

Teacher Blends Art and Pride to Create a Recipe for Great Teaching

EDUCATOR CREATES CUSTOMIZED BOOKS TO TEACH FLORIDA STUDENTS ABOUT ART

“I want my students to be proud of who they are and where they came from. That’s primary to me,” says Rebecca Hinson, an art teacher at South Grade Elementary in Lake Worth, Fla. Aside from raising a child, the educator says that being able to create art books depicting her students’ cultures has been one of her life’s biggest adventures.

“Art can be a good catalyst for teaching,” Hinson says. “It is a powerful resource for getting students talking, thinking, and reading with a deeper understanding of the text.”

Hinson is the author of 36 art books featuring cultures that are formed by and reflect people of color through their authentic art pieces. By creating these art books she crafted new learning material that she wasn’t able to find in any existing K–12 textbooks.

At first, Hinson taught European art to children of European ancestry at Plantation Key School in the Florida Keys. Later, she moved to South Grade Elementary School where 80 percent of her students are English language learners. Hinson changed her classroom after realizing her knowledge of European art wouldn’t connect with her new students, and after she heard a colleague talk about being “ashamed of who she was, and where she came from” after arriving in the U.S. from Nicaragua.

“I thought, ‘I can’t let that happen to my students. What can I do? Well, I’m an art teacher. I’m going to teach my students about the art of their cultures,’” Hinson says, looking back.

For years, she had a student, Tomas Juan, who never spoke, never smiled, and avoided direct eye contact. Following a lesson about Tecún Umán, the Mayan prince who fought against the Spanish conquistadors, Hinson heard Juan speak for the first time.



Once she realized her students weren’t reflected in the material she was using, Rebecca Hinson created art history books depicting her students’ culture.

“Thank you,” he said, looking directly into her eyes.

“Of all the things that I had tried, it was his own culture which spoke to his heart,” Hinson says.

“At that point I realized how powerful art was and felt that it should be shared because art reveals the soul of a nation.”

Today, Hinson is the author of six series of books—each containing six titles. The collection allows her to make a difference in her students lives, and show them that their culture is important, too. And by presenting the stories first, then using text-dependent questions to get students to better comprehend the information, Hinson is able to deepen their understanding of the artwork they’re viewing.

Hinson says, “Connecting them with the art and history of their culture made them proud of who they are and where they came from.”

Other educators use these art books in their classrooms, too.

Hinson plans to add an Art of South America series and an Art of the U.S. series, written in Mandarin, as well. The books are sold and distributed exclusively by Follett School Solutions and can be previewed at rebeccahinsonpublishing.com.

—ALIYA DRAKE