

FEATURE TEACHER

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What is a challenge you have faced teaching in during a pandemic in 2020?

One of the biggest challenges of coming back for the school year has been moving to "art-on-a-cart" and traveling to the students' homerooms to teach. While teaching in this way presents unique challenges, the teachers have been so accommodating and helpful as I adjust to working in their space. It amazes me how adaptable my students have been this year. They have adjusted very well to working in a different way, using only their own supplies, and staying in their classroom space. We take time at the beginning of class to stand up, stretch, and put our "art brains" on so that students can mentally switch over to new content matter and get a physical break. At the end of class we turn our "art brains" off and say a poem to remind students to refocus on their homeroom teacher. My principal has also provided picnic tables for our art classes so we are able to go outside when the weather is nice. That has been a welcome opportunity for students to move out of their classroom spaces and safely enjoy some fresh air!

How do you support building a positive and safe online learning environment for your students?

I create a positive environment online for my students by providing positive feedback on the assignments they submit, along with suggestions for improvement when necessary. I modeled my expectations for how to submit assignments in class so that students knew what I am looking for and how to do it correctly. This helped them feel more comfortable and capable of doing their work at home. Students are only able to view their own work, which removes the pressure of classmates seeing their work and helps them feel more comfortable posting what they have done.

Do you have a super awesome success story from 2020?

The biggest success I have seen this year is that several of my students have really found their artistic voices and been able to express themselves using the blended learning approach. In the spring, I had several students submit and write about their artwork. I was able to respond to their submissions and build a stronger relationship through that one-on-one interaction. These students have been more engaged and excited to participate since we returned in-person. I feel we have developed a stronger sense of community in the art room because I am able to interact with them both online and in the classroom. I think the online aspect removes the pressure of others seeing their work and allows students a safe space to express themselves. I want to continue incorporating some of the technology I have started using in blended learning for many years to come.

What do you do to encourage online classroom participation?

In the spring, I wanted to create a "one stop shop" for students to be able to access all of the assignments I was sending out, which is why I set up a [blog](#) and a [YouTube Channel](#).



I tried to make it more interactive by including videos and making the projects simple enough to be reproduced with few materials at home. One of my favorite projects was having students reproduce a famous piece of artwork and photograph themselves. They got really creative! This fall, I am keeping students engaged online by providing a "hook" for them when I see them in person and showing them some images for inspiration for their at-home assignments. I also am sure to comment and interact with them online when they turn in an assignment so they know I am paying attention to what they submit!

Parent Communication... What's working for your families?

I think it is really important to create positive connections and maintain open communication with parents. Each day at the end of class, I designate an "Art Star"...someone in the class who has done a really nice job of following expectations. This person gets to take home a little certificate designating them as the art star, which has really encouraged positive behaviors in class. I have been communicating with parents via phone, email, and Schoology more than ever this year as we work through this new learning approach together. The biggest message I try to send to parents is that I want their child to be successful and will help enable them to reach that success in any way I can.

What methods have been effective in teaching during a pandemic?

Incorporating more technology into my instruction has been essential during the pandemic. While we were out of school in the spring, I created a blog where I could post instructional videos and art lessons for students to view. Since we have been back in school, I have been posting my in-class presentations on SeeSaw and Schoology for students to review at home as they work on their at-home assignments. I think it is helping students to have this blended approach and be able to interact more with the content.

We also created "suitcase" sketchbooks for students to use to complete their at home assignments. The theme for this year is "Art Around the World," so we are studying the art and culture of different countries. Students decorated their sketchbook covers to look like suitcases to take on their imaginary trip around the world. At school, they have "Art Passports" to keep track of the countries we have learned about. This has really sparked student interest and engagement. They are excited to see which countries we are learning about each day!

Share something positive about teaching in 2020.

The most positive thing about this school year so far has been being back in the building and seeing the students face-to-face again. They are so excited to be back in school and they are more eager than ever to learn. I love walking into a classroom and seeing their eyes light up with excitement. I am teaching on a cart, so we have been getting creative with the types of materials we are using because every student has his or her own supplies. The students are taking more ownership of their materials and they are taking a lot of pride in the work they are producing. We are definitely making the most of our time together!