



# Social Emotional Learning Through Creative Expression

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## ABSTRACT

I began by researching the availability and frequency of life skills being taught in the classroom. When I realized that most programs were after school or cost money to attend, it was clear that these programs were not very accessible. I teamed up with social-emotional expert, Middle School Teacher, Education Director and Cofounder of The Heartisan Foundation, Abram Katz, to bring social-emotional learning to The Valley School of Southern Oregon in Medford. The charter school offered an “exploratory time” during which students could choose classes similar to electives. One such choice was Mr. Katz’s Creative Expression class. We used the class time for activities such as writing, listening to stories, being the school’s reporters, and performance based art. Our most meaningful activity was mask-making. The project enabled students to explore their perceptions of themselves and how they think others perceive them, and in the process, they became more in touch with their authentic selves.

## RATIONALE/INTRODUCTION

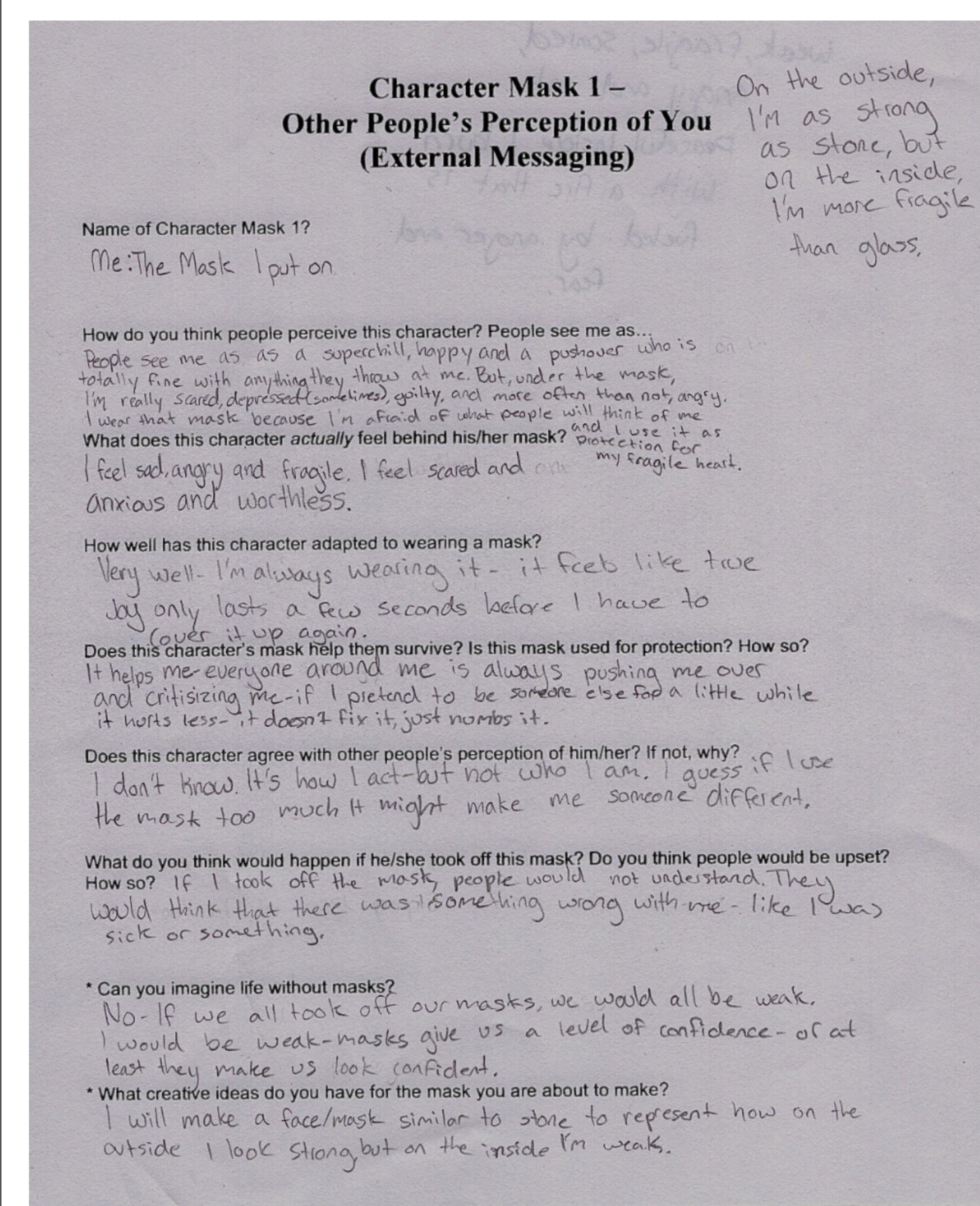
- Many schools follow an academic curriculum and lack access to art resources, self-expression time, and life skills practice which can be provided through social-emotional development.
- If students have these experiences at a younger age and build healthy habits, they may have more positive attitudes towards themselves and others.
- I want to help give students tools to be competent, successful, happy, loving people.
- I want to practice these skills and how to teach them so I can better serve my future students.
- Social-emotional learning is beneficial for everyone.

## PROJECT GOALS

- Collaboratively create student-centered lesson plans integrating social-emotional development for the Creative Expression class at The Valley School.
- Brainstorm additional activities and prompts that can be used in the Heartisan Community Center.
- Include the development of life skills students can use on their journey of self discovery through creative expression and their lives.
- Gain hands on experience with time management, professionalism, building professional relationships, lesson preparation, classroom management, and building student relationships.

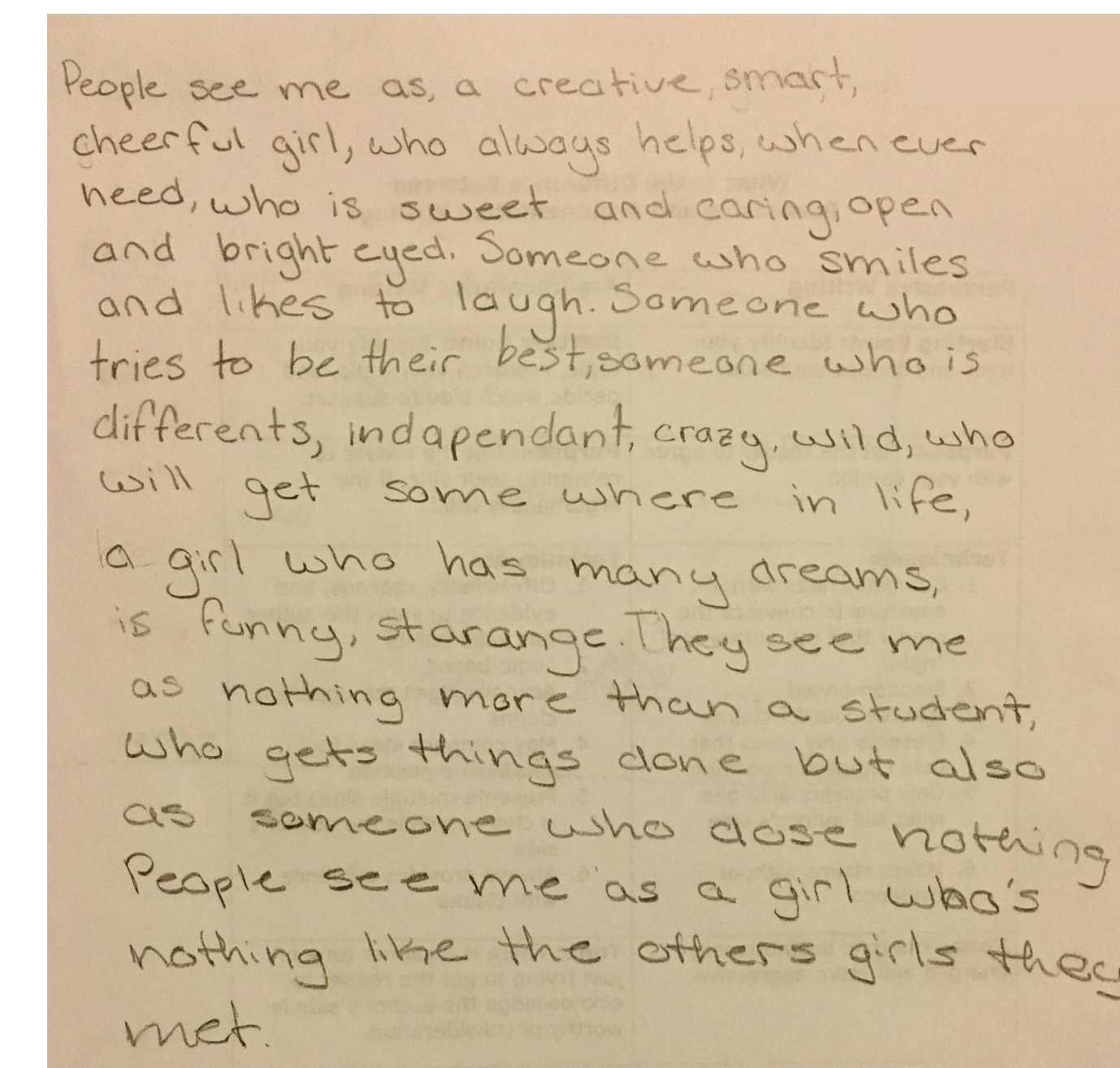
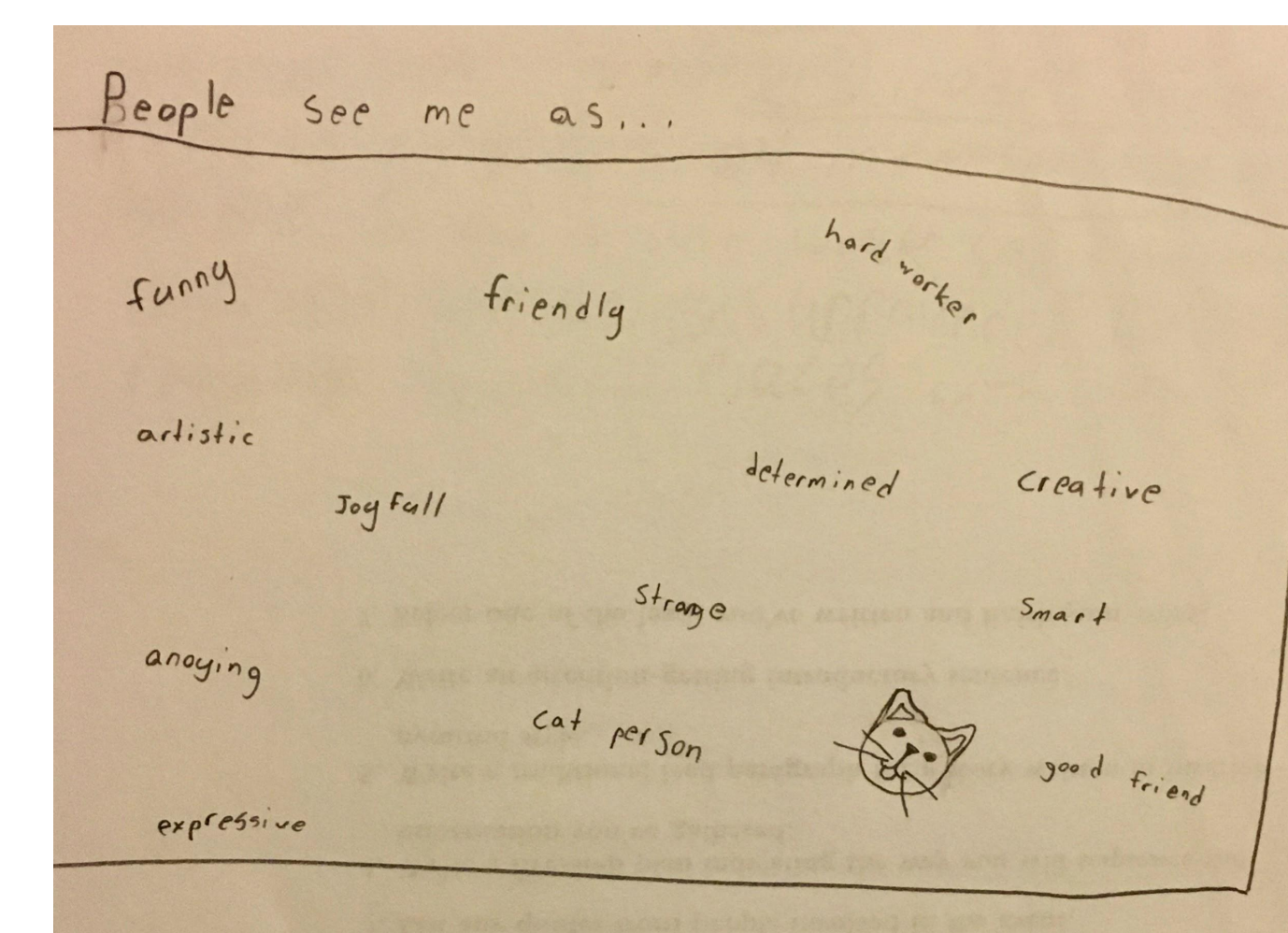
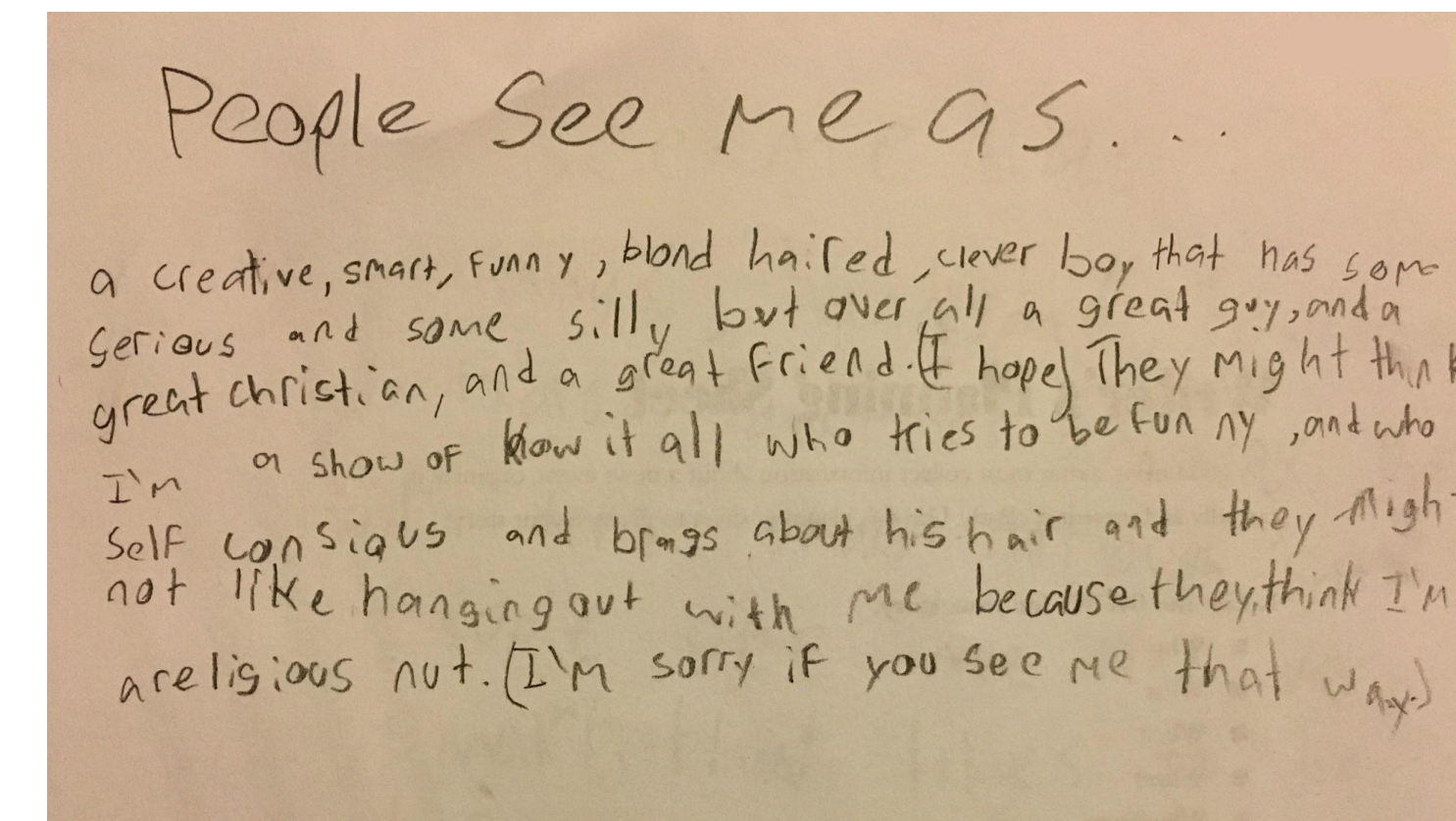
## PROCESS

- Research life skills students may be lacking
- Find a mentor that shares the vision and goals for students’ learning and success
- Collaborate with mentor on how to integrate social emotional development opportunities and experiences
- Determine overarching goals for class, then break down into daily lesson plan activities
- Try to implement lesson plan and realize that the curriculum in class is really determined by the students if it is to be meaningful
- Provide open-ended prompts that get students thinking, writing, and talking
- Give students a variety of materials to create a mask they think represents their responses
- Listen to students’ feedback and adjust accordingly throughout the class period
- Debrief the class experience with mentor
- Collaborate on what went well, what did not, and what can be changed for next time



A brave student shares their deep thinking in responses to open-ended questions about “the mask” that they wear.

Students’ responses to the prompt “People see me as...”



## RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

Students:

- Opportunity for self-expression
- Hands-on, experiential learning
- Time to be the goofy, energetic, messy, creative, colorful people that they are
- Option to explore their authentic selves through writing or mask characters
- Chance to interact in a meaningful, human, vulnerable way

Myself:

- Opportunity for personal as well as professional growth
- Hands-on experience teaching in the social-emotional realm of development
- Time to acknowledge challenges, make mistakes, reflect on purpose of education
- New definition for success: “For ultimate success, you have to prepare to feel unprepared. Become comfortable being uncomfortable, secure that you will be insecure, and use all that to relate to your students.” -Abram Katz



A young artist reveals how they see themselves.



Digging deep, a student responds to the prompt “I see myself as...”

## REFLECTION

Especially in the first few classes I experienced some discomfort, and could feel my urge to jump back and hide from a new way of seeing and doing things. I was aware that I wanted to return to my safe zone of how I was taught and what I already knew, but instead I opened my mind and decided to believe that this was going to work and it was going to be okay. Since that moment I have learned so much about social-emotional development, how I had been projecting my own views onto others, and how to better serve students by being empathetic, dependable, honest, open, and getting to know them as a whole person. I am so grateful to Abram Katz, the most flexible, resourceful, and authentic mentor I have ever had. In addition, many thanks to the students of The Valley School who welcomed me into the class and opened my eyes and my heart to the real purpose for the work educators do.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Thank you Abram Katz for all of your support through this process. You have been a wonderful mentor and community leader and I believe you will continue to make your dreams into realities and create a better world.
- Thank you Angela Crum, Principal, and Amy Maukonen, Executive Director and Cofounder of The Valley School. You have both been so welcoming and supportive. All your hard work and dedication has made this school a special place.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

If this kind of experience speaks to you, please consider volunteering in your community. More information at:

- The Valley School of Southern Oregon [thevalleyschool.k12.or.us]
- The Heartisan Youth Center is a project of the Heartisan Foundation, a 501(c)(3) non profit organization committed to serving young people around the world. [https://www.heartisanyc.com/]