

# Why Arts?

Beverly Hall, Library Media Specialist and former Music Teacher

Good afternoon. My name is Beverly Hall. I am currently the library media specialist at McCormick High School in McCormick South Carolina. My teaching career began in 1976 as an elementary music teacher in Clinton South Carolina and continued as a middle school music teacher in McCormick in 1991.

Growing up in a mill village in Greenwood South Carolina, I went to the neighborhood school, Matthews Elementary. We didn't have a school library, we didn't have visual art classes but we did have music class every week. In this class in the early 1960s I discovered things about myself that helped me change from the painfully shy child to the person I am today. Not only did music feed my soul, but as I continued my music training in junior high band, it provided opportunities to be part of a group that worked together. This is not something I would have experienced otherwise.

Being a part of the education system in South Carolina for so many years I have seen trends come and go then perhaps come back with a new name. I found through this process that the trends in education that seemed to fit best for the students were the ones that required project based collaborative work. As I became part of the Curriculum Leadership in the Arts program each summer I learned about creating standards based lesson plans with formative and summative assessment, using rubric and incorporating learning styles through Howard Gardner's work in multiple intelligences. It always seemed that these tools I learned about through arts professional development would then be introduced as a new district initiative several years later. The arts teachers were ahead of the curve in designing curriculum that taught the way students learn.

Krysty Nunley, the visual arts teacher at McCormick middle and high school expressed the difference she has seen in her students over the two years she has been with us:

"The Arts are excellent for teaching students critical thinking skills and perseverance, both of which are highly desired in the work force. My students usually start off with such rigid thinking skills because school teaches that there is a correct way to solve a problem or issue. This is not preparing them for life because life does not always have

**just one** right way. During an arts course, students learn to “think outside the box.” They learn that there are many ways to approach a problem. They learn that sometimes the idea you chose doesn’t work but that does not mean you can’t do it and then quit. It just means you have to try again or try in a different way. Quitting is not an option. Only by persevering can they solve the problem and produce awesome results.”

As an example from my own teaching career, three of my former middle school music students became my students again when I became a high school library media specialist. One of our Social Studies teachers asked me to help his students with research projects that could be good enough for competition at National History Day. My three former students were in his American History class. These three girls wanted to do a project that would combine history and music. What we came up with together was a comparison of the African American music during the Civil War and the music during the civil rights era a hundred years later. These students researched and wrote a performance, blending music and drama to demonstrate how music reflects the culture and history of America. Through their creativity and persistence they made their way from local to regional and then to the statewide competition in Columbia. Because of their first place finish they won the opportunity to perform in the National History Day competition at the University of Maryland, each coming home with a medal. One of these students has gone on to become a researcher at Old Dominion University and one achieved her masters degree in Math and currently teaches in Greenwood.

Now, more than ever, South Carolina students need the skills that the arts teach. Gone are the days when you could easily get a job at the local mill or manufacturing plant. With these jobs you just needed to be able to do a repetitive task eight hours a day. Very little analysis, evaluation or creativity was needed. Today’s world is different, with new challenges constantly testing the abilities of the workforce. Students will need to be able to learn and adapt to these changes and persevere to be successful.

The arts help students develop problem solving skills, collaboration, critical thinking and perseverance...just the kinds of traits that will help them become productive working members of our society.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today, and thank you also for all you do for the students of South Carolina.