



**ILLINOIS STATE
UNIVERSITY**
Illinois' first public university

Wonsook Kim College of Fine Arts
Wonsook Kim School of Art

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May 16, 2022

To Whom It May Concern:

I wish to recommend AJ Kepka as an art resource teacher in your school. I had known AJ since the spring of 2019 when he was a student in the Illinois State University (ISU) Art 211: Media, Methods, and Techniques for Secondary Schools class that I taught. AJ was also a student in the Art 309: Professional Art Education Sequence, Elementary and Secondary, Art 403: Curriculum in Art Education classes that I taught. AJ was a stellar student, curious, responsible, eager to learn, and engaged in a supportive manner with his peers.

AJ came to art education with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Dance Performance from Northern Illinois and a Masters of Fine Arts in Acting from The New School for Drama. His years of experience leading children's drama camps brought a level of expertise to the art education classes. AJ used his experience in set design and movement to create and teach effective and engaging lesson units. During the 2020 Heart of Illinois Conference for high school art students held at ISU, AJ devised and led a popular lesson unit around the work of Erwin Wurm, an artist who uses his body as a sculpture. AJ used his sewing skills to create large flexible cloth bags that the high school students put over their bodies and formed into exciting sculptural shapes. An assistant professionally photographed the students, using a backdrop and lights to make the students appear as if they were large, abstract sculptures. Students reflected on the experience and saw that visual art could expand into many art forms, including theatre and dance. Before this process, AJ led the students in theatrical warm-up exercises to help them feel comfortable working with each other and experimenting with something they hadn't done before. Students enjoyed the experience and asked for a repetition in the subsequent year. AJ's ability to think outside the box would bring a sense of excitement to any art classroom.

As a student studying for his Masters of Science in Art Education, AJ worked at Illinois Art Station, preparing supplies and teaching children's art classes, including those for toddlers. He was an invaluable teaching assistant for Art 309 Elementary and Secondary courses after taking the previous year's classes. He organized and distributed supplies to be shipped out when we taught the classes virtually during a COVID lockdown and assisted students in creating and teaching lessons, providing valuable advice during the online sessions. He was also a helpful teacher and assistant when the 2021 HOIC Conference went online. He maintained face-to-face office hours to provide students with needed supplies and answer questions when the university was in a remote setting. ISU awarded him the Mary M. Packwood Art Education Graduate Student Scholarship in 2021.

Professional development is also an essential part of AJ's teaching experience. He presented a lesson unit taught in local schools at the 2019 Illinois Art Education Association (IAEA) Conference and attended subsequent conferences to learn more about art education practices. As a graduate student, he updated the IAEA spreadsheet of members' names and contacts so that the IAEA Central Region officers could effectively advertise the annual Central Illinois High School Art Exhibition. No job was too big or too small for AJ.

AJ is a team player who establishes excellent rapport with students, peers, and faculty. He is passionate about teaching and encouraging students to think in new ways. He is

exceptionally accommodating to students with disabilities and works to create and teach inclusive lessons, mainly focused on artists of color. AJ would make a welcomed addition to any school faculty. I can be reached via email at jabrigg@ilstu.edu and via cell phone at 309-531-3776 for further comment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Judith Briggs". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Judith Briggs, Ph.D.
Professor of Art Education