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It's not just art Amy Brown's students are learning, they're embracing the process

CHELMSFORD, MA (Nov. 20, 2020) – In normal times, if Amy Brown were to give her Byam school art students an assignment, with pencils and paint at the ready, naturally they would skip over the pencils and start painting.

Instead, perhaps unbeknownst to her third- and fourth-graders, she is teaching the vital role that preparation plays in creating art; to work through the artistic process through planning and reflecting.

Unlike most educators at Chelmsford Public Schools who are largely teaching in a hybrid model, CPS elementary art teachers are teaching fully remote, only interacting live with their students once every five weeks. Mrs. Brown pre-records her lessons for her students for the weeks she cannot interact in real time, then uses her 'live' classroom time to best forge the necessary social and emotional connection with her students.

Recently, she tasked her students to create a book cover design if they were to write their autobiographies. She took it a step further, challenging her students by asking what would make someone pick up their autobiography and read it. Her students were to turn in several sketches. In pencil.

"If you slow them down, and allow them to think about it, they will concentrate on it," Mrs. Brown said. "If they take their time planning, they will probably have more success when they're working on the final piece because a lot of the challenges will have been worked out.

"Whether they realize it or not, they're learning to slow down and enjoy the process," she added. "In the end, they'll enjoy the whole process more."

Mrs. Brown has also embraced social media as a crucial tool. She posts her students' work on Instagram and Twitter for families to view. It is safe to say her followers have increased since the beginning of the year. Though the Covid-19 pandemic has radically altered her approach, she sees silver linings.

"It's been such a unique year teaching through a screen, but there have been some things that I have learned and will take away," Mrs. Brown said. "I'll use my recordings, which will help my kids through the process."

A resident of Chelmsford, Mrs. Brown is in her first year teaching at Chelmsford Public Schools. She taught the last 15 years at the Hemenway Elementary School in Framingham.

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