

the Guiding Creative Journey

MEET PECK'S ART DEPARTMENT



PECK ART TEACHERS POSSESS A UNIQUE BLEND of talent, knowledge, and unwavering passion for nurturing the budding artists within their classrooms. From music to visual arts to woodworking to theater, our arts program goes beyond teaching skills—it teaches children to develop a lifelong appreciation for creativity. Through their innovative teaching methods, personal experiences, and profound love for their art, these educators strive to empower their students to explore their own artistic identities and contribute their voices to the world's creative landscape.

SCOTT BEIL UPPER SCHOOL ART TEACHER



Art by Maddie Forman '26

"Art is often a series of questions. Sometimes they don't have answers. Sometimes you are asking the question of yourself. Sometimes you are asking it of society. Sometimes you put something out into the world so people can talk about it and then share their thoughts back. It is an essential element of human connection."

—Scott Beil

MIDDLE SCHOOL OFTEN GETS a bad rap, and that's exactly why Scott Beil says he loves teaching it.

Many view these years as merely ones to suffer through, because it can be messy and awkward. Like toddlerhood 2.0, it marks a period of intense growth and development across a relatively short period of time. One minute a middle schooler is out at a dance with their friends, eager for new social opportunities and greater independence, and the next, they're cuddled up in bed with a teddy bear. But Beil says we need to flip the script: middle school is about finding out who we are, discovering our passions, and shaping a path for the future.

"Art is an opportunity to walk in someone else's shoes, take a look at something new, and share a perspective that others might not see," he says. "That perspective is individualized, and it's coming from each student. Art is the space to let their voices shine."

Authenticity is extremely important to Beil. Having spent years working with special needs learners at the Matheny Medical and Educational Center (Gladstone, NJ), he acted as a guide for individuals with physical limitations to create art. Whether using lasers to track eye movements or questions to understand where he should place lines, shapes, or dots on a canvas, Beil did not interpret but rather facilitated his students' artistic visions.

"While my hand touched the canvas, every decision on that canvas was theirs. And that shifts your focus on art. There are a wealth of benefits in taking the time to look through someone else's perspective."

CHRISTINA DIETZ BELIEVES

the tactile nature of the wood-working studio is invaluable, especially for today's digital-native youth—and she drives this home with her students.

Dietz says that when you work with wood to, say, carve a simple spoon, you are not only interacting with the material, but it is interacting back.

That two-way experience between the maker and the material can often bring unexpected results and unexpected joy—especially since wood is a physically hard material, and you can't "undo" a change, or cut, you make. Dietz prides herself on teaching her students to adapt to the material, even if it begins turning out differently than intended.

For example, one of her students wanted to make a watermelon slice out of wood. But the cut didn't go exactly as planned, so Dietz guided the student to imagine how the piece could evolve and evoke a new story. The student ended up turning the unintended cut into a bite out of the slice.

"There is humor—even mischief—in thinking about things in a different way," Dietz says. "Children inherently have the ability to see the upside-down of things, and that there is more than one right-side-up. I get a lot of energy from that: entertaining the impossible. I think that's what you need for change in the world. You need to see beyond what is possible because that's how you break and make anew."

CHRISTINA DIETZ GRADE 3 & 4 WOODWORKING TEACHER

"Lately, we've been using gouges, rasps, and files to carve and form wood. Wood is a living material, and when you shape it, you have to hear what it's saying back to you and react. So often we feel the need to control things in our lives. I want to teach my students that the creative process can be more of a conversation with the material you are working with."

—Christina Dietz



Art by
Sofia Corica '28



Art by Joseph Heck '26

SEBASTIAN GUERRERO UPPER SCHOOL MUSIC TEACHER

"I see everything in our existence as music. Even conversation. The exchange of conversation is vibrational: there's tone in the way that we talk to each other, there's rhythm, there's an emotional element to it, there's harmony or discord that we can establish in the conversation, there's opportunities for creative action. And I would encourage others to try looking at it that way."

—Sebastian Guerrero

IF YOU COULD SEE INSIDE

Sebastian Guerrero's chest, you'd see a Peruvian box drum where his heart is.

That's because the music associated with Guerrero's cultural roots in Peru, especially from his grandfather, Juan Andres, continues to deeply influence him today. (In fact, he keeps his grandfather's guitar recordings with him in his classroom!)

"Because of my longtime exposure to folk music, I believe that there really is no 'us' or 'them,' and that everyone's in this together," says Guerrero. "I fell in love with the way music brings people together, and gives them something they can share in."

A professionally-trained percussionist, Guerrero aims to access the reactive side in his students—that side when listening to music becomes *feeling* music, and the self gets lost in the collegiality—and the heart—of making music with others. Having performed with bands in a variety of genres, he knows how important it is to teach young musicians to blend their sounds together.

As such, Guerrero uses the Orff Schulwerk approach to teaching music, which invites learners into the creative process of music-making before mastering an instrument.

"What's amazing about this approach is it's not about talent, it's about exposure," Guerrero says. "Your brain is adaptable; the more you do a thing with intention, the more you teach your brain to do that thing more effectively over time. When you play music, the synapses in your brain fire. Even if it doesn't sound good to you, just the process of doing it is a net positive for your brain."

ELIZABETH MONKEMEIER IS

doing exactly what she's meant to be doing—guiding her students to discover and develop their innate musical capacities.

In her first year at Peck as director of The Peck Band, Monkemeier dove head first into building out an instrumental music program for students in fifth-through-eighth grade. She creates a safe space for students to explore their creative expression through music, regardless of where they are in terms of proficiency with an instrument.

"All different forms of music-making are valid," she says. "And while they are in my band, I'm going to make sure that they learn to love to play."

Monkemeier's students know that their band is more than discovering and playing music together; it's also an opportunity to be truly vulnerable together. Though Monkemeier is new to Peck, the band members are new to the band—and, actually, the entire instrumental music program is still in its infancy. Nonetheless, the group has put themselves out there for peers and teachers during intimate concerts, pep rallies, and assemblies.

"Every time I turn around and see teachers and students who show up, who applaud, who are really listening—it makes me emotional because we're celebrating these students and their expression through music together."



Art by Declan Weng '26

**ELIZABETH MONKEMEIER
INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC DIRECTOR**

"When you're dealing with something that can be as vulnerable as making music, there's a certain amount of respect and trust that must be built and and exchanged, especially during the middle school years. I want to honor that part of my role."

—Elizabeth Monkemeier

**MARK MORTENSEN
GRADE 5-8 WOODWORKING TEACHER**

"Part of teaching is being a little bit of an entertainer, and I love getting the kids jazzed up— really fired up about something. There's something about surrounding yourself with kids and their love of learning that just makes for a great day."

—Mark Mortensen

Art by Julieta Ambrogio '26



AFTER 32 YEARS AT THE PECK

School, there are parts of Mark Mortensen all over the campus.

From award plaques to a window bench in Lindenwold; from kits for MiniMester to a wooden step stool used to reach the podium microphone; from the new Peck Post mailbox and all manner of other custom-made pieces, Mortensen feels proud that when his time comes to retire, he's leaving quite the visible legacy on campus!

What initially drew him to Peck was the caliber of the facilities and the uniqueness of a having a woodworking program in a K-8 school. What has kept him for 32 years is his love for the school, its family-like atmosphere, its well-rounded program, and its size.

Mortensen says that part of the charm of a small school is that he can really get to know his students well and meet each where they are in their skill set and interest in woodworking. He views himself as a guide: setting up projects not only to teach students the desired skills of woodworking, but also to foster those "a-ha" moments and a discovery of the artistry and creativity inherent in each project.

Take the traditional wooden clocks in seventh grade: what starts with a solid block of wood not only allows students to express themselves creatively but also to learn the saber saw and how to shape and carve with rasps, files, chisels, and routers.

"A project like this can really transcend the utilitarian aspect of a functioning clock to the creation of a piece of art," he said. "When a child holds their creation in their hands, whether intended to be artistic or not—when they have that great satisfaction of having made something, that is such a joyful moment."

CHRISTINE WALKER COMES

from a family of artists. Her father liked to draw; an aunt was a painter; an uncle, a sculptor.

Another relative, Aunt Jane, is a painter in SoHo and would often take Walker to her studio to paint, tie-dye, and just make a mess. They went to gallery openings and museums together when Walker was just eight years old.

"The exposure meant a lot to me," she says. "And as early as I can remember, I've always loved making art."

As both an artist and a teacher, Walker carries on in the same fashion: exploring new art exhibits, taking classes, and drawing on her own broad exposure to guide her teaching approach. She wants her students to learn that art can be open-ended and accessible and exposes them to a diverse group of artists and media.

"I use different entry points to help them see from different angles," she says, "from experimenting with material from the scrap bin to helping create a story around a piece of art."

For example, when first graders learned about Claude Monet, they also learned that Monet's vision deteriorated later in his life, and his impressionist paintings became less realistic. Using dyed tissue paper, students created their own water lily paintings in the way an aging Monet may have seen the landscape.

"You could still tell they were water lilies," Walker said. "But it illustrated for the students that they can let go of the idea of 'perfection' and find the joy in creating."

CHRISTINE WALKER LOWER SCHOOL ART TEACHER

"I love children's ability to dive right in and be excited about working with new materials. I love their energy. I love introducing young kids to new materials and artists, exposing them to all of it."

—Christine Walker

Art by
Annabelle
Scott '28



LISA WICHMAN LOWER SCHOOL MUSIC TEACHER

"Everyone has an artful self, sometimes deep inside, and my role is to draw it out."

—Lisa Wichman

Laura Bornia



WHEN LISA WICHMAN WAS

in middle school, her piano instructor told her she would never realize her dream of being a concert pianist.

From childhood, Wichman has been in love with music as a way to process and express her emotions. The family piano became her solace, a source of calm and comfort, especially against the backdrop of a busy family of seven. She dreamed of playing "Für Elise" like her mom, even though her first teacher said her hands were too small to ever play at a high level. However, through the encouragement of her mom and her middle school choir director Mrs. Huckle, Wichman persevered in her study and practice of piano.

"No one can tell you no," Wichman says. "Mrs. Huckle took me under her wing, and she pushed me. She changed the course of my life. She always knew that I was going to move forward with music."

Now, in her more than 30-year career in music education, Wichman has had some incredible opportunities to provide piano accompaniment for choirs at The White House and Carnegie Hall, just to name a few.

"My goal isn't for [my students] to be concert pianists like me, or even study music in college—but rather, 30 years from now, to be able to chant and keep the beat at a sporting event, or tunefully sing "Happy Birthday" or a lullaby to their child, or be fully present at concert, where they can appreciate the artistry and emotion of the music."

Art by
Laura Bornia '28