



Eduardo Padrón

UPFRONT

I RECENTLY MET WITH A GROUP OF STUDENTS WHO had returned from studying abroad. What they learned was on their faces more than in their words.

Their enthusiasm was overwhelming. One student, in particular, poured out his story, and it has me thinking to this day.

"I'm not really an artist," he began, "but I wanted to visit the great museums of Europe. I wandered through the Rembrandt Museum in Amsterdam and a particular painting stopped me in my tracks. Suddenly, I was seeing it. I never knew I could see like that. In front of this painting I found myself crying and I didn't know why."

The painting was "Jeremiah Contemplating the Destruction of the Temple." You

day to find a front page photo of another temple destroyed, this one in Iraq. I wondered how many had wept in front of it and asked why.

I don't know if art can save us from our own worst instincts. It's a lot to ask. But if I asked you before which temple you would want your sons and daughters to stand, your answer would be quick.

Despite a broad and rich educational system, we reinforce a rather limited notion of intelligence. I remember a young woman, an interior designer who could walk into a room and "see" the beauty in it, recognize instantly the

possibilities in space, light and color. She was brilliant but she forever lamented her lack of book smarts.

Most of us took the Stanford-Binet IQ test developed in 1916, and revision #5 is still being administered to our children and grandchildren. With good reason we emphasize verbal skills and STEM—Science, Technology, Engineering and Math. But in our

frenzy to rejuvenate a struggling K-12 education system, math and English dominate the curriculum. A study by the non-partisan Center for Education Policy found that 71 percent of the nation's 15,000 school districts have reduced the hours of instruction in art, music, history and other subjects in favor of reading and math. This study and others demonstrate that failing schools and their low-income minority students suffer the greatest losses in arts instruction. Hang federal funding on reading and math test scores, and beauty and rhythm get demoted.

For a generation that has grown up on wildly creative digital graphics and animation, a generation that saunters everywhere to the beat of an iPod, does it make any sense to reduce or eliminate art and music from their curriculum?

No one, certainly not I, will tell you that math and reading are inessential. But art and music are also essential. There are so many ways to "see," so many moments of feeling that are capable of changing a life. But the arts are protagonists. They stop

the machinations of mind, the endless explanations and rationales. Art can transport us to a moment of feeling that is as essential as any other mode of learning. Spellbound by a great work of fiction, lost in a musician's sway, thrilled by the dancer's turn—we are never more alive than in these moments.

Living in a society dominated by information and easy opinions, we too often reduce to numbers and symbols that which should never be tampered with. In this world, the value of the arts—and artists—should never be underestimated. They bless us with the exquisite and the ragged, the reality of being human.

The message we should be sending to our young students is that each life is a unique work of art. Find your artistry. Our education system should give them every imaginable chance to stop cold in front of a Rembrandt, and better yet, paint their own masterpiece. **H**

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FAILING SCHOOLS AND MINORITY STUDENTS SUFFER THE GREATEST LOSSES IN ARTS INSTRUCTION.

should see it. Rembrandt's prophet is humanity's weary mourner, guarded by light that is surely on loan from Heaven. Our young traveler was not the first to weep in front of that canvas.

The painful irony in this is that I returned to my office that