

Preface

Being and Belonging

For over forty years, my sense of who I was and where I belonged in the world was associated with teaching. I identified myself with my job and planned the events in my life around going back to school every September—over forty of them.

Sure, during that time, I've also been a husband, father, papermaker, janitor, menswear salesman, department store window decorator, editor, gardener, carpenter, electrician, plumber, cook, bottle washer, and much more, but “teacher” has defined my image of self and school has defined the place where I belong. When asked, “What do you teach?” my response was always, “Kids.”

If we discount the hours spent sleeping, I suspect a teacher spends more waking hours in the workplace than in the home. We also spend more quality time with our colleagues at work than with family members. This isn't good or bad, it's just the way it is. That's the way it was for me for over forty years.

But not anymore—I'm retired. Reflecting on the first weeks of retirement, I recall that it was easy enough to change my designated status on the various legal documents to make everything official, but, come September, it was quite another matter to change my sense of who I was and where I belonged. School was no longer home, and colleagues were no longer an extended family.

I was told that it might take some time to adjust to a new identity. So I thought maybe one of those “Retired” license plates or bumper stickers would help. Baseball caps and T-shirts with slogans might help, too. After all, it's always important to have a good sense of who we are and where we belong in the larger scheme of things.

Fitting in, or no longer fitting in, is certainly an issue one faces upon retirement. Fortunately, I was, and still am, quite fond of writing poetry and making art, especially paper-making. So I was, and still am, able to wear those labels with pride.

Art teachers and administrators value, and take pride in, the uniqueness of their individual school, community, and district art programs.

In planning programs for our local community we ask ourselves:

Who are we?
Who are we teaching?
Why we are teaching?
What's important for students in this community to know?
How do we become better teachers?
Where are we headed?
How can we become better advocates?

These are important questions to ask. Being able to see how the goals and activities we plan for our students fit into the larger scheme of things is also important for curriculum and program development.



Mantis:
The Prophet. Pencil, 2017.

Who will tell our story?
What will our story be?

Introduction

As an octogenarian and long retired art educator, I've had lots of time to think about why I became an art teacher and how I found that art really did make a difference in kids' lives. My teaching career started as an elementary art consultant in the 1950s and culminated as a professor of art education in the 1990s. During my career, I taught art at all grade levels—elementary, middle school, high school, and university—and, in addition to the United States, two countries in Africa. I worked with gifted and talented students and children with special needs, both in regular classes during the school year and in district-sponsored programs in the summer.

In both the U.S. and Africa, I supervised student teachers and observed art being taught in hundreds of classrooms, some in remote African villages. Thus the collection of short essays and poems in this book draws upon my journaling about those experiences, commenting on observations, and memories of my personal life.

Retirement from teaching did not end my career in art education. During the first eleven years of my retirement, I was the editor of *SchoolArts* magazine. Since then, for the past ten or so years, I have been writing an occasional advocacy article for the magazine. Unabridged versions of these now condensed essays first appeared as an editorial or as an advocacy feature in the magazine. Others are adapted from messages written or speeches delivered as president of the National Art Education Association.

Truth be known, despite an amazing career, there were often times when I was challenged to defend the importance of art in education. As you read this causerie of journal musings—fast food for thought—I hope you will find inspiration and answers to questions about why it's important to teach art and why art teachers do what they do.