

Getting to Know Mrs. Weinard

Name:

Ashley Weinard

Position:

Art Teacher

How long have you been teaching?

I have been a public-school Art teacher for 3 years. Before coming to the classroom, I managed school programs and teacher professional development for museums in New York, Chicago, and North Carolina. I trained non-Art teachers how to integrate the arts into their regular instruction to help their students be more creative, motivated, and better able to reach grade-level learning goals. I trained teachers in all 100 counties of North Carolina! (Teachers are actually harder to teach than students!)

Where are you originally from?

That is a hard question. I was born in Kentucky, moved to Chicago when I was in elementary school and then to Atlanta for middle and high school. I went to college in upstate New York and then graduate school in New York City. My husband and I moved back to Chicago for a bit before moving to Durham in 2003. Durham is the place I call home because I have lived here longer than I have lived any other place...and it is best.

When did you know you wanted to become a teacher and what influenced you to make that choice?
Was there something else you considered doing before deciding to teach?

Although I worked in the education field for over 20 years before coming to Forest View, I never felt like I really knew what it was like to have my own class of students. The museum is a unique and pretty ideal learning environment. Teaching with real works of art and historical objects was so fun and I could use all kinds of creative strategies to help engage children and adults. However, I was never able to develop real relationships with learners and my direct impact was limited.

Truthfully, my move to the classroom was an experiment of sorts. I wanted to see if I could actually hack it and I wondered what new things I might learn about learning. This job is much harder and so much more rewarding than I ever expected. I learn at least 20 new things a day, mostly from my students. I can't wait to see what I learn tomorrow.

What kind of student were you? Was there anything that was incredibly difficult for you to learn?

I was a pretty diligent student. I spent a lot of time studying and got pretty good grades, except in math and chemistry. I underestimated my abilities in math and my lack of confidence in that subject was difficult to overcome. I wish someone had shown me how creative and relevant math can be. That might have motivated me to look at it differently, not just as a set of irrelevant word problems.

What are some of the things you love about teaching? **I love to watch children create. It is amazing what beautiful and intriguing ideas come to life when you give kids the chance and tools to take risks and be creative. I also love to see kids surprise themselves and their peers with the talents, skills, and knowledge they did not know were inside their head, eyes, and hands.**

What makes your classroom unique or different from other classrooms?

In Art class, we transform our mistakes into something new and unexpected. We imagine. We stretch ourselves and our perceptions. We explore ideas visually. We get messy, very messy.

What do you hope your average student would say when asked to describe you?

That I am kind, but also a little kooky.

What do you actually think your average student would say when asked to describe you?

She goes a little crazy during clean up time.

What are some of the difficult parts of your job you wish people outside of the profession could understand a little better? Only answer what you're comfortable saying.

Elementary Art teachers teach the entire student body. Try learning 800 names and building relationships with that many students. Truthfully, it is a gift that I get to know every student in the building.

Who was your favorite teacher while you were a student?

Ms. Snyder, my 3rd teacher, was kind, smart, and beautiful. She was so confident and seemed genuinely happy to be at school with us each day.

At the end of the day, teaching is really hard. In order to keep coming back, we all have to have something we can hang our hat on. What keeps you coming back?

Our world needs imagination. We cannot solve the problems of our day without imaginative solutions. Our kids need to learn how to imagine and create. I must help them practice and become better at imagining a better world for themselves and the future.

If you could tell your students what you really feel about them, without any chance for them to respond or ruin the moment, what would you tell them?

You are an artist, whether you feel like one or not. You have so much creativity inside you. Don't be afraid to show it in the way that feels most natural. Perhaps more importantly, don't be afraid to make mistakes. They are so critical to the creative process. We learn from them and can transform them into something beautiful.

If you could talk to a teacher starting out. Just getting ready to take over their first classroom. What wisdom would you impart to them?

Try it for at least 3 years. It gets easier and much more fun.