

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



Amanda Swift

Visual Arts Teacher at Tyler Elementary School

Role as a D.C. Art Educator

Amanda Swift defines her role at Tyler as “creative inspirer.” She wants her students to understand that art is more than making a pretty picture. It is also an opportunity to show feelings, make a statement, and incorporate some sort of hidden meaning. She encourages her students to “think outside of the box in order to become freer,” as well as “being focused and having self-discipline and motivation.”

Working Creatively

The challenges she faces as a public school art educator require Amanda to do some creative problem solving of her own. Committed to giving 100% of herself to her students, Amanda has learned to adapt to extreme scheduling challenges throughout the school day. For example, her 3rd–5th graders have art first thing in the morning; late arrivals and students who use the free breakfast option have no more than 15 minutes a week for art making! It also means Amanda rarely starts her instruction with a full class and must teach and re-teach constantly.

To alleviate these challenges, she creates videos of herself facilitating each day’s lesson. Students who miss all or part of class use the videos to understand the assignment and the steps to take to complete the task. The recording becomes a “second teacher,” Amanda says, and it empowers students to take responsibility for their learning. She also established an after-school Art Club and recess Open Studio—an achievement for which she is justifiably proud—so that students have more occasions for art making. She relishes these opportunities to focus on bigger, more in-depth projects with a smaller group of students in a more intimate collaborative setting.



Looking Ahead

Firmly believing that there is always something you can do or say to make the world a better place, Amanda is committed to “Bucket Filling,” which encourages learners to look out for one another, show empathy, and focus on the positive. She places buckets throughout the studio and encourages students to look for examples of kindness. Students write personal notes to their peers and are later celebrated for their actions. Amanda hopes that as a result of being a participant in her class, students might be better equipped to face the world and think about the kind or positive ways to encounter a situation.



Choosing Her Path

Amanda’s journey into the art classroom was a round-about one. She originally majored in Environmental Science, but ultimately combined it with her love for art making to pursue a career as a scientific illustrator. Then, she traveled around D.C., teaching environmental science from a truck. Amanda gained an appreciation for education, especially in D.C. public schools, and headed into the classroom. She continues to incorporate science and other disciplines into her art units as much as possible.

Benefits of teaching in D.C.

Like many D.C. art educators, Amanda loves being in a city with wonderful museum opportunities and outreach programs. She just wishes for more arts time in the school

day so that she and her students can take advantage of all the city has to offer. She humorously describes this situation as, “the world being our oyster and yet not being able to eat the oyster!”

Fun Fact!

What art supply would Amanda be if she could choose? Clay—it can be molded, shaped and smoothed, and most importantly, constantly changed, and forgiven!