

# MAIA PALMER

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## TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

My resume cannot express my firm commitment to art as a means of communication, sharing, and being in the world. A pivotal experience that has defined and guided my philosophy as a teacher was working at the Center for Survivors of Torture and War Trauma. I collaboratively developed and implemented a Mural Arts Program with a group of middle school refugees from Somalia, Liberia, Kenya, and Iraq. Working closely together with the center's therapists to provide a safe environment for open expression, we succeeded in creating more than a mural. We nurtured the seeds of friendship and communication that crossed racial, religious, and cultural divides. Art is so much more than a technique or a finished product. The "art" was not simply in the mural; the art was also in the *making*. The artistic and personal transformation of these young girls through the course of the summer left an indelible mark on my spirit. It was this experience that reaffirmed my commitment to becoming an art educator that celebrates differences and encourages community.

I believe that learning should be a dialogue, with both teacher and students learning from and responding to each other. I begin assignments by explaining requirements and expectations, as well as its contemporary, historical, or cross-curricular significance. In fact, the initial presentation of a project is key – the student's first glimpse of a unit should cause them to question assumptions and spark their imagination. In order to help students visualize and conceptualize these new design challenges, I show work from various exemplars, particularly women, people of color, and those who have been silenced throughout art history. I aim to show work that will resonate with a diverse body of students and encourage them to engage in open and honest discourse of their own experiences. Communication is not only critical at the beginning of each unit, however, but throughout the design process. Students continuously dialogue with each other in the form of critique and critical analysis at every stage, from ideation through creation and revision. The process of articulating design choices, analyzing the successes as well as failures, allows students to grow as thoughtful designers and artists.

As an art educator, I am involved in hands on activities with my students every day. Creating art is my passion, and my students cannot help but be infected by my enthusiasm. I look at demonstrations as a chance to inspire students with thought provoking and visually stimulating new ideas. New skills are demonstrated in small bites, giving the students the opportunity to watch and listen, then to follow along with a demo. I typically include written step-by-step instructions for tutorials as well in order to help students who may move at a faster or a slower pace. After each small sequence of steps, I spend several minutes walking throughout the room to individually help students before moving on to the next sequence. After new skills are presented, I assign both small tasks and larger assignments that allow students to practice those skills independently. By breaking assignment into smaller pieces this way, students are more readily able to internalize information. It also gives students multiple opportunities for success within each project, and gives ample time for them to voice concerns and questions. Additionally, it enables me to continuously assess student progress, reflect and modify assignments as needed, allowing for differentiation. I also firmly believe in the benefits of a strong sketchbook culture. Assignments will include a variety of sketching, brainstorming and visualizing on paper as well as digital work. In addition to a careful balance of question and answer discussions, lectures, demonstrations and individual work time, I believe that group work can be helpful in preparing graphic arts and design students for working collaboratively in the real world. Assignments are scaffolded to build on skills, and grow in sophistication and complexity as the semester progresses, allowing for more creativity and individual expression with each tier.

I create an open atmosphere that encourages students to ask questions of both me and their peers. If students remain unable to solve their problems after looking through notes or checking with peers, I often prompt them with questions to lead them to their own answers. It can also be helpful to ask the class for assistance, because where one student encounters a roadblock, other students may have the same question. It is affirming to know

that you are not alone, and the verbal repetition can be helpful in retention of new skills. It also gives students a chance to practice the vocabulary that they have learned as well as to generate ideas about multiple techniques to solve a problem.

Concerning assessment, I provide both verbal and written instructions accompanied by a detailed rubric. Student expectations are clear from the beginning of a unit, and as I work with students individually I consistently provide personal feedback about technical issues, composition and visual hierarchy, as well as conceptual choices. Students have the opportunity to revise their work after mid-project critiques, as well as after the final critique, where they receive feedback from myself as well as the students. I am a fair grader, and in addition to the verbal feedback that they receive throughout the process, I provide detailed comments and written notes for improvement when I grade the assignments. I believe in grading promptly; this sets an example for the students and also helps them to improve future projects. I also believe in making myself accessible to the students for help on multiple fronts, such as in person, via email, and through commentary on Blackboard. My goal is for students of all levels and backgrounds to find success in my classroom. When students are personally invested in their creative work and are able to critically present their ideas, I know I have succeeded in my job.