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## **Inktober Coloring Book Volume 1: A look at maintaining artistic practices while teaching.**

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### **Abstract**

*Over the past three years I was able to work towards creating a published coloring book containing illustrations from a well-known art challenge called Inktober. Inktober is a 31 day art challenge in October of each year in which artists create one ink drawing or illustration every day for 31 days based on a prompt list, or their own ambitions. The challenge itself is grueling for those who do not create art as their sole occupation. I participated three years in a row, and this year I have just reached the amount of illustrations I felt would be needed to start compiling and publishing. I am now sharing my experiences with fellow artists and educators, as well as touching on the benefits of allowing ourselves to be creative on top of whatever field you are studying or working in. I am currently a Masters in Art Education student who has been doing my best to teach, as well as maintain my own artistic practices. I received a bachelor's degree from Millersville University in 2016 with a concentration in Graphic and Interactive design and a special interest in illustration and publication design.*

As a student and artist, it can be difficult to make time to for yourself to actually create anything. It can be so easy to only do what is required of you for school or work, and then relax in front of the tv or go to bed. I noticed I had not been making as much new art as I would like, and decided to do something about it. I started creating specific times for myself to create and practice my drawing skills. I usually created this time for myself during either lunch breaks, or while I was relaxing and eating dinner at home with my husband. Having this time sparked a flurry of creativity for me. I found it much easier to continue to make things, and continue my artistic practices, if I set aside specific time for it and had a particular goal or project in mind.

As I have been pursuing my post bacc teaching certification alongside a masters in education, I have found much less time to make my own art. Countless hours are spent lesson planning, studying, and student teaching. By the time I arrive home or have a moment to myself, it can be easy to just want to go to bed watching some Netflix, or mindlessly scroll through my social media to see what other artists are accomplishing as lay there wasting my time. This brought a thought to my attention while reading an article related to my predicament: "Does our chosen profession require that we make art... or only make artists?"(Sands) I of course knew right away that I wanted to be teaching students to be creative thinkers, and not necessarily try to push them through a

“become a famous artist” sort of unrealistic program.

I started to wonder if making my own art while teaching would be too impossible, or if it was as important as having my students make art in my shared classroom. Will not creating anything for myself lead me to burnout, or is this just what all art teachers face daily? I was unsure, and decided to do some digging. It turns out, there are a lot of teachers out there, art teachers in particular who have a hard time squeezing extra time out of their day to do things they love. As I continued to do some research I came back to the same article that that stated: “how can one share the joy of making art if they don’t create art themselves?”(Sands) I started wondering if my students would still be engaged in my lessons if it seemed like I was not myself enjoying my own personal art making outside of school.

A lot of the time it comes down to whether or not I feel like I have the time to make any art in the first place. Much of my time that I am not teaching is spent writing lesson plans, creating assessments, or reading up on the newest pedagogy. Not to mention I have responsibilities of my own at home such as feeding my dogs, doing laundry, and shoveling my driveway. I unfortunately cannot just decide to let some of things go to make time for my art, but I can try to create some wiggle room or multitask. I have come to the realization that this need or constant itch to create new things will never go away, and I need to just accept that sometimes I need to spend a Saturday sketching or painting instead of tidying the living room, or reading another article on classroom management. Making time form myself to avoid burning myself became a top priority.

Unlike what many parents may think of their children, creativity is not a simple phase we can just grow out of or put to the side; it infiltrates our entire lives and shows itself in any way it can. I have especially seen this

recently in my colleagues who like to keep planners or schedules. Some of them act as beautiful places to keep track of time while being colorful, well organized, and they often include little doodles or stickers near important tasks. While reading this week I came across the following quote and I do believe it got me thinking about not being ashamed of the way I am or have to be in regards to my creative expression: “I argue that making room in your life for art, even though it may not seem economically rational, is worthwhile and possible—and if you don’t, you risk feeling like something’s missing in your life well past your mid-life crisis.” (Cay)

I began sketching for an online art event called Inktober in 2016, and have been participating every year since. You basically draw every day for the month of October. You can follow a prompt list given by the original creator Jake Parker, or you can come up with your own theme and ideas. I had all of these great ink drawings sitting around not being used for anything, and I started to think about how popular coloring books were both for adults and kids. Many use it as a form of stress relief, although I found some of those adult coloring books stress inducing or overwhelming with all the tiny little spaces and ornate patterns. I decided to make a coloring book for kids and adults using my ink drawings.

It was fairly simple to do considering my theme for the last three Inktobers had been centered around animals or pets. I worked on scanning in all of the images, then digitally recreated them in adobe illustrator. I then arranged and organized them in adobe In Design. Publishing the book itself was probably the most time consuming. I went back and forth with several separate self publishing companies, and finally settled on Lulu.com. The devil was in the details at that point; formatting errors and revisions were abundant. I gave the first print copy to

friends and family to review and got lots of very helpful feedback for my next two revisions. Finally after three tries, I had a book I could be proud of.

Having this as a project I could work on during my schooling gave me the creative outlet I needed. Just simply performing a creative act for a couple of minutes to about a half an hour a day really made a big difference for me. I did not feel burnt out, or frustrated teaching and not having time to myself anymore. I felt as though I was

giving myself a break or a time out, to just sit down and truly enjoy something I created and put it to good use to share with others. Overall, I am glad I took the time to do these small bits of creative work, and hope to participate in more online monthly challenges in the future and create more content. For now though, I am happy to share what I have made with others and I hope they get some joy out of it and can allow themselves to take a break and color for a while.

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### Recommended Citation

Dunkle, M. (2019). Inktober Coloring Book Volume 1:  
A look at maintaining artistic practices while teaching. *Made in Millersville Journal*, 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.mimjournal.com>