing Supplies**

Depending on your storage situation, there is nothing more colorful than stacks of paint or paper or yarn arranged on top of cabinets like a spectrum. Think how much you enjoy going into an art supply store—can you create that same atmosphere in your classroom? And, of course, if you have cabinets, *arrange* some of the great things you have collected for a still life on top of them. This could include all kinds of wheeled vehicles, musical instruments, large machine parts, discarded large toys, an antique chair, and so on.

Label materials such as markers, clay, and liquid paint by date, placing the newest materials behind the purchases of the previous year and using the older items first. If you find you have materials that are several years old and you never get to use reasonably fresh items, give the old stuff away to other teachers in your school or send an e-mail to art teachers in your district or state, announcing a grand giveaway.

### **Student Storage**

Ideally you have a drawer or shelf for each class where work in progress can be stored in a “portfolio.” Students are expected to bring their own drawing pencils, eraser, black fine-line marker, and sketchbooks to class (and to label all of these with their names, using the

marker). A storage place for wet work may be a drying rack or newsprint to protect the floor of the hallway outside the art room.

### Loaning Supplies or Equipment

If a student wants to borrow something valuable (even your pencil) during class hour, have them leave a *forfeit* (keys or something small you can keep safely in your pocket) that can be retrieved when they return the equipment. If you loan something that will leave the classroom or overnight, ask people to sign it out. Mark *anything* that might be borrowed in large letters with permanent black marker.

## Safety

Yes, secondary school students are physically capable of doing almost anything adults do, but they are not fully experienced, and sometimes they do not think as far in advance as you would like (I always felt they were 98 percent adult, 2 percent little kid). You owe it to the students to provide safe materials, a safe environment, and instructions on proper use of tools. Never take their safety awareness for granted. Specific safety reminders are also given in the appropriate chapters in this book (ceramic, sculpture, and printmaking).



### General Safety Suggestions

- No matter their ages, a few students can be counted on to point a staple gun at someone and see if it “shoots.” Allow a staple gun to be used only after you have given instructions and gotten a guarantee from the student that it will be used only as you have agreed.
- Extension cords should not snake across floors. Compliance with local fire codes regarding these is imperative. If they must cross a floor, covers may be placed over them to protect students from tripping.
- Check to make sure that your fire extinguisher has been inspected or replaced each year. Make sure you understand how to use it.
- Have electrical equipment (kiln and electric drill) inspected each year for safe operation.
- Flammable solvents should be properly stored in a metal cabinet.
- A kiln ideally should be in a well-ventilated area. It should be properly vented and have eighteen inches of space between it and any wall. Students should be told never to touch it or anything that is drying on top. If it is adjacent to the art room, firing should be done overnight.
- If students are working with something that might splash or cause a foreign object to get in their eyes, insist that they wear safety goggles.

## Safety in Cutting

Students should know how to use a craft (X-acto) knife and a metal ruler to make a straight cut on paper.

- Make the assumption that the edges on precut purchased paper are straight.
- *Always* keep the guard on the paper cutter. When giving instructions on proper paper cutter use, remind students to always check to see where the holding hand is before bringing the blade down.
- If students cut on a paper cutter, point out that they can measure at the top ruler, using the grid on the bed of the paper cutter to perfectly align the paper. Show them how to hold the paper with the left hand so it does not move or slide.
- Whatever the cutting tool (single-edged razor, craft or X-acto knife, or linocut tools), remind the students to always keep the noncutting hand behind the blade in case the knife slips.
- Count craft knives and make sure all are returned at the end of the hour.
- If cutting through thick board, several short cuts may be needed to go through the layers.
- To cut a “window” in paper or cardboard, the cuts extend slightly beyond the corner so the corner will be perfectly square and the center will fall out. Use a metal ruler, preferably one with cork backing, and place the ruler over the *mat* area, not the hole, holding the ruler firmly in place. If the cutter slips, the border will not be damaged.

## Recommended Safe Materials for Schools

Manufacturers go to great pains to develop safe materials for students, and if you still have materials that do not have the CP (Certified Product) or AP (Approved Product) manufacturer’s seal that is given by the Art and Craft Material Institute, I recommend you discard them. Even university classes have adopted the following nontoxic materials and methods:

- CP or AP pencils, watercolors, tempera, acrylic, oil sticks, crayons, chalks, and colored pencils
- CP or AP water-based inks instead of oil-based inks
- CP or AP pastes for papier-mâché or CP or AP cellulose for papier-mâché
- CP or AP clear acrylic emulsion to fix drawings
- CP or AP lead-free glazes for ceramics
- Mineral spirits instead of turpentine or kerosene
- Water-based markers
- Shellac containing denatured alcohol
- Food or vegetable dyes (onion skins or tea) in place of procion dyes
- Oil paints that end in *hue* (cadmium red hue) instead of toxic cadmium-based paints

## Get Support for the Art Program

### Keep the Administration Informed

When a student or staff member has done something special, send a memo to the principal and put it in daily announcements and on the school's website. Personally invite all administrators and guidance counselors to the exhibitions or send a handwritten invitation (another use for student power). Discuss student artwork with administrators, pointing out a student's creative approach to problem solving. Discuss different students' approaches to the same project and explain why you encourage those differences.

### Ask for Administrative Support for Your Budget

A strong art program costs money! You will never have as much money as you would like, but try to get enough to support a strong curriculum. Keep accurate records of your expenses. Conserve supplies and keep equipment repaired, replacing only as needed. Some districts auction items no longer needed, with the proceeds going back to the department that sold them.

### Plan Ahead for Large Expenditures

If you plan a large project such as a mural and it will improve the appearance of the school, you may be able to obtain funding from the administration. If the curriculum is changing, try to get sufficient money to start new courses from some source other than your yearly budget.

### Invite Visitors

Encourage administrators, school newspaper and yearbook teachers, and parents to drop in on your class if you have something special going on or even if you don't. Invite visitors to talk with students and to discuss their work with them. The opportunity for an administrator to talk with students during class is rare. Visitors enjoy observing both the bustle and quiet activities of the art department.

### Show Off Your Students and Your Program

Visual arts specialists understand the importance of fine arts courses in education and have an opportunity to *show* what is happening in the classroom, whereas many disciplines can only use testing. School administrators, guidance departments, and sometimes state lawmakers play a vital part in decision making about your curriculum. You, the visual arts expert in your school, must be prepared to let others know that art has a *curriculum*, just as any other discipline does.

### Your Website

Many districts now encourage or expect each teacher to have a regularly updated website, which is a link inside the school's overall website. This is a place to tell the community about

your background, degrees, qualifications, exhibitions, and experience, including photos of your own artwork. Your website will also probably include a page for each of your classes. A course outline (syllabus), special handouts, notices of upcoming art shows, pictures of student artwork, even digital slide shows can be included on each class's page. This can be a great way to communicate with parents and students. An automated signature at the bottom can be a link to contact you by e-mail. Your district may have a "Publication of Student Information" consent form that is signed by the student's parent or guardian and will allow you to photograph your students and their work for the district's websites. Of course, with the ease of getting that information out, you need to keep it updated on a routine basis (preferably monthly).

## **Get Support from the Staff**

### **Get to Know Staff Members by Name**

In a large school it is all too easy for teachers in every department to remain in their offices, getting to know close colleagues well. You can get to know other staff members by becoming involved in school committee work, working as a class sponsor, or becoming a representative for your teacher association. Don't be a stranger! Look at a yearbook to connect faculty and student names with faces.

### **Act as a Resource Person for Other Teachers**

Many non-art teachers realize that student learning can become more interesting when students are asked to add visuals to a project. As your school becomes more "art-oriented," it benefits everyone. Many teachers simply want suggestions or ideas for something that might enhance a project. Send a memo to the teaching staff offering to help them in any way you can. Help when you can with suggestions for posters and bulletin board decoration. Suggest to teachers that they enlist help from any of their students who take art. Offer to help create a literary and visual art magazine showcasing short prose and poetry. Often your students' art works well with the themes in student writing.

## **Get Support from Students**

### **Display Student Work**

Make students proud that they "belong" to the art department. Because constantly changing exhibits is time-consuming, let students help in creating displays. Students become aesthetically discriminating when they see all the different interpretations of one assignment displayed together. Label pieces with easy-to-read student names (in at least fourteen-point font). Put signs near the displays indicating the name of the class in which the works were made and any prerequisites for taking that course.

## **Ask Students for Suggestions**

Students and teacher work together to help make a class successful. It is not the exclusive responsibility of one or the other. If the classes are good, students will support the program. No form of promoting enrollment is as strong as students talking with each other about courses. Examine your classes each year; see which projects were less successful than others or definitely need to be replaced. Try new things. Don't be afraid to "bomb" once in a while. A good saying for art teachers is "It is better to be among the wounded than the watchers." Or, as art teacher Lauren Davis used to say, "No guts, no glory."

Encourage students to ask questions when they don't understand. If there is something they especially want to learn, they should let the teacher know. Don't be afraid to let them know that you are also asking questions of yourself, willing to make changes, and always trying new teaching approaches. Ask the students; they will tell you.

## **Artist of the Week**

Think of the thirty or more students a year to whom you can give the lasting memory that once he or she was an Artist of the Week. It can't always be the person who draws best or who intends to pursue a career in art, but perhaps a student who has just one outstanding work to show that week. Seeing their name on a placard next to a small display can give great satisfaction to students. Awarding a certificate signed by the art teachers and principal is a nice addition.

# **Make Your School Look Good**

## **Make Your Program Visible**

Just as successful sports programs and musical and dramatic events give students opportunities to share their talent, an art program should show what your students are doing. One advantage to displaying artwork is that it needn't be a one-time event, but can be ongoing.

## **Hang Artwork by *All* the Students Outside the Art Classroom**

Although you might prefer to hang only outstanding art, all students benefit from having their work exhibited. If you hang the stronger works at each end and in the middle, every student's artwork looks good. Students should automatically identify their work by using a fine-line black marker to *print* the following information on a preprinted label: name, grade level, title of the work, name of the course, and teacher (the card also serves to inform other students which courses they might like to take next year). Keep labels and a black fine-line pen in a box lid taped to your desk, and students can label work for display (and neatness is appreciated).

## **Changing Exhibits of Student Artwork**

Mount displays on walls throughout the school such the wall outside the main office, inside the library on top of bookshelves, and in glass-fronted cases in the entry hall. These displays should be changed regularly. A general rule of thumb is that the farther the artwork is from

the art room, the stronger it should be. Standard-size frames that are affixed to the wall and open easily make frequent changes possible.

### **Principal's Art Collection**

At the end of the year, hold a contest in which the winner will leave a work of art as part of a permanent display in the principal's office, the library, guidance department, or other prominent location. A parents' organization could sponsor this contest, furnish a small prize, and frame the work of art. It costs little more to affix a brass plaque with the student's name and the year to the frame, and the student will never forget the honor. A digital print of the artwork can be made to include in the student's portfolio.

### **The One-Day School Show**

Near the end of each semester, hold a huge one-day show in the school entrance lobby (if your department doesn't have a large enough area) in which *every* student in the department has at least one work on display. At the spring show, feature a few students who are graduating with a grouping of their own work. This display requires a great deal of student power and help from a couple of parents. Send special invitations home with students for all parents and grandparents, and invite district officials. If you can coordinate the visual arts exhibit with a musical or dramatic event that brings in community members, so much the better.

Invite teachers to all-school art shows through written and personal invitations. Ask your students to give their teachers adequate notice, so that those teachers can bring an entire class to see the show for fifteen minutes or so.

The purpose for doing all this work for a *one-day* exhibit is that you often have to move worktables and chairs out of the area to make space for viewers, and you would not want any of the work to be taken or defaced. Schedule a few students each hour to act as hosts throughout the exhibition.

### **District Art Exhibition**

Even if yours is the only high school in a county, you still can have an art department exhibition somewhere outside the school. It may be a community library, recreation center, mall, or bank, but make the effort and give it publicity. A large district may sponsor an all-district, all-grade-level show to which all students and their families in the district are invited. It offers a chance to see what is happening in the other high schools. This event might be held inside a big mall or all-purpose recreation center.

### **District Gallery Website**

Another venue for an ongoing district art display is a district Gallery Website. This is a good place for a district to spotlight artistic growth from kindergarten through twelfth grade. It can be set up so a viewer can look at just ceramics, for example, from grades K–12 or compare photography from each of the district's high schools. It is important that teachers keep the Gallery Website current, so viewers always see new and exciting things.

## **Monumental Artwork for the School**

**Think Big** Look for an empty spot crying out to be filled with a large work of art, or see if existing artworks in such a spot are dated and need to be replaced. Get permission and funding first! To get inspiration, look at artwork done for new buildings and hotels. Two possible projects are wall murals or huge bas-relief wall sculptures. If you know that you will be physically unable to hang something large or will need scaffolding, enlist the help of the district's building and grounds staff. Plan ahead: estimate time schedule, costs, dedication ceremony, and publicity. Some schools use tiles made by students to enrich an outdoor seating or garden area.

## **Public Relations**

### **Publicity Guidelines**

Local newspapers, community newspapers, Internet newsletters, and TV stations are always looking for interesting stories. If your students have participated in an art-related service project or have completed a monumental work of art for the school, try to get recognition for their work. First discuss with your principal the possibility of getting publicity for a student or group of students.

Many school districts have public relations departments that specify the policy about publishing students' names with photos. Use permission forms if necessary. If adults are featured in an article with students, identify them by name and title (for example, Principal John Jones and Art Specialist Mary Doe).

If you submit an article about this event, include the 5 Ws and H: who, what, when, where, why, and how. If this is an event to which the public is invited, be specific about the date, time, school name, address, and phone number or e-mail of a contact person for further information.

### **Principal's Newsletter**

Most schools post their news on the school's website once a month. Update the community on what the Art Department is doing—shows, competitions, and the like.

### **Competitions**

Keep your eye open for opportunities throughout the year for local or national art competitions for high school students. Some of these offer financial benefits such as college scholarships or cash prizes. Others may be juried shows or opportunities for students to have their work displayed or published. Local businesses sometimes sponsor a competition for a logo design or artwork to be used in an advertisement. One of these *real* applications might be beneficial to an entire class, but you do have a curriculum to teach and may prefer to offer some of these to a few individuals to enter if it appeals to them.



Read the directions carefully about how and when the work must be presented and how it will be returned. Fortunately, many art competitions can now be juried by sending the work online or by sending a CD. If work must be sent and returned by postal mail or any other method that will cost, make sure you consider it a worthwhile competition. Follow presentation directions to the letter! If the regulations specify framed work with wire attached for hanging, it will likely be rejected if the work isn't ready to hang. Also keep in mind that some students will want to keep their original work or at least color photocopies of it to show at college portfolio reviews.

Type "high school art competitions" into a search engine to bring up competitions sponsored by banks, specific states and counties, colleges and universities, and art supply companies. The Congressional Art Competition is sponsored annually by the House of Representatives. Entry information may be found on the Internet. The art is displayed in Washington, D.C., and the winning student often is invited to attend, expenses paid. Area universities will sometimes host a high school exhibition in a nice gallery setting, with a reception for the opening. This is a great chance for high school artists to feel success.

## **School-Business-Community Partnerships**

### **Public Art**

State and local transit authorities sometimes sponsor a call for entries for public art that will be used to decorate the interior or exterior of their offices or transit stops. Many communities around the country have organized city arts groups that welcome student assistance in producing public art.

### **Temporary Mural**

Construction sites often use temporary plywood fences to protect pedestrians. Get in touch with the local construction company and ask permission for your students to paint a mural on one of these fences. The merchant should be willing to prime the fence and supply the paint. These murals usually remain in place for a year or so and offer an opportunity for students to put their skills to use.

### **Permanent Murals**

Many communities and neighborhoods commission permanent paint-by-number outdoor murals to be painted on the walls of buildings, as in the Grove neighborhood of St. Louis. Through these projects old brick buildings are enlivened with beautifully painted murals. A concrete dike wall near Chesterfield, Missouri, was recently painted under the auspices of Chesterfield Arts by students, community residents, and artists. This mural is intended to remain in place and will presumably be refreshed as needed.



### **Floodwall Mural**

Gumbo (Chesterfield), Missouri, 500 feet long × 8 feet high. The wall was power-washed and primed, then painted with premixed acrylic water-based paint. Outlines and numbers were drawn by a few volunteers at night, using overhead projection, with each number representing a specific color to be used on outlined shapes. This community mural was completed in one hot day, under the supervision of artist Stuart Morse and with the help of the entire student leadership team, which comprised fifty eighth- through twelfth-grade students representing seventeen schools and/or homeschool groups. Chesterfield Arts and their student leadership team facilitated the one-day paint-out, with more than three thousand members of the community helping to paint.



**Floodwall mural detail**



**Floodwall mural detail**

## **A Local Bank**

Banks usually have generous lobby space where student work can be displayed, and some welcome the opportunity to attract visitors. If they are open to such an exhibition, ask them if they are willing to give prizes and ribbons to the students. This can become an annual or biennial event.

## **Businesses**

As businesses are upgrading equipment such as computers, copiers, or display boards, they may be willing to donate good used equipment to the school. Even if they cannot help you the first time you ask, they'll keep you in mind for the future. Follow up your request in writing.

## **Families**

Let parent groups know about your need for donations of used equipment. For example, people who have switched to digital cameras are willing to give film cameras if their children's school still has a darkroom program. A tax-deductible donation should be acknowledged on school stationery.

# **Personal Development**

## **Make Time to Create Art**

Teaching students every day the thing you know and love is a grand opportunity. When you remain a practicing artist, you cannot help but identify with the student who is struggling for

an idea or unable to make the medium do what he or she has in mind. Remember that you became an art teacher because you were good at art and could always come up with original ideas. For many of us, *teaching art* may be our finest art form, but we can continue to improve on our personal motivation to learn and to create art. Become an “artist who teaches.”

### **Join an Existing Arts Group in your Community or Region**

If you live too far from such a group, make arrangements to meet monthly with a few friends who are also artists. Time to just “talk art,” not “teach art” is the greatest gift you can give yourself. Visit the museums within your region or whenever traveling. Most of them can display only about 20 percent of their collections, so displays are ever-evolving and -changing. Take advantage of any museum classes offered to art specialists, because you will always come away with something new and useful.

### **Take Advantage of Internet Resources**

A great many resources are available for teaching and learning on such websites as YouTube. If you want to know how to do or teach something, type in the subject, and there will be someone there to demonstrate (some appear to know the subject well; others appear less adept). It is as simple as typing in what you want to know and selecting carefully. Many teachers have joined Pinterest and get frequent updates on what is happening in the art world today. If you find something of interest to you, keep it.

### **Become an Active Member of the National Art Education Association**

You automatically become a member of your state art education organization when you join the National Art Education Association (NAEA). This state group is usually divided into regions that have regular workshops from which you and your students will greatly benefit. Most state art organizations also have a blog that will be helpful. You will find that a solution to a problem also faced by other art teachers is no further away than your computer.

### **Apply for Grants**

Further your experience in art. A number of foundations offer travel opportunities for art educators, many of which occur during the summer. Friends of mine have won grants to go to Washington, D.C., and other places in the United States, as well as Australia, Japan, and China, by planning ahead and filling out grant applications. Consider whether you can offer to pay for some portion of the expenses and how you will follow up with your students and colleagues following such an experience; include that plan in your application.

### **Keep Abreast of Current Research in Your Field**

Don't make changes just for the sake of change, but do enhance your program by teaching more historical background or art appreciation skills. Analyze your curriculum to ensure that you are trying new things and that you have made recent upgrades to some of your tried-and-true projects. Question, question, question colleagues about what has been exciting to *their* students lately.

## Continue Master's-Level Studio Classes

Although most art teachers have at least one area of expertise, it is likely that at some point you will be asked to teach something about which you know very little. Great! Good teachers nod . . . and get busy. This gives you an opportunity to learn something new, go back to school and get graduate credit, do a lot of reading, and learn a new skill. This new class may become your favorite subject to teach. Classes at universities or art centers may be taken as quickly as possible, and sometimes you are learning something one day and teaching it the next. There are many good books at the library and tutorials on the web, and as you teach yourself something, writing it down step by step—presto!—you are prepared to share it with your students. Nothing you ever learn is wasted!

## Organize a Field Trip by Bus

Get students out of the classroom and into a different environment in which to draw, paint, or take photographs. Decide what you want students to gain from a field trip and prepare them carefully. Let them know in advance what they are expected to achieve as a result of this field trip.

- If drawings or sketches are expected, be specific about how much you expect students to accomplish during the trip.
- If photographs will be taken, tell student the minimum number of shots expected.
- If you are visiting a museum show, you may ask students to write about it or interpret it in a work of art. Perhaps they could mentally “collect” a work of art and write a poem about it.

### Planning

- Let students help you make the decision for a destination. This can get a lively conversation going early in the semester as you are becoming acquainted.
- Preview the exhibition so there are no surprises and you are prepared to discuss questionable images.
- Plan far ahead to get the trip onto the school calendar.
- Setting the date between the fifth and twelfth weeks of the semester is ideal—you know the students by then, and enough time is left for students to benefit from sketches or photos they may have made on the field trip.
- Pick a great season of the year unless you are going to a scheduled exhibition out of season.
- If going to a museum, decide if you wish to arrange for a docent-led tour.
- Make a list of materials and equipment needed. Let students assist you in distributing and collecting them to ensure supplies are on the bus.
- If a student does not go on the trip, you must have a substitute in place to supervise him or her. If only one or two students stay behind, perhaps a colleague will take responsibility.
- For weekend field trips by train or plane, work through a travel agent for the best value.

## **Teacher Notification**

Notify teachers by memo or e-mail at least two weeks in advance, explaining the purpose of the trip and the date. Include a list of students, alphabetized and separated by grade level. Students should present a field trip notice to each teacher and let the teacher know they appreciate being allowed to go. Offer to allow the student to make up missed work during your class period. Request that teachers let you know if a student cannot miss his or her class and therefore cannot go on the field trip.

## **The Permission Slip**

This should explain where the student is going, what time the bus will leave and return to school, the cost, and arrangements for lunch. Students may not understand the reasons behind the permission slip, but you must protect yourself and the school district from possible lawsuits in the event something untoward happens on the trip.

## **Finances**

If no money has been budgeted for field trips, students may be willing to pay for it, or you can hold a fundraiser. In calculating the cost, assume that fewer students will actually go than say they will. That way if someone is ill or backs out at the last minute, you should be able to absorb the cost. This also allows you to pay the transportation if a student cannot afford to pay for the trip.

It is best to have the money and permission slips collected by the secretary or bookstore at your school. If there is not a signed permission slip, the money is not accepted.

## **Transportation**

Students should not be allowed to drive on a field trip unless your school has special permission forms to be signed by parents. If students are injured while driving, it is yours and the school's responsibility. It might be possible to let parents drive a group if the school agrees.

- Make sure you have a signed permission slip for all the students before they get on the bus (no slip, no trip!).
- Fill the bus to make the trip most economical. Your district may pay for the bus. If you choose to use a charter bus rather than school bus, your transportation department may recommend a provider.
- Always know where you plan to stop for food (purchased or picnic).

## **A Few Simple Goals**

- Bring back all the students who went with you. They must bring a watch and commit to meet you in time to return home with the rest of the group.
- Keep an accurate list of who actually goes. If cell phones are allowed, get each student's number. Count heads as they get on, have two students count with you,

and make sure everyone is on the bus before it leaves for the next stop. The buddy system and your attendance list let you quickly know the name of anyone is missing. Bring at least one more adult along, if possible.

### **Expectations for Behavior**

Secondary students sometimes resent being asked to stay close to the teacher, and a different set of rules may apply for some locations. School rules apply as always.

You must clearly state what behavior is expected:

- They must not go anywhere without a buddy to keep track of when they need to be back on the bus.
- Define the exact geographic boundaries within which they must stay.
- Let them know that they should use good common sense and that they could destroy all hope for future field trips if they don't abide by the rules. Although it seems excessive, suggest that they think carefully about whether a behavior or act might embarrass their parents, teacher, or school. Clearly state the consequences if your rules are broken.
- Talk about appropriate dress for the location and weather. Some items may be left on the bus if not needed.
- Talk about respect for speakers or presenters at the destination.

## **The In-School Field Trip**

### **Guest Speaker**

This type of trip takes one hour of a school day and is planned when a guest speaker or visiting artist is willing to speak to all the art students for one or two periods. Many states sponsor artists in residence who will speak to schools. You may be asked to pay expenses for a speaker, or the administration or a parent group may agree to pay. It can be a very rewarding experience for students.

The procedure for organizing is to

- Reserve a place where all the students might fit comfortably (such as the auditorium or gym).
- Follow the notification procedure for teachers as previously listed.
- Ask the speaker what equipment will be needed (screen, microphone, or projection system). Arrange for a reliable person to operate such systems.
- Prepare the students as discussed previously.
- Invite parents and other classes if space permits.