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## ARTICLE

**Lunch at Petra: Greene, Gargoyles and the Sixth-Grade Field Trip**

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“The world is not what I think, but what I live through,” said Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2002, p. xv). I am inclined to agree, murmuring those words like a prayer as I drive my two young sons to elementary school through a treacherous predawn snow. Through the darkness, I am enmeshed in morning rush-hour traffic as a hypnotizing snow pounds the windshield, completely obscuring the view between swipes. The Inuit have about a hundred words to describe different kinds of snow; I might call this type *snow day* or *anticipate a wreck* snow. Miles back, I tested the road and skidded through a stop sign. Yet, the snow does not deter the steady stream of over-caffeinated drivers clipping past at least forty miles above the legal limit, reminding me of George Carlin’s line about two types of drivers, morons and maniacs: morons drive too slow and maniacs, too fast. As the windshield wipers more or less keep time with the Christmas carols on the radio, I’m conscious of the reality of my sons’ lives reified with those of passing strangers, driving like maniacs, and think fleetingly of Hannah Arendt’s quote, “we are a combination of freedom and fate” (Torres, 1998, p. 172). I think also of phenomenological-existentialist Maxine Greene (2001), who urges individuals to a state of *wide-awakeness*, to “come awake to the colored, sounding, problematic world” (p. 7) in a universe in flux and open but offering no guarantees. My two young boys in the backseat, however, are caught up in a completely different kind of moment. For them, the snow is a source of delight, a gift from God, and another reason for jubilant celebration. It is the first major snow of the season. And it is Friday, the last day before Winter Break, the last school day of the year. It is also the day I’ll be chaperoning my eldest son’s sixth-grade class on what has been billed as an *aesthetic* field trip. A cascade of laughter and Cheerios, visible in the blinding high-beam headlights immediately behind us, fly through the air from the backseat, as my youngest proclaims, “It’s snowing.” Suddenly the Dodge pick-up that has been riding my bumper passes me, muscles within a hair’s breadth of my front bumper, and then slams on his brakes. I do the same, hold my breath, and brace for a crash, just as a few Maxine Greene books slide off the passenger seat, and my sixth-grade son says nonchalantly, “Hey, don’t talk to the kids about art today.”

While we narrowly avoid rear-ending the pick-up, I find myself more immediately concerned with my son’s perplexing directive. Of course, I’m going to talk about art today. For months, I’ve been immersed in researching the aesthetic education discourse of Maxine Greene, and regard her, as Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman (2004) do, as “possibly the most important philosopher of education of her generation” (p. 191). Greene’s books -- particularly *Variations on a Blue Guitar* (2001), *Teacher As Stranger* (1973), and *Releasing the Imagination* (1995) -- are pedagogical touchstones. Through Greene I’ve been introduced to the conceptual gem of *wide-awakeness*. Based on the work of phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, I understand wide-awakeness as a heightened awareness of the sights and sounds of our everyday problematic world. It is an aesthetic awareness equated with being “personally present and alive” (Greene, 2001, p. 98) or “vividly present” (p. 15) in our own and everyday lived contexts. Greene (1995) speaks directly to me when she explains that teachers and students ought to cultivate wide-awakeness, and “seek more shocks of awareness as time goes on, more explorations, more adventures into meaning, more active and uneasy participation in the human community’s unending quest” (p. 151) for knowledge and experience. Direct encounters with the arts cultivate individuals and their communities in becoming more *wide-awake* and *connected*. As I understand it, encounters with and through the arts are intersubjective, transcending subjective experiences and revealing that the sum of individuals co-constructing knowledge with and through the arts is greater than its parts. Such experiences have immeasurable educative value and should be an integral part of what and how we teach. Among other ideas, I appreciate Greene’s writing on the power of metaphor to communicate the otherwise inexpressible. In this age of standardization and high-stakes testing in P-12 education, too often the arts are regarded as superfluous to the curriculum and relegated to the service of the disciplines. Yet, Greene (2001) places the arts at the front and center of the curriculum, regarding the arts as essential not only in “learning to overcome passivity and induration and learning to notice what there is to be noticed” (p. 149), but also in cultivating “perception, sensation, imagination, and how they relate to knowing, understanding, and feeling about the world” (p. 5). It is hard to conceive a better argument than Greene’s for the necessity of the arts in pedagogical and curricular practice. As a lifelong educator, learner, parent, and artist, I have at least a thousand reasons to appreciate the wisdom and genius of Greene’s work, which I find transcendent and timeless. I am stoked to be *vividly present* with my son and his classmates on this opportunity to meaningfully engage the arts. Maxine Greene is my Patroness of the Aesthetic Field Trip. As dawn breaks and the snowstorm subsides, I imagine a little plastic version of her hula dancing on my dashboard.

“Mom, it’s kind of embarrassing.” I glance in the rear view mirror at my eldest son, unaware that seconds before we had nearly been in a wreck. “You use words, like *existentialism*, *neo-PostToastie-ism*, *globalization*, and *aestheticology*, and

nobody knows what you're talking about. Hey, did you know I can still say *antidisestablishmentarianism*?" Then my youngest son, with a mouthful of grapes, chimes in with a drooly sing-song, "Mom, I see your mouth moving, but all I hear is 'blah-blah-blah-blah-blah.'"

Big brother tries to soften the effect of what has been said. "I mean, you talk about stuff that's so *boring*. Dude, we don't always want to be, like, *educated*."

Through the ensuing hilarity and monkey noises, a fire alarm goes off in my head. I wonder why I volunteered to be a field trip chaperone and why every sixth-grader I know generally calls everyone *dude*. I am perplexed by my son's remark. On this aesthetic field trip, I look forward to spending time with my son, but also seeing Greene's ideas about aesthetic education in action. I anticipate how aesthetic encounters enable us "to become different, to enter the multiple provinces of meaning that create perspective... and look through the lenses of various ways of knowing, seeing, and feeling" (Greene 2001, p. 5), for Greene (2001) maintains, "We must try to comprehend how each of us, unique persons with unique life histories, can move inside works created by quite different human beings and actually discover ourselves there" (p. 22). I anticipate rich dialogue, narratives, and *meaning-making* experiences, yet I acknowledge a seed of doubt in my ability as a parent/chaperone/ educator to rise to the occasion to cultivate in students "the disposition... to attend and explore and take risks" (Greene, 2001, p. 23).

How have these students been prepared for their impending aesthetic encounters, and what are the students' expectations for this aesthetic field trip? I am getting used to seeing my son's eyes glaze over at the whiff of anything unrelated to his normal pubescent pursuits, typically involving electronic video games, combustion engines, believe-it-or-not trivia, and mud. As the mother of an eleven-year-old, and as an aesthetically oriented progressive educator in conservative times, I'm adjusting to being seen as the enemy. I accept my fate and attempt to pick my battles.

At school, I'm assigned a group of five boys and we embark on our aesthetic field trip, which begins with a visit to the Art Museum, an institution that has been in existence for about one hundred and fifty years, where I have high hopes of *selling* to the group of thirty or so as yet unclosed minds the virtues of aesthetic knowledge and experience. During the drive, I become revalorized with the spirit and passion of Maxine Greene's compelling aesthetic discourse. As I glide into a parking space, I'm convinced, as Greene was, of the potential of art to *transform*, to *educate*, and to *improve* students' lives. I'm confident that the students will soon appreciate this enriching aesthetic opportunity. As we disembark, the headwind is brisk and I breathe deeply, impervious to the cold. We make a mad dash for the main entrance, yet form a hasty retreat back to the car to stow about \$1,000 in handheld video games the *imaginistas* intended to play on the sly in the museum.

## Petra-faction

In the museum atrium, students throw their winter coats into bins and get the party started by piling themselves three-deep on two benches. These thirty sixth-graders -- representing a private school with arguably the most socio-economically, ethnically, and religiously diverse student population in the city -- are in collective high gear, irrepressibly generating the kind of energy and excitement that, if harnessed, could power a major metropolitan area.

Two docents lead us towards the galleries of a special Middle Eastern art exhibition, where students more or less watch a short introductory film on the ancient city of Petra, once a thriving intercultural trading center in the rugged mountains of Jordan. I am immediately drawn to Petra's astonishing architecture and sculpture, extraordinary hybridizations of Hellenistic, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian influence. Petran civilization blossomed in unique expressions, including technically superior ceramics and sophisticated water storage systems. Petra is part sunless cave and sunlit mountaintop: I'm such a geek, but that visual paradox and ontological metaphor finds parallel in Greene's *Teacher As Stranger* (1973). Petra was a remarkable civilization, yet one that seems unendurably, brainscaldingly dull to the fidgety preteens. Greene writes of our ongoing obligation to do justice to multiplicity and difference, but multicultural student interest in this culturally diverse aesthetic experience is waning fast.

Once in the gallery space, our docent quickly loses the students, who find it infinitely more engaging to herd cliquish and bored. Greene (2001) recognizes, "the complexity of teaching those who cannot connect or the problem of communicating what one values to those who prefer other things" (p. 21). Yet, our docent invests none of her ego in the aesthetic experiences of these students. The docent stays with the group while knowing she is complicit in the utter lack of aesthetic engagement. She's an aesthetically anointed volunteer who, ironically, chooses not to pick this battle.

Yet, arguably, the battle was already lost. Although the teachers occasionally urge students to read the text panels, apply their studies, and ask questions, in truth the students are not prepared. Although I assume that the lack of engagement is not entirely the result of the lack of teacher preparation, it is nonetheless agonizing to be in the company of the *aesthetically disinterested*, those who do not seem to value the aesthetic qualities this experience has to offer.

## Aesthetic Literacy & Culturally Diverse Encounters

Greene endorses *aesthetic literacy* (1991, 1995, 2001, 2002), finding that firsthand encounters with the arts provide salient challenges and opportunities for posing questions, seeking explanations, evaluating claims, and constructing meanings. As an existential-phenomenologist, Greene (1995) finds that we live in the world not as disinterested third parties but clearly as situated human beings becoming more conscious as we uniquely develop in and interact with the world. The arts figure into these processes, (re)complicating what we know and enriching what we experience, tapping imaginations and expanding perceptual repertoires and connections, thereby moving us from the ordinary and habitual to more fully human *being*. The arts, and the aesthetic encounters that engage them, reveal something of what it means to be human. Further, Greene (2002) acknowledges the challenges of attending to a painting's formal elements and principles of design – such as the qualities of line, shape, color, and pattern – and consciously, contextually participating in the work, “entering it perceptually, effectively, and cognitively” (p. 94). Yet, the value of such an education, Greene (1973) asserts, is that

those who read or look or listen attentively can create new orders within themselves. Doing so, they are likely to discover new meanings, unsuspected angles of vision; they may discover original perceptions of what it is like to be alive, ‘themes of relevance’ against which students can pose worthwhile questions. (p. 16)

Although educators may, wittingly or not, dismiss aesthetic appreciation as an innate ability – we have it or not -- or even a reward of merit gained in a former life, Greene writes of the democratic obligation to cultivate aesthetic knowledge and experience in all students. For example, provoking students to ask *why* questions can be a profound starting point for valuing diversity, engaging the arts, and helping individuals find their own voices. Further, we may believe that if students don't appreciate art now they may at some point in the future, yet simply *planting the seeds* of aesthetic appreciation is insufficient. In other words, teachers should explicitly cultivate aesthetic *growing* for aesthetic *sowing* -- untutored, unreflective exposure to the arts -- is not enough. The purpose of aesthetic education is not just to expose students to art, but also to help students to become more cognizant of all there is to perceive and experience from their unique frames of reference. Through such an education we “realize how much remains to be discovered by those who can notice what there is to be noticed” (Greene, 2001, p. 20) as we hone our abilities to transform the world.

The educative merits and potentialities of multicultural aesthetic encounters should be considered deeply by educators (Dewey, 1934/1980). Among their virtues, such experiences can provide extraordinary opportunities to expose students firsthand to culturally diverse arts and perspectives, not just those of their own or the socially dominant culture. Some teachers and students may prefer more familiar styles or periods of Western art, like Impressionism or American Landscape painting, and may find these works more accessible or easier to appreciate than less familiar works. Yet, aesthetic encounters with culturally diverse art objects are clearly not inaccessible to Western students, and such experiences should be valued for their multicultural, pluralistic, and democratic potentialities. Students should be given the opportunity to grow through the challenges of encountering unfamiliar and culturally diverse art, which often has greater potential to broaden and enrich understandings than encounters with art anchored in what is familiar, comfortable, or pretty. While such work has its own merits, culturally diverse, aesthetic encounters can provide an education that enriches understandings, not only of that which is novel or unfamiliar, but also of what is everyday and commonplace. Further, encounters with multicultural arts are not necessarily going to test all students' comfort levels or generate Piagetian *disequilibrium* (Sigel & Cocking, 1977), but they likely will, and as such, can foster human cognition. Culturally diverse, aesthetic experiences can contribute to developing civility in and among students, as well as the ability to resist or alter any tendency towards being an ugly American through ethnocentrism and insular behavior. Students in general must be educated in how to understand and respect culturally diverse art, which contains symbolic elements and cultural significance outside the spheres of typical Western knowledge and sensibilities. Over the centuries the original meanings of enduring art objects have been lost, co-opted, and separated from their original contexts, as well as layered with new meanings, projections, and translations. Although aspects of the arts may be culturally (in)accessible to those outside the time and place of the culture that produced them, it needs to be acknowledged that to appreciate the arts from all cultures old and new requires viewers to bring a receptivity, or open-mindedness, to what the experience has to offer. Further, Sartre (1949) writes, “At the heart of the aesthetic imperative we discern the moral imperative” (p. 62), referring to how works of art are essentially acts of confidence in the freedom of human beings. Sartre's words can also underscore a moral imperative that links aesthetic literacy with advance forms of twenty-first century global cultural understanding and respect. Aesthetic

experiences should facilitate students in forming at least a rudimentary understanding of the multiplicity and complexity of human makings or doings, and to think, for example, about what connects and defines humanity across divisions of space and time. While this is hardly an exhaustive exploration, it provides some insight into the fact that aesthetic experiences are among the most complex, demanding, and worthwhile educative pursuits in which human beings can engage. Yet, why do we devote so little time and effort to cultivating them?

### **The Arts & Narratives of Lived Lives**

At one point, I gravitate towards one of our teachers in a dimly lit corner, intimately studying a text panel, of a map of the Middle East. The map is reflected in the lens of her glasses. She tenderly reaches out to the region and traces it with her finger, explaining where her son is currently fighting in the Iraq War. The exhibition tells its stories as patrons relate their own. The arts, as Greene well knows, are politically charged. Yet, the arts engage us, connect us, and transform us with new layers of personal significance we could never anticipate or measure. In particular, Greene recognizes the relationship between the arts and narration. Storytelling, in its myriad forms, reflects and inspires heightened consciousness -- “that wide-awakeness [which] contributes to the creation of the self” (Greene, 1978, p. 163). Moreover, narration, Greene says, is interpersonal and intersubjective, bringing into being “something that goes beyond the present situation” (Greene, 1995, p. 27). In that intensely personal moment, I understand the visceral power of this exhibition as an extended narrative that transcends geopolitical and cultural divides, as it connects mother-to-son and mother-to-mother. I hug the teacher but am compelled to find my son and hug him; when I do, he even hugs back.

### **Anaesthesia**

At the risk of embarrassing my son, I occasionally drag his classmates to works of art and ask questions, in hopes of engaging something of the “possible discovery” (Greene, 2001, p. 204), self-identification, and wide-awakeness Greene describes. These works of art are priceless tributes to the potential of human imagination and creativity. Will the students gain some sense of what is *really real* amid this aesthetic feast? I’m a mother on a mission, but my son’s comments in the car, like a time-released potion, begin to take effect. I’m aware that the students are skeptically evaluating me, and my *Greene-ness* is waning. This is not how I envisioned a visit to an art museum. It’s dawning on me that this field trip isn’t at all what Greene had in mind, either, when she wrote about the virtues of aesthetic education. The experience is a joke, and the students are watching to see if I, like them, will finally get it.

It finally dawns on me that the experience has digressed into what Greene and Dewey refer to as *anaesthetic*, which Greene (2001) equates with “Anaesthesia...[which] implies a numbness, an emotional incapacity, and this can immobilize, prevent people from questioning, from meeting the challenges of being in and naming and (perhaps) transforming the world” (p. x). How *could* this aesthetic experience have become inauthentic, counterproductive, even antithetical? Through this aesthetic encounter I intended to see Greene’s ideas come to fruition; I find instead that the community of students exhibit transient interest, if any, in the extraordinary art that surrounds them. The art museum seems inaccessible and pointless because *students* were choosing not to engage in it. Yet, the students aren’t the only ones responsible for their aesthetic forfeiture; the teachers, parents, and I are witting accomplices. There is a vast difference between what this experience ought to be and what it is, and I am shocked into awareness that these students seem so disaffected. What a shame, I think, wondering if anyone will find meaning and significance in the experience, and what that might be. As we prepare to leave, students put their coats on backwards and race for the exit. I stop a group of girls to ask what they like most about the museum; they giggle, “Dude, the water fountains and restrooms.”

### **An Aesthetic Encounter**

Our next stop is a stunning Catholic basilica, built in the French Gothic style of architecture but in the late 1800s on the banks of the Ohio River. As we walk towards the cathedral, the boys notice, of all things, the gargoyles perched four stories above its main entrance. They ask why something so scary is on the rooftop of a church. I consider that this is the first non-prompted, aesthetic-related question of the day, and it involves gargoyles. I try to seize a teachable moment: I look up at the gargoyles and exclaim, “Hey, did that one just move?” My question hooks them. Suddenly everyone stops and looks up. The boys ask, “Dude, are they animatronic, dude?” “Dude, what if they fly, dude?” The boys try not to blink as they skeptically watch and consider the possibility of petrified sculptures swooping down on them.

“What do the gargoyles mean to you?” I ask aloud. The gargoyles sit on their haunches and stare imperviously, leering

down on us groveling mortals below. In truth, two of them bear a freakish resemblance to Maxine Greene and one of my professors. I think of the visual pun, the paradox of seeing a *pair of docs*. How bizarre, to visualize Greene poised above and beyond an interactive aesthetic encounter, yet at the heart of it. For the spellbound sixth-grade boys, the gargoyles are Gothic grotesques, inhospitable and terrifying beasts, but they are also extremely cool, or as the boys say, “the bomb, dude.” I do mention something about gargoyles being monsters in stone, creatures of fantasy, adopted from pagan myth and lore, but I dare not tell them what I see or, worse yet, presume to tell them what they see. Spontaneously, the boys begin *Yoda Talking* together, a language game that involves speaking in a Yoda voice, inverting the normal word order of an English sentence, and removing articles, which sounds something like this:

“Gargoyles from Greek mythology I know.”

“Gargoyles from really bad Saturday morning cartoon I know.”

“Like Gargoyle superhero our Spanish teacher looks.”

“Gargoyles like cow-tipping they do.”

“Quazimoto gets girl advice from gargoyles on top of Notre Dame he does.”

Through this unanticipated aesthetic encounter with gargoyles, the boys begin acting like gargoyles, making animated connections to their own lived lives, yet gradually engaging in more serious dialogue and connecting strands of similarity with new forms of knowledge and experience.

As we stand craning before the overwhelming basilica, focusing on the gargoyles --architectural elements that are at best tertiary but not to these boys -- I resist explaining that gargoyles can be nothing more than glorified waterspouts or gutters because I want to work a little more aesthetic magic. I want the boys to use their imaginations, to engage, as Greene (2001) says, in “things unknown, so often released by unbridled fantasy” (p. 17). As the boys continue to look at and talk about the gargoyles, I realize, at last, they have turned a small corner, literally and metaphorically, on this aesthetic field trip. We’ve at last forged a hopeful, tenuous connection and meaning-making experience through an encounter with the arts. I think at that mysterious moment of how the words of Frankfurt School philosopher, Herbert Marcuse, apply, for, indeed, art makes “the petrified world speak, sing, perhaps dance!” (as cited in Greene, 2001, p. 22) and maybe even fly.

## Mystery & Aesthetic Encounters

Greene (2001) explains that aesthetic encounters are intrinsically, elegantly mysterious, and finds meaning in Gabriel Marcel’s description of mystery as, “something in which I find myself caught up, and whose essence is therefore not to be before me in its entirety” (p. 141). Greene finds that every aesthetic encounter -- like the painting, play, drawing, dance, or literature that inspires it -- points beyond itself to the mysterious, that which is unspeakable but intelligible. Greene finds mystery reveling in reality, rooted in the here and now, not the above and beyond. Greene (1973) refers to Martin Buber, who found that, despite all the metaphysical systems, there is still the mystery of human knowledge of and experience in the world, the mystery of human *being*. For Greene (1973), the concept of mystery represents the existential and phenomenological revolt against Western paradigms based on universal systems, pseudo-absolutes, presumed certainties, and anachronistic conventions. While the Dominican Friar Meister Eckhardt wrote during the Gothic period of *higher ignorance*, which finds we are limited by what we know, not by what we don’t, Greene acknowledges that no one can completely anticipate, predict, or measure the mystery that is at best caught in glimpses through aesthetic experiences. The mystery of aesthetic experiences, subject to different contexts and interpretations, can be grandly or more subtly experienced yet is integral to encounters with the arts. Encounters with the arts reveal mystery. I begin conceptualizing mystery as corresponding to meaningful aesthetic encounters and teachable moments, when a teacher cannot say exactly what is being taught, just as the student cannot say what is being learned. Experiencing the grand mystery is addictive, what we -- as teachers and learners, as individuals and communities of learners -- desire to experience again and again, although it occurs unevenly, which is part of the mystery, the gamble that keeps us coming back, ever hopeful. Despite those aesthetic encounters when even the best-laid plans and every appointed detail falls perfectly into place, there are no guarantees we will experience -- or experience in the same way -- the grand mystery we anticipate, just as we may find the mystery in our midst -- unexpectedly peering down at us from above but not beyond -- along the journey.

## Radicalizing Metaphor

I have always been fascinated by gargoyles, yet I suddenly see them in a completely new light. I am the “teacher as stranger” Greene (1973) writes about, as I encounter gargoyles as if for the first time and notice what I’d never noticed before in light of this novel experience. Yet, I also see gargoyles as mischievous yet benevolent strangers encountering the boys, other gargoyles, themselves, and myself. The gargoyles simultaneously mirror and embody a willingness to critically view who and what they are and to work the radicalizing power they have. I perceive them not as hapless victims but active participants, as occupants of a space forged by and for resistance. Gargoyles exist interdependently in a realm where power is contested and resisted, envisioned and re-visited, discovered and negotiated. Gargoyles are symbols and “new texts that break boundaries; that move from the center to the margins to comment upon and decenter the center; that forgo closed, bounded worlds for those more open-ended and less conveniently encompassed...” (Lincoln & Guba, 2003, p. 284). In that *ah-ha* moment, I begin seeing gargoyles as radicalizing metaphors and powerful referents, pointing beyond themselves to the potential of *what education could be*.

## Thresholds

How often we occupy such precipices without realizing what critical points they are. Greene (2001) writes “there are always fringes, boundaries at the edge of the familiar” (p. 132), yet it may take the wonder of a child to reveal to us a salient moment or an in-between space, where so often truth and knowledge are contested and the arts flourish. As a space, these points can be seen as peripheries of solidarity, where the center depends upon the margins for its continued existence. These spaces, like the edge of ecosystems, contain the greatest potential for multiplicity, change, and transformation. Educators need to consider the power of the spaces we occupy and how to best utilize them to meet the needs of our students and the greater good. Such precipices can represent, in Hannah Arendt’s words, the moments “at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it” (Greene, 2001, p. 75). Greene writes of our moral obligation to question and consider deeply the realities and representations presented to us, and to break with the crust of convention, wherever it is found, since it threatens and limits us. It can be dangerous, deadly business – heresy – to risk questioning, inquiring, noticing the man behind the curtain, breaking with complacency, and choosing despite the *status quo*. Quoting Camus, Greene (1995) finds human beings in a constant state of tension, aware that we will never know all we wish to, or all there is to know, yet unwilling to accept nihilism. What happens when we are at such points, “when the stage sets collapse and everything we have taken for granted about our routines suddenly becomes questionable” (p. 24)? Greene (1973) writes, “Camus would say that rebellion is left: the conscious effort to become lucid, to impose form, to make sense” (p. 108). As educators, it is inevitable for us to feel compelled at some point to drop the script and question, to teach from our hearts, or in some way to be forthright in ways that reflect our sense of commitment to the deeply moral enterprise of teaching. While thresholds are rarely as narrowly delineated as those found in Gothic architecture, I think of how often we are pressured to unquestionably bolt across them, toe the line, demonize, buy what’s being sold, as well as adhere to convention and absolute either/or ways of thinking, often in the name of blind faith or common sense. Educators need to cultivate space and time for students to ask their questions and to ask questions ourselves, whether we are constructing *cathedrals* or our understandings of them.

## Endings & Beginnings

Later that day, I’m driving the boys back to school. Quicksilver sunlight streams through wintry clouds as I bask in thought and go with the flow of interstate traffic. I think of how the arts teach us something of what it means to be human and about the mystery of our lived lives. I think of how aesthetic encounters with the arts intensify, clarify, and expand what we know and experience. I believe that we are conscious seekers, continually shifting from subject to spectator, in a world of symbols and actors generally indicating in life the good, which is constant but not always apparent, and the absurd, which may be apparent but is not constant. I am more wide-awake to some things – children, aesthetics, and gargoyles -- not in isolation but in relation to the other aspects of my lived life, continually in flux. My appreciation of gargoyles is enriched, layered with new significance; they are now for me powerfully aesthetic, pedagogical symbols of rebellion against complacent teaching, the *status quo*, and the anaesthetic. The gargoyles moved me from the center to the margins, and from the surface qualities to deeper understandings and connections between individuals inextricably entwined with “...the colored, sounding, problematic world” (Greene, 2001, p. 7). Greene once said, “I am drawn to those who unconceal, who are not afraid to expose the darkness, to go below surfaces, who are capable of indignation, who are willing to join with others to make changes without any guarantee at all” (Torres, 1998, p. 174), and I aspire to be all the more *Greene-like*. Gargoyles provoked us to question, and Greene (2001) finds that students and teachers who pose questions “do so in light of what they themselves want to know. And it is surely those who can pose their own questions, pose them in person, who are the ones ready to learn how to learn” (Greene, 2001, p. 22). So I ask the boys, “What was the

best part of your aesthetic field trip?”

“Dude, the gargoyles,” they say. I agree. The gargoyles awakened us and disclosed for a few mysterious moments the way aesthetic education can be.

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