

LETTERS TO A YOUNG ARTIST

In August 2008 I reached out to the members of the Association of Teaching Artists' listserv asking experienced Teaching Artists to write a letter to a young artist.

Members of the ATA Listserv,

This afternoon a young artist from New York City called me about how to get started as a Teaching Artist. I receive quite a few e-mails and calls every month from artists from a wide geographical range asking this same question. I always refer the New York State artists to the listserv, to other resources on www.teachingartists.com, to regional Arts In Education roundtables, to professional development offerings that come through the listserv. Today I knew the artist was asking for more, along the lines of "Can you support yourself working as a Teaching Artist," "What is essential to know," and "What is necessary to succeed."

Since I greatly admire Rainier Maria Rilke's "Letters To A Young Poet" and have read Jonathan Kozol's "Letters To A Young Teacher," I thought "Letters To A Young Artist" might be exactly the forum for a resource for artists who are both considering and starting out on a career path as a Teaching Artist.

I am asking you to contribute a letter to "Letters To A Young Artist." I think it would make a great publication, and I certainly know it is needed! Too often we, as Teaching Artists, don't take the time to pass on what we know and what we have learned from our work. Please include personal anecdotes. We have a wealth of experience that so often gets overlooked in the hurly burly of getting jobs, our own work, attending conferences, standards, keeping up with funding, etc.

Letters came in, not enough for a book as I originally envisioned, but a collection.

Here is the collection.

Dale Davis

From MARK DEGARMO

Dear Prospective Teaching Artist,

I understand that you want to pursue teaching artistry. I have worked in this field since, at least, 1986 and still find myself feeling like a pioneer or a Johnny Apple-Seed for dance and the arts. I believe that this work is critical for U.S. society at this time. I have some questions for you to help me understand how to assist you on a practical level. I might offer some advice as a mentor, if these thoughts are helpful and if you want this kind of exchange.

I am interested to know how you are currently thinking about what you do and what you propose doing. I want to know: how do you understand the origins of your interest? Is this, for you, a gig, a job, a vocation, a career, a calling, or a profession? Is there some other way that you frame your interest and its wellspring?

Why do you want to do this work? Have you ever taught? If so, what did you teach? What were the contexts for your teaching? What led to your sense of satisfaction, dissatisfaction, or some combination thereof with your work?

Have you thought, and what do you know and understand, about your learning style? How do you approach a challenge, or something that is new to you that you want, or have, to learn? How do you describe the way that you go about solving different kinds of problems in different areas of learning and fields or domains of knowledge that you have encountered?

What is your relationship with education and learning? What degrees have you earned? What alternative sources of learning beyond educational institutions have you accessed and used? Are you comfortable in schools? Are you comfortable learning outside of schools, colleges, and universities?

Are you an artist? What inspires you in your creative process? How do you describe imagination? What is creativity? How, when, and why did you discover yourself as an artist?

How do you describe your art form? What are the critical questions, trends, and themes in your field? Who are the major artists, the less well known, and unknown, but important artists in your estimation? How and where do people practice this art? Why do people practice this art whether as amateurs or professionals? What do you know about the intercultural and international practices, domains, and fields through and in which this art appears? How do you answer the previous questions in this paragraph using intercultural and international lenses?

How do you characterize your artistic practice? When, how, and where do you share your practice publicly? Do you have a current or upcoming exhibition or performance?

Can you send me today a videotape or DVD of your performance work, a catalog of an exhibition, or a portfolio and current CV? Can you clearly and simply communicate verbally and in writing your background, previous experience, education, and other indicators of your serious and sustained pursuit of your art form?

How do you situate your work within artistic domain(s) or field(s)? Who are the artistic and other communities in which you create and demonstrate your artistry? Do you participate in community service as an artist? If so, how do you define community service? Why do you participate in it?

Are you as passionate about the possibilities of this opening into teaching artistry as you are about your art itself? What are the qualifications for the opportunities and work that you seek? Which skill sets do you currently possess and can you demonstrate? Which skill sets do you want to achieve? What do you propose as education and training for yourself as educator-artist/teaching artist in order to gain entry to this interdisciplinary domain and emerging field?

What are your goals and objectives? What is the previous learning on which you will build your core competencies as a teaching artist? Who inspired you to teach? Who are your mentors both in your art form and in teaching?

What is education? How do you envision yourself making a difference in the fields and domains of public and private education?

What is skills-based arts education? What is arts-integrated teaching and learning? What is aesthetic education?

Who are the critical philosophers and writers in the field of arts education? Is there a difference between arts education and arts-in-education? If so, how do you describe these differences and how they impact or might impact your imagined work as a teaching artist?

I have posed a lot of questions because my learning style is grounded in questioning. An integral part of

my artistic practice as a choreographer is to question myself. It follows that I use questions as a Socratic approach to teaching and learning.

I practice "arts education" and "arts-in-education" as an interdisciplinary field. My research in arts learning is within what I have conceptualized as a broader field of experiential education and the arts that encompasses arts education/arts-in-education. I am thinking of experiential education as grounded in and inspired by the work of Dewey, extending back to the guild system of the middle ages to the way that earlier and ancient societies regulated practice of artisans, and a basic way that humans know and understand based in doing.

I am defining interdisciplinarity as bringing together into dynamic interaction, at least two fields or knowledge domains. The rationale for interdisciplinary theory and practice is to a) amplify understanding of critical issues and challenges from multiple perspectives, b) discover new relationships beyond the constructs of individual fields and knowledge domains, and c) construct knowledge. Three fields comprise the interdisciplinary field of arts-in-education you seek to enter, that is, a) the arts; b) the particular arts field you know, understand, and do; and c) education.

Depending on the practitioner, other fields and domains might also contribute to the interdisciplinary dynamic of arts education/arts-in-education, including intercultural communication, cognitive science, and psychology. The other content areas of the PreK-18 curriculum are also potentially present in the teaching artist's understanding and practice and include: English language arts; social studies; math, science, and technology; health and physical education; and language study other than English. All art forms are potentially involved, such as dance, theater, music, and visual arts, as well as art forms that do not appear explicitly as part of the Learning Standards for the PreK-18 public school curriculum, such as, creative writing; video, film and animation; performance art; circus arts; and dance-theater.

I hope that this line of introductory inquiry has helped you understand my perspective as a practitioner of teaching artistry and as an arts educator/teaching artist. This reflection on interdisciplinarity is fundamental to how I am thinking about some of the theoretical and practical issues that we in the U.S. currently face in the fields of the arts, education, and arts education/arts-in-education.

This letter might seem more like an interview or a lecture than a letter. I had hoped to find an approach to creating a conversation with you. I also wanted to share with you what I believe are critical issues for you to consider as a novice teaching artist. Maybe when we next meet I will have received your reply. When we meet I also want to hear what you have to say in person about your reasons for entering this field and how I might help you.

I want you to know that I cannot necessarily offer you a job. I cannot answer your questions for you. I am really interested to hear how we in this field are approaching formulating and answering the questions that we are passionate to interact with and untangle. I am curious to know how we might collectively raise the level of discourse about learning and teaching within the scope of our work. I am also interested in how we can extend the scope of what we are expected to do in the context of public schools. How do we work well in and out of the box?

My own teachers have included many and varied individuals working in dance, the arts, and education for many years. I build my own practice on their shoulders. I am grateful for their belief in my potential for learning and change. I hope that you and I can inspire learners to become themselves as fully and fearlessly as possible. I hope that our learners can find ways to act well in the world.

I look forward to your response.

With best wishes for your every success,

From NICK JAFFE

I've found that having some instruments and amps around is pretty key, even with kids who are primarily interested in sampler-based production. The availability of live instrumentation adds all sorts of musical and technical dimensions, and the kids really gravitate to the performance possibilities too, even kids with no prior training.

Multipurpose is ideal--leads to interesting work. I'm sure you'll find what works best for you in terms of curriculum. For me, working with kids from 4-18 years old, I found that what worked best in most cases was combining a little technical/theoretical teaching with a little musical/aesthetic training and discussion and a lot of entirely student-driven production work, right from day one.

Kids are very good at absorbing pretty complex technical and musical skills on the fly, if they are interested in the work and need the skills to achieve the artistic outcome they've envisioned. So a hypothetical 2-hour studio session might look like this:

10 minutes -- Kids, or self-selected kid "studio manager" might fire up the gear. The rest of us might sit around and bull.

15-20 minutes -- Straight up lecture demonstration on a technical or musical topic. Kids encouraged to take notes, but not required to. Topic might be anything from how to coil a cable to binary math, or wave mechanics, notation, simple music theory issues, (depends on age, interests, teacher expertise, etc.). Discussion, questions and argument strongly encouraged. The vibe is very de-schooled---the point isn't to learn this to meet some state standard or prepare for some test, but to learn it because a) it's cool and interesting and b) it's useful.

10-15 minutes -- Some sort of musical discussion. We might listen to something (familiar or unfamiliar music, student work in progress, whatever) and talk about it from an engineering standpoint, or a musical standpoint. Strong opinions and deep discussion encouraged!

1 hour and 15 minutes -- Production work. Kids can work individually or in groups. My role is primarily as tech support and artistic provocateur. I often hang out OUTSIDE the studio during this time so the kids are really forced to run things by themselves. Some kids might be heavy into tracking or sequencing, others might be writing, others might be sitting in the corner and watching/critiquing/hating. All of this is cool. The only rules are: treat the gear well; don't be an asshole; don't get in the way of the work. There is zero tolerance for censorship of any kind. I might argue with kids about the political implications of some lyrics or something, or even refuse to participate in something I find really objectionable (it's never come to that) but I don't place limits on expression.

The issue of the school's rules, culture, and my job security are dealt with openly, but at the distribution phase--some work is for some audiences and some is for others. Kids totally get this. If the school needs a certain type of work to be produced for particular purposes or for show, we're honest about that, and it becomes similar to working in a jingle house (for ads)--the kids are set with the task of finding ways to creatively address the particular challenge. But, the emphasis is on original, innovative work that the students want to make. I often tell them that if less than 50% of their music is incomprehensible to me they are doing MY work not theirs.

So, in practice there are a million variations on this type of sequence, and just cause it works for me doesn't mean it should for anyone else. The bottom line is that, if the kids are working on music that matters to them, and they have someone around who knows some things, as you do, and is willing to find out about things they don't know, as I'm sure you are, they will learn a great deal and produce some

really cool stuff. They'll also have a blast.

A few thoughts on the gear and curriculum:

Sound sources are more important than inputs: if you have to choose between a bunch of instruments, some drum machines and a few field recorders, or a really fancy multi-channel interface, go for the former. Initially most of the work the kids do will be overdub based--one track at a time.

If you can get something like Acid, Reason, or Fruityloops (the demo is free and does everything but save a session--you can mix down to WAV though) on a bunch of beater computers, kids' laptops etc., that is really useful. Lots of kids will generate ideas, and even fully worked out songs/pieces just working with a sequencer and an onboard laptop mic. Tracks can later be dumped to pro-tools for additional work, mastering etc.

Spend more time teaching craft and theory, less time teaching the interface. Kids KNOW how to figure out software. Better to spend time teaching them how a mic works, and what EQ is all about than how to work a PT playlist. You can show them that stuff on the fly or they'll figure it out themselves.

Direct teaching should be clearly organized (topically, sequentially, whatever), but the way the kids work will have very little to do with this initially. So you'll teach EQ one day, but when they start back working on their projects the kids will ignore EQ entirely because they are fascinated with learning to play the drums, or they've discovered the reverb plug-in etc. A common mistake that teachers make is to try and make these two types of learning line-up. There is no reason to, and in fact the attempt to line them up gets in the way of the work and annoys both kid and teacher. What you teach and what the kids discover will intersect organically in the work itself. Roll with it.

When a kid asks "What do you want us to do?" the first response should always be, "How should I know what you want to do?" If your goal is fundamentally to get the kids to frame the creative and technical problems themselves, and to help them solve them on their own terms, they will engage in ways no classroom teacher ever gets to see. The most problematic kid in the school will turn out to be a genius in the studio. The work will be incredible and you'll have a blast. The studio is not a classroom, it's a studio. The rules SHOULD be different. Teachers and administrators will need to get used to this idea at first, but if you explain that the kids are learning different skills (innovation, collaboration, self-organization) and they see the engagement that takes place, most will come to understand. The parents almost always seem to get it right away because their kids come home raving about how much they love the studio.

Don't be afraid if a project the kids start crashes and burns. Force yourself not to worry about the outcome. Don't worry if, after three weeks of hard work, the kids decide they want to drop a project and start a different one. If you do these things, you'll find that, as if by magic, the kids will generate amazing, carefully thought out, and finished work. The less YOU drive it, the more THEY will make amazing music, and the more they will learn.

The one area where it's ok to be really rigid and almost militaristic is with certain types of craft procedures: proper handling of gear, proper marking of track sheets and so on. Kids get this. If kids want to revise procedure once they know it, great, as long as they can explain the reasoning behind the revision. We had a kid who didn't say or do anything for the first three weeks of an after-school studio program. Then one day he walked in with a beautifully drawn floor plan and said, "This studio is set up all wrong--it's really hard for 12 of us to work in here." He was completely right, except for his monitor placement, which he quickly revised once we explained the problem. He got the other kids to help him move all the gear and furniture around to work better. He became de facto Studio Manager, which was fine. Then he started getting off a bit too much on a power trip, which was fine too because the kids asked if they could fire him. I said, "Why are you asking me?" They "fired" him, and then "rehired" him

with a changed attitude. It was very cool, and because I didn't take any of it too seriously, they didn't either. They learned a little about organization, but mostly they stayed focused on the work.

The earlier you can involve students in the studio the better. If you know there are a few students who are already interested, invite them to a real meeting where you talk about the gear options, curriculum etc. If they are really involved, they will be a magnet for other kids. It's fine for kids to recruit their friends and all, but insist that they also recruit kids they don't like, even kids no one likes. Explain to them that such a mix is necessary if you want to produce really interesting music. They won't entirely get this, but they will later when the kid no one likes is the only one who seems to be able to figure out how to get the Mac to recognize the interface, or the only one who can syncopate his foot on the kick drum. Insist that the group is close to at least half girls/women. Tell them this mix is also necessary for them to make really good music. The girls always end up being the best technicians in addition to being great musicians. They'll end up teaching the boys.

Do not, under any circumstances let the school use participation in your program as a reward for anything, or deny participation as a punishment. This is a recipe for pedagogical, musical, and cultural disaster, and it completely undermines the positive aspects of participation, especially for students who have a hard time in school. If the school has to punish kids they should leave the studio out of it. I can't tell you how many times I've had to fight with administrators because they want to pull a kid out of the studio program for something that happened elsewhere, even though that kid has said time and again that his work in the studio is the ONLY reason he still attends school.

Ok, I suspect this seems more of a rant than a help! Take it just as one person's experience. If you have specific questions about how to think about curriculum, let me know and I'll be happy to share some ideas. You can also hear a few examples of the thousands of recordings kids made in the studios I worked in, here:

From CECILIA PINTO

You will not have a place to put your coat or bags and so will carry them from room to room. Every time you enter the building you will feel a nervous excitement, it gets better, but still, every time.

You must learn the name of the security guards even though four or five years in to your residency they may still ask to see identification. You will rarely see the principal but when you do, the principal will know exactly who you are, and what you are doing.

You must learn the name of the school engineer because he controls your ability to use tape or tacks on the wall. He will determine if your poetry display is a fire hazard, and is the only one who can supply you with a ladder. And yes, when teaching poetry, sometimes you need a ladder. If you are lucky enough to have someone who makes photocopies for you at the school, treat them like a god.

You may have to learn the names of 100 third graders. You will not have a key to the teacher's bathroom and this, among other things, will lead you to feel a certain allegiance with the children.

You will occasionally forget or mispronounce the children's names, or you will call them by the wrong name. You come to understand why one classroom teacher you encounter calls everyone, *dear*. You will lie in bed at night trying to put names to faces. You will remember them by their poems.

If you eat lunch in the cafeteria with the fifth graders they will accept but not understand your presence. What grown up would want to eat with them they seem to be thinking? But then someone will offer to share his or her chips with you.

You will be walking across the playground when you are hit by a red ball. Three or four boys will stare at you looking nervous and guilty while someone shouts, "Hey, you hit the teacher!" While regaining your balance you will think, *oh, they mean me.*

You will be accosted by children who run up to you to ask, *are you coming today?* And while in another instance you might reply sarcastically, *what does it look like?* to these children you say, *Yes, yes I am.*

When you enter the classroom a ripple of words will go through the room, it will sound like this; *She's here, it's time for poetry, yea! She's here, poetry, poetry.* You will start the class saying, *I have an amazing poem to show you,* or you will start the class saying, *I am so excited about this poem,* or, you will start the class saying, *Would everybody please, please be quiet?*

You will feel bad when the teacher yells at them for *wasting your time,* when you know that even on a bad day this is exactly where you want to be. You will also feel bad when the teacher pays no attention to your lesson.

You will be able to offer a teacher a fresh perspective on their students.

Teachers, who at the beginning of the year eye you skeptically, will end the year by shyly reading poems they've written during your class. You will develop deep, meaningful friendships with some teachers. Others, you will never understand.

Each teacher is alone in their classroom and responsible for the educational, emotional and physical well being of a large number of children whom the world expects them to care for, nurture and improve. If they look tired or seem preoccupied, it's because they are.

You will be a part of countless fire drills.

It is part of your job to fit in to whatever classroom you are in. Some will be loud and lively, some will feel fearful and restrained, some pleasantly calm. It is your job to do your job irregardless of the presence of a security guard, or the Secret Santa exchange, the impending report cards or the substitute teacher.

You will show up in your usual rumpled black, or neatly pressed slacks and blouse, the Hawaiian shirt you think makes you look fun, whatever it is you end up wearing time after time, only to learn that it's spirit day, or dress up day, or pajama day, or some other event for which you are inappropriately dressed and you will feel like an outsider.

Honestly, no matter how kind and generous your school is, or how long you're there, you will always feel a little like an outsider. This is ok. You are an outsider, you are bringing something in from the outside that otherwise wouldn't be there. You are a messenger.

Some days, what seemed like a great idea is a dud. Some days, something you had little faith in, produces amazing work.

You will give away all your pens and pencils again, and again. Someone will attempt to measure your rear end with a ruler. They will ask if you had a bad night, if you are pregnant or just fat, if you didn't have time to fix your hair, if you write poetry too?

You will worry about the kid that always cries, the kid that can't sit still, the kid that never, ever speaks, the kid that smells like cigarette smoke, the kid that falls asleep, the kid that only ever has a bag of chips for lunch, the kid that's always in the office.

Some days you may feel that no amount of poetry is ever going to help anyone.

You will hear secrets like; *I have a new brother, or a kitten, or my tummy hurts, or my grandma died, or my boyfriend broke up with me or I'm kicked out of the house.* You will be given special poems, poems written just for you or poems written because you made it seem important. You will also receive drawings and other precious objects made from construction paper and glue sticks. You'll get hugged.

If you teach high school, students will carelessly preface reading their work by saying, *this isn't any good, or I just wrote this on the train.* Usually this means that the poem will leave you breathless.

You will constantly be reminded of the depth of emotion felt by every human being.

Alone, you will read poetry and think, *this poem would be perfect for Roberto, or this is just the right poem for Tamara.* You will give them these poems, they will receive them seriously, shyly, or with surprise. *For me?* they will ask. *Yes, you say, this poem is for you.*

You will be there when the light goes on.

You will love the ones with the messy hair, the glasses, the round bellies, the ashy elbows, the runny nose, the beautiful smile, the acne, the stain on their shirt, the chip on their shoulder, the laughing, good natured ones, the dutiful, hardworking kids, the tough ones that try not to smile when you praise them, the ones that will win prizes, the ones that try, the ones that don't, the ones that always hug you, the ones that are really never going to love poetry the way you do.

You will most likely spend unpaid hours working on lessons because after a while it becomes more important to get the work right than to think about fair wages. However you will often think about fair wages.

Your own work may seem to flounder. You'll worry that you're giving it all away; your energy and good ideas. You aren't. You may think that your art is suffering. It isn't. You are only gaining, learning and growing more creative. Your own work will only get better. This work will feed your work. This work is the work.

Expect to be engaged, challenged, frustrated, inspired. Expect to learn, expect to grow, expect to be humbled, expect to give and receive, expect everything.

From BRENNY RABINE

Dear Young Theatre Artist,

Katie, a cherubic young actor in my class, wore her long blonde hair in straight braids down her chest. In a game of "Dolphin Training," her classmates and I decided to train her to hold her braids up and "fly" around the room. [This is an improv training game I learned from BATS in San Francisco.]

Each time Katie touched her braids, the company called out, "Ding!" She'd let her braids go, look around at what offers she was making, and say, "What??" Then, she wandered about, making offers, trying to figure out what she was supposed to do. Sooner or later, Katie would touch or pull at her braids, and again, the company would call out her reward: "Ding!"

Katie started to get really frustrated. She wasn't "doing anything," she complained. The more frustrated she became, the more her braid-stroking habit increased. "Ding! Ding!" we called out. Her habit was so deeply unconscious that when she finally (finally!) put two and two together—that she was touching her braids and getting "dinged" for it—, getting her to hold her braids out and run around was easy. The look of relief on her face was matched only by the utter recognition of her habit.

I thought of Katie and the Dolphin Game recently, as I read this lesson from F. M. Alexander: "You can't learn what you don't know, if you keep doing what you do know." Katie was unable to be "trained" in the game, because she failed to even recognize what she "knew how to do." Habit, the great deadener, eh?

Before I can teach actors anything, I find my first task is to become a kind of mirror for them. I show them what they're doing. I allow them to recognize their habitual impulses. I must do this as gently as possible, stripping my tone or my expression of any judgment, so they don't feel "bad" for having practiced their habits. I help them to slow down and go easy, so the habitual impulse cannot find expression. In this way, other impulses may arise, and they can track those.

When I first fell in love with Dolphin Training, I admired it for the way it exercises an improviser's spontaneity and listening skills. Improvisers have to keep making offers. Improvisers have to listen, both to the feedback of the audience and to their own awareness. Improvisers learn to fail good-naturedly by making offers that don't work. For many reasons, I loved the game. Using the frame of Alexander's lesson, I saw the game in a new light and admired it all the more.

Being a teaching artist requires us to look at our own habits (and habits of mind) just as much as we make our actors aware of theirs. It's constant practice. It's always new.

In peace,

From KAREN LEWIS

Dear Dale for the young Artist,

*With words alone, you don't make the soup.
Rumanian proverb*

Teaching Artists, first and foremost, teach *artistry*. We've come a long way from the days when the word connoted trickery, or cunning deception. Today we are skilled professionals that cultivate, with *clarity*, the artistic process through a variety of methods. We develop meaningful classroom environments where students learn, communicate, manifest, compose, question, originate, produce, imagine, perform, arrange, execute and *create a work of art*. In a skilled Teaching Artist's classroom this work feels like a joyous and serious journey of discovery.

As practitioners and educators we know *how* to bring art into being through our students' head, heart and hands. We often do this in the face of difficult obstacles, and we accomplish our goals with dedication and a well-developed sense of humor. It isn't enough to love our art form; we must know it with sufficient power, intelligence and competency to convey artistic process in manageable and understandable lessons. It is important to learn how to break down the process without disrupting flow, and to keep our students' attention through inevitable frustration and reluctance, to use their self-doubt, fear and curiosity to propel them into a deeper relationship with their work. We must challenge them at all times to attempt their best work.

My students affirm that my writing residencies make them feel and think differently. They discover a new sense of freedom. They say that through art making they learn to focus, that it opens their eyes to a new way of being in the world, and they develop a stronger belief in themselves and their art.

It is a particular blessing to have an opportunity to teach students in subsequent years. Ashley Andrews was in first grade at Como Park Elementary in Lancaster, NY when she wrote the following poem in response to a lesson introducing poetic metacognition.

We Create Each Other

I create
poems,
poems
create me
My poem
likes
alliteration
I give it
My poem
likes
to be
alive
that is what
I
give it
My poem
likes rojo
and onarenhado
I give
it
My poem
likes
words
I give it
what it needs
to be a poem.

Ashley Andrews

Ashley's writing continues to demonstrate her personal observations, experience, and strong voice. This year, as a third grader, she tackled a definition poem with delightful results.

Dust: (noun). 1. Makes you go achew!
2. As gray as the clouds on a rainy day. Drip.
Drip. Drip. 3. As soft as a lamb, roaming and
grazing through fresh fields of grass.
4. As tricky as a fly, coming back
every time you get rid of it.
5. Good at playing hide and
seek. 6. As dirty as a pig after
his early morning mud bath. 7. Can
give many people allergies.
They do it so people think
Attack of the deadly dust! 8.
A good poem topic for me.

Ashley Andrews

A note of caution: this work tends to possess us (we certainly don't possess it). It has a life of its own. We need, and want, to make room for it in our lives. Remember to leave, or build, enough time into your schedule to refresh yourself, to *recreate* yourself. Also, if you are the type of person that needs the latest car, the newest gadget, the biggest bank account— then this work is not for you. We are modest wage earners; you may need to supplement your income, especially in the early years while you are developing relationships with various non-profits, schools and institutions.

This work is energizing, it moves us, it astounds us, and it is an important contribution. Through us—our students, and our communities, come to know better who they are. I don't mean to be trite to say it is an honor and a privilege, but it most certainly is. It actually makes us better artists, and that is a phenomenal reward.

From RICHARD LEWIS

Take a minute, and look into the eyes of the children you are talking with. Look for that intensity of attention, that aliveness that goes beyond our usual boundaries of learning. Make sure you aware of their desire to share with you the great adventure that is their childhood – the impulse to play, to imagine, to explore and discover the richness of their newly found understandings. Become a part of their angle of vision, watch with them the flow of their dreaming, the constant delights of their reaching into the unknown, the spaces and solitudes that make up their wonder and astonishments. Let yourself travel with their ideas, become the adventure of their inner worlds, the movements and gestures of their questions and answers. Enter their listenings, the sheer abundance of poetries surrounding them. And with quiet patience watch their eyes follow you – as you bring them to the marvel and mystery that are their dances, their words, their music, their drawn and painted images. Then sit back and enjoy their singular excitement and joy, indeed their gratitude, as they begin to see, to experience that artistry and expression of their thoughts, perhaps as it is for you, at the source of themselves – and the life of others.

From BERTHA ROGERS

So you want to be an artist who actually makes a living! The perfect occupation for you, although you certainly won't get rich at it, is being a teaching artist. I have been at this work, off and on, for almost 40 years. This occupation, sporadic and intermittent as it can be, has been one of the great joys in my life.

The longevity gene isn't one you require for this job; those who work best in shorter, more intensive spurts are ideally suited to be teaching artists. (I deeply admire teachers who are able to work day in, day out, with the same students, but that's not my strength, and I suspect it's not the strength of most of us in this field.)

As a teaching artist, you'll need to be really good at applying for jobs because each new residency is like a new job, with all its frightening and exhilarating aspects. You must revel in intensive work with different groups and enjoy the challenge of meeting new teachers and their students and learning their quirks and idiosyncrasies. This past year I had two boys who always called me, in their pre-teen voices, "Ms. Bertha Rogers," making me laugh. One of these boys also wrote the most amazing poem about time, far beyond his years, and I was so excited, I had to read the poem over and over.

You must be prepared to work with students from K-12, from 21-106 (my oldest student, a bright, articulate writer, was in a nursing home; she couldn't hold the pencil, but she dictated an amazing story).

My youngest students have been two years old. Working in these age ranges expands and advances your own thinking process and opens you to wonderful new realities.

You will also teach, if you're lucky enough to be in a big city like New York, students of every possible ethnic background, which will only enrich you and your thinking. If you're working in small towns you'll understand how students who attend school in the same building from K-12 resolve differences and exult in their sense of community.

Sometimes, you'll be working with gifted students; sometimes (and often the very next day), you'll be helping special needs children, or the incarcerated, or retarded adults. You will never be able to sleep through your working days. Instead, you will constantly be on the alert, always learning, just like your students. I was told by a very famous poet that he always assigned himself the same task as those he gave to his students, a very good device for keeping fresh as a writer or artist (of course, you won't have the opportunity to write or draw in the classroom because you'll be so busy working with the individual students; this will be on your own time).

You won't have paid sick days, vacation, holidays, etc. You'll have to manage those on your own time. Unless you belong to a teaching artist organization with a health plan, you probably won't have health insurance. You certainly won't have a 401K.

You will have freedom; if you're good you will be able to pick and choose your residencies; and, if they like you, you'll be asked back. I've been at one school for eight years now, and I love walking in the door, being greeted by teachers and staff, seeing the children I worked with when they were five or six and are now in high school.

Young artist, I wholeheartedly recommend this work.

From JUDITH TANNENBAUM

Dear Young Artist:

The evening is warm as I write this letter to you, late August in northern California. The amaryllis, those pink bulbs we called naked ladies when I lived on the coast, have been out for a few weeks, and school here starts tomorrow. *Late summer light/red gold and low*, I wrote in a poem years after I'd moved back to the city.

I'm 61, and my world as a young artist was so different from yours. For one thing, we could live on very little money. Which means many things, including the primary fact that we could come to our work – making art, sharing art – slowly, moved by the project at hand more than the need to pay bills.

And I did come to the work slowly. I began sharing poems with children in my daughter's kindergarten class. I didn't think of myself as a community artist – the descriptor I'd come to use in a few years. I thought of myself as a mother, a volunteer, a lover of poems, and as someone who had fun sharing imagination with kids.

The times allowed one thing to lead to another: volunteering to being paid for a few classes, a few classes to long-term workshops, poems with country kids to sharing in urban classrooms, Bay Area public schools to prison, once-a-week prison classes to a grant as a full-time teaching artist at San Quentin, my own classroom experience to writing manuals for other artists working in prison, manuals to becoming training coordinator with WritersCorps. I learned most from observing myself and my students, from the enthusiasm or lack of it of those at the site, and from the welcome or closed door given by the wider

community around us. I'm grateful for the pace at which I was able to grow into the work that's become my life work.

I wish you a similar – from-the-roots, organic – pace, but I know that wish is unrealistic. How can your pace be from-the-roots when one month's rent on a room in San Francisco would have paid six months of bills when my daughter was ten and I was thirty-three? How can your pace be organic when schools are so besieged that the basic human need to make art has to prove its worth according to a dozen irrelevant measures?

Still, despite rent and high stakes testing, these are your times and they have their own blessings. Therefore my advice is to embrace these blessings with curiosity and love for your art form, for those with whom you share, and for the process of making itself.

Letters to a Young Artist. Dale Davis, ed. Association of Teaching Artists. Accessed July 30, 2012 <<http://www.teachingartists.com/lettersyoungartists.htm>>.