

An Art Teacher's Perspective on Remote Learning

By Colleen Shoup

Colleen Shoup is the art teacher at Eaton Rapids Greyhound Intermediate School.



“Can we do clay.....Pleeeeeease?” This was a question from one of my 4th grade art students during our first Zoom meeting for Remote Learning-Art. “Uhhhh, no?” was my response.

Unfortunately, when our school district learned on Friday, March 13th that we were to shut down due to the COVID19 pandemic, some of my classes were in the middle of a ceramics unit. We thought then that we could continue when we returned to school in two weeks. That wasn't to happen. With the closing of schools through the end of the year the district scrambled to put a plan in place to provide online remote learning. In our rural district many families do not have

reliable internet (myself included) and they may not have devices to use at home, let alone the knowhow for online learning (again, myself included!). Families and staff were surveyed to assess the needs to accomplish online equity. Many devices were made available and hot spots were set up in school parking lots for downloading material to work offline.

I teach visual art to grades 3-5, about 470 students. For me, the idea of remote learning is daunting. I teach in 2-3 week rotations, 5-6 class sections each. Art, gym, technology and music teachers are using Google Classroom for remote learning to keep it manageable. Our administrator cautioned us to “keep it simple.” As I set out to create art lessons for distance learning, I built upon skills and content delivered. I had to create lessons for students who may not have any art supplies at home. Lessons include live Zoom sessions, recorded video, and digital lessons that can be accessed from home or downloaded from the parking lot. Although “keeping it simple” is important, I want the art learning to be meaningful as well.

I started remote learning with a chaotic zoom “live lesson.” More than sixty students tried to connect. I had them all muted on entry and when the class started, I asked them to turn off video so that the sound was not so distorted. However, there were audio issues for some, and video issues for others, depending on their internet quality. It was difficult to admit participants, answer chats, and go over the two art lessons for the week all at once. I have attended several zoom meetings recently, but hosting one is another story. Yikes! I plan to record my demonstrations from here on out so that I can better monitor and manage the meeting. As bad as the live lesson seemed, the students are completing and turning in their projects. I have had some email conversations with parents, and some projects emailed to me instead of turning them in via Google Classroom. It truly is a learning curve for all of us!

This surreal and challenging situation in which we find ourselves does have its moments of positivity. I posted several drawing prompts before our remote learning officially started, encouraging students to be creative. I find that students are eager to connect. Students have requested art ideas and have emailed sketches to me. I've even had one student ask me to be her "pen pal." We have exchanged letters and drawings, and she even put forth a "needle felting challenge." All of this renews my faith in the creativity of children; in the strength of our school community; in the teamwork of our staff; and in the resourcefulness of my art students. And it makes me miss them even more. Stay home. Stay safe. Stay creative. We will get through this.