

GSB Art Teacher Named Maine Middle Level Art Educator of the Year

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Great Salt Bay Community School art teacher Coreysha Stone sits with recently completed student work in her classroom on Thursday, March 28. Stone was named middle-level art educator of the year by the Maine Art Education Association this year. “I really want people to learn about everything she does,” said her nominator, Monique Boutin, of the Chewonki Foundation. (Molly Rains photo)

Great Salt Bay Community School art teacher and multidisciplinary artist Coreysha Stone, of Alna, will be honored this spring by the Maine Art Education Association as the Middle Level Art Educator of the Year.

“She does so much across so many aspects of the school and community, and at a personal level, in her own practice, she really lives everything that she teaches her students,” said Monique Boutin, art teacher at the Chewonki Foundation, who nominated Stone for the award.

Stone, known as “Ms. Rey” to her students at GSB, said it was rewarding to see a career’s worth of various art education-related pursuits recognized.

“It’s what you do because you love to do it, and you love to be involved,” she said.

Originally from Brooklyn, N.Y., Stone is in her first year as art teacher at Great Salt Bay. Previously, Stone worked as an occupational therapist before becoming visual arts specialist at the former Chewonki Foundation Elementary and Middle School, which specialized in place-based, holistic learning. She also holds a Master of Arts degree in K-12 art education from the Maine College of Art.

The immense breadth and scope of Stone’s commitment to art education is one reason that Boutin said she knew Stone was a prime candidate for the award. She added that she hoped the award would draw attention to Stone’s commitment and the effort she puts in daily – much of which, she said, is not always visible to the outside observer.

“It’s really hard and long and slow work, this community building, the work she does with students over time, helping them grow,” Boutin said. “It is really impactful work, but it’s hard to see in a short period of time.”

Stone said that her past career experiences inform her current approach to teaching. Knowledge about child development gained from her time as an occupational therapist, for example, is one thing that strengthens Stone’s teaching.

“Understanding human development is really a huge tool,” she said. “(It) impacts my teaching approach. It impacts how you scaffold information, to be able to switch your way of engaging ... I can’t imagine teaching without having that knowledge.”

A multidisciplinary, “place-based” approach is central to Stone’s educational philosophy. She thought she may have stood out to the award committee, Stone said, because of the connections she seeks in her art curriculum with “science, social justice, and natural history.”

Once students start looking, those connections aren’t hard to find: “they’re everywhere,” Stone said. Some cross-discipline projects that GSB students have undertaken this year under Stone’s guidance include a social justice leader portrait project completed by seventh graders, a visit to a local animal sanctuary where fifth graders learned about animals and agriculture while practicing drawing from life, and multiple museum trips.

Helping students connect their work in school with “something bigger” is, Stone said, a vital part of teaching.

“That is a big part of what makes her work so impactful for students,” Boutin said, suggesting that Stone’s deep connections with the natural and human world and commitment to community both enrich her curriculum and make her a natural role model for her students.

Boutin also highlighted the fact that Stone’s dedication is not limited to her teaching pursuits.

“Her work doesn’t end when she leaves the classroom – that’s just who she is in all areas of her life,” Boutin said.

Stone has written and illustrated three children’s books, in which her knowledge of early childhood learning combines with illustrations inspired by Maine’s natural beauty. She also runs mural-painting workshops with students and communities and produces artwork of her own.

One of Stone’s personal interests is the American chestnut tree, a critically endangered species formerly found throughout the eastern United States. Stone, whose grandfather was also passionate about the trees and planted them in Alna, has created a series of multimedia artworks inspired by the trees. Stone sold her pieces as a fundraiser to benefit the American Chestnut Foundation’s efforts to save the species.

Stone’s arrival at GSB was a welcome development in her career as an arts educator, she said. Although she is new to the school, she said she felt welcomed, appreciated, and that her work and efforts were supported by the broader GSB community.

“It’s a special place,” Stone said. “Although I just got to GSB, I’m really excited that this is where this award has come to me. It’s a great community to be able to celebrate this accomplishment with.”

GSB Principal Kim Schaff highlighted Stone’s “unwavering passion for the visual arts” in a letter to the awards committee, calling Stone “an inspiring representative of the dedication and excellence that characterizes our state’s educators.”

Stone will be formally honored at the Maine Art Education Association’s spring conference in late April, with her two children and Boutin there to support her.