

2006 HONOREE

Carolyn L. McKnight

John Marshall High School, Los Angeles, CA
Arts Education • 9th-12th Grade Theatre



Years Teaching: 12

Average Class Size: 45

Classes Taught Per Day: 5

School's % of ESL Students: 85%

School Type: Public, LC

Type of Class: Heterogeneous
elective

“In my classroom, students learn the rituals, disciplines, and joys of theatre work. My drama class follows a pattern of warm-up, game, new concept, improvisation, rehearsal, presentation and discussion. Students quickly grasp my way of working on theatre tasks. They expect to be challenged by ideas, activities, and literature that they have not encountered before. They have to step out of their social lives and academic struggles, and step into a different mode; even teenagers have to reach back into their childhoods to retrieve their knowledge of how to play. Students often comment on what they saw and heard in each scene, while I try to say as little as possible. Although the students seek my praise and they like receiving marks, they learn from each other as much as they learn from me. My students’ experience in my classroom is unique because they feel happy, supported, and respected as artists. They can also learn respect for others by learning that they can work with anyone, which enriches both the art they create on stage and the lives they lead off stage.”

“My most deeply-held belief about learning is that all students are capable of abstract thought and creative self-expression when they are allowed to start from their own experiences. In one of my favorite assignments, I give groups of kids a pair of abstract nouns – such as ‘joy and sorrow,’ ‘praise and shame,’ ‘trust and betrayal,’ ‘chaos and cooperation’ – and ask them to create sculptures or tableaux



that illustrate their two concepts. This assignment encourages them to think about big concepts and create strikingly beautiful, emotionally powerful visual representations of their ideas.”

“If patience were an Olympic sport, Ms. M would easily win a gold medal. She can take the most shy, most introverted student and have him or her performing a hilarious monologue about the difficulties of being a camel. Or she can take the most petulant student like myself and drag him on stage kicking and screaming and have him write a well-structured scene about it. I have learned more from Ms. McKnight about my potential and myself in the past four years than from any other educator in all my schooling.”

– *current student*

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS:

Fulfillment Fund Award (1996)