

# Identity and Ideals



Shield by Andrea.



Shield by Natividad.

**Pam Stephens**

**A**s the new academic year begins, my focus turns to the serious responsibility of helping pre-service art educators mold their professional identities and ideals. This is a delicate leadership role, and one that requires me to give up absolute control while firmly guiding novice educators toward positive outcomes that will impact not only their careers, but the learning of their own future students.

Among the most deeply gratifying experiences is visiting the classrooms of graduates and discovering that they have indeed found their “teacher identities,” and have embraced the standards that define the ideals of quality art teaching. One such experience occurred when I was invited to “friend” a recent graduate on Facebook. There, displayed in a virtual art exhibit, was the evidence of a well-defined art teacher who was modeling

the principles and characteristics of individuality and creativity; a teacher whose love for art seemed to be surpassed only by her empathy for the learning outcomes of children.

**Meet Mary**

Mary Batson teaches art at Mountain Sky Junior High School in the Phoenix metropolitan area. This is her second year as an art educator. Mary is what some researchers would classify as a “moral agent.” Indeed, Mary is a teacher who encourages young artists to explore who they are, set high standards, and think critically about their personal places in the big scheme of the world. Mary has a clear idea of who she is and where she would like the art journey to take her students.

**Personal Shields**

Among the many exceptional activities that Mary teaches during the year is one that combines teaching and applying art vocabulary while encouraging students to explore and express ideas about individuality, uniqueness,

and character. The lesson is the creation of a personal shield. In this activity students brainstorm symbols that represent who they are and then show those symbols in cut-paper symmetrical designs of contrasting colors. This simple activity provides students with a nonthreatening opportunity to communicate ideas that help define who they are. Sharing these sorts of ideas with classmates offers the additional opportunity for students to connect with one another on a deeper level, and to find commonalities rather than differences. It is this collective aspect of seeing shared characteristics that forms the foundation of Mary’s high-quality art program.

Do you have a favorite way of helping students find their identity? How do you model ideals? Please join *SchoolArts* on Facebook, where you can share your thoughts and student work. ☞

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