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## **Finding My Way: Using Visual Journals to Forge a Path of Resilience and Resistance**

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### **Abstract**

Over the last four years of my K-12 visual arts teaching career, I faithfully kept visual journals, filling them with stories of my experiences in the classroom. What initially began as an experiment as I searched for a tool to help me navigate new challenges within a public school system, eventually led me to realize that my visual journals were a valuable resource to better understand myself as a teacher, my place within the system, and a resource for resilience. In this article, I use narrative and arts-based approaches to explore the ways I leveraged visual journals as a tool for resilience by integrating humor, fostering a sense of accomplishment and self-efficacy, as well as retaking ownership of my journey to fight back. Through sharing this narrative I hope

to illustrate some of the ways visual journals can help arts educators find resilience and strength to resist during challenging times.

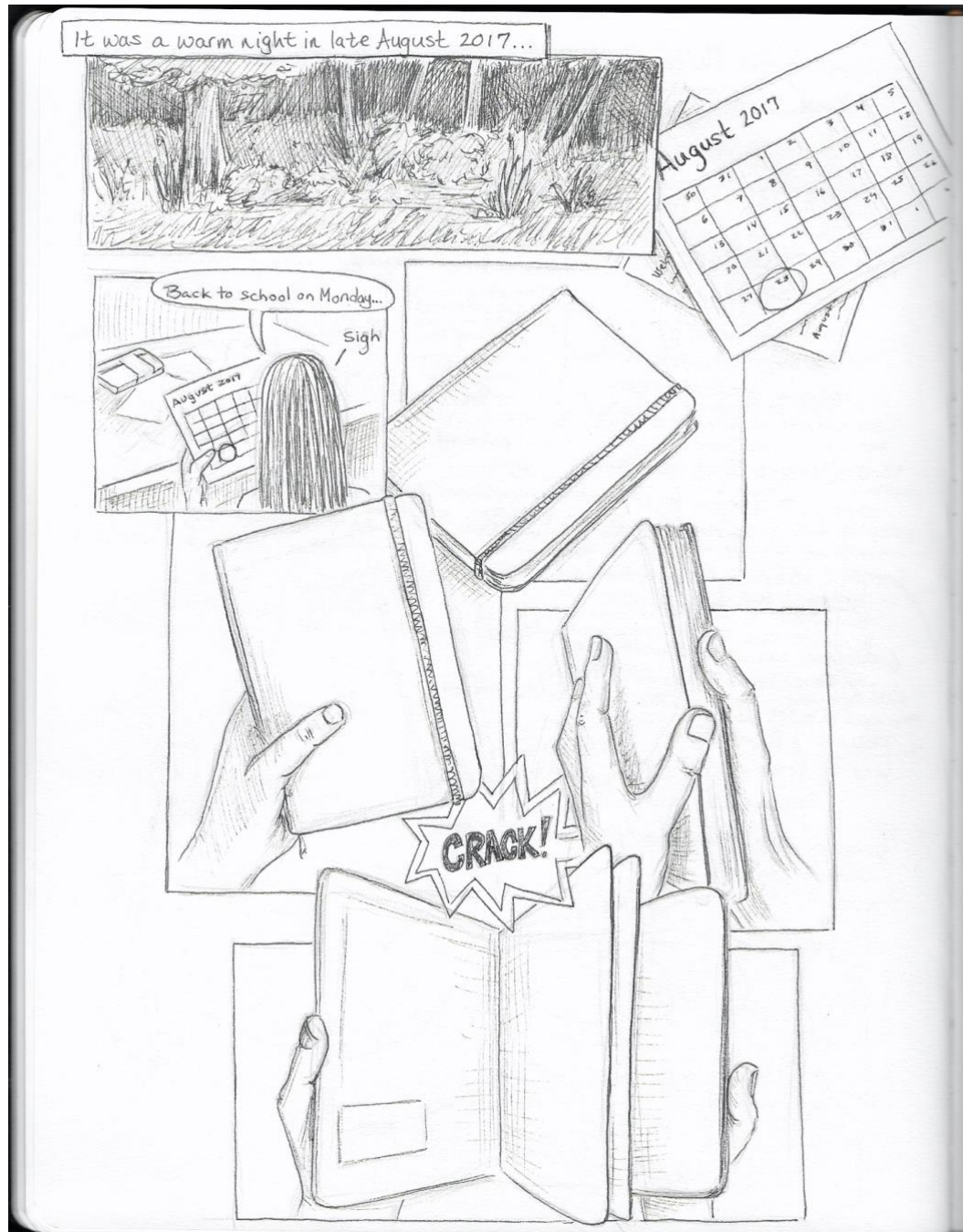


Figure 1. Opening my brand-new visual journal in late August 2017.

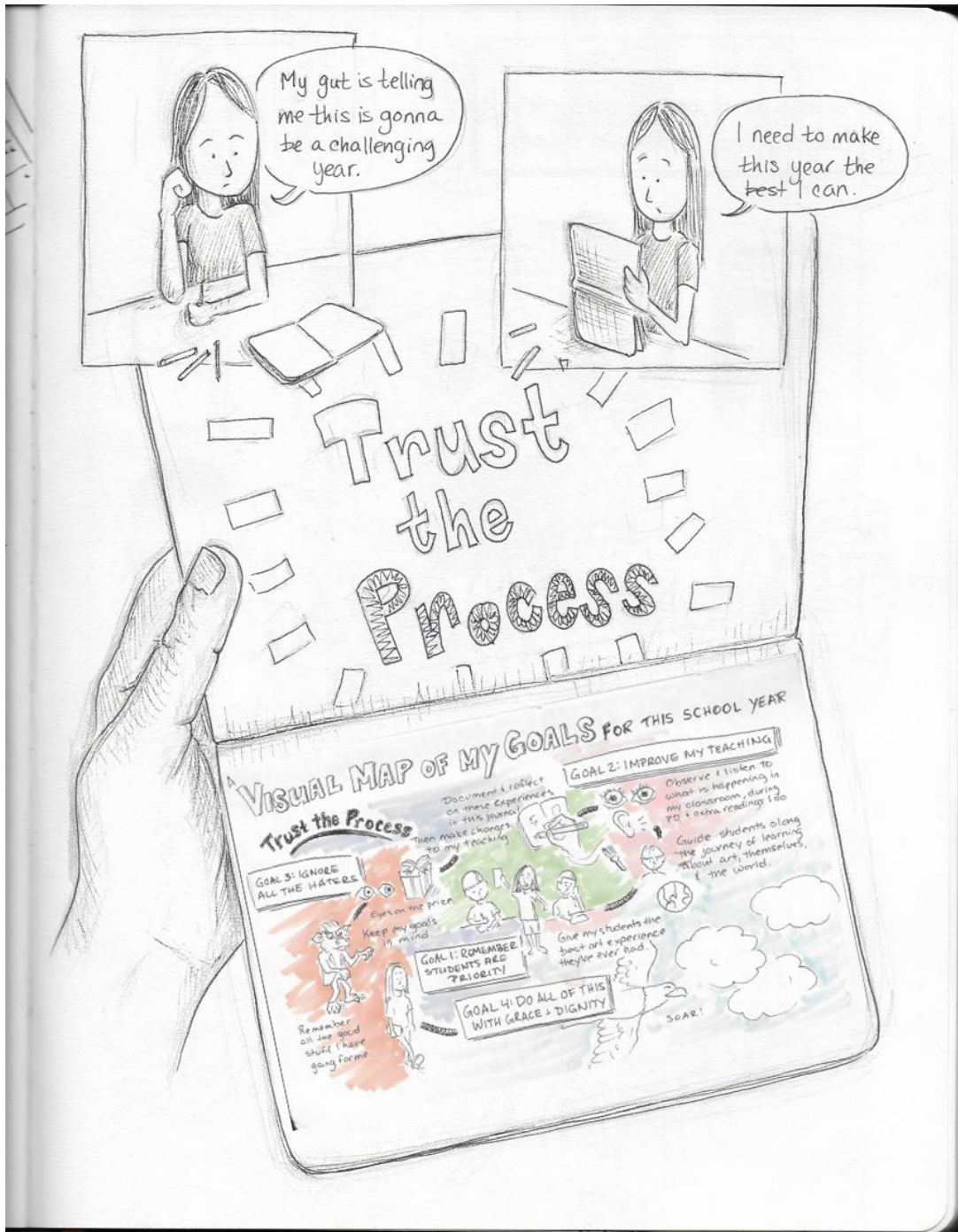


Figure 2. Sketching my goals for the upcoming school year.

It was a warm night in late August 2017, and I was just days away from beginning my ninth year as a public-school art teacher in the northeastern United States. In previous years I was typically filled with excited anticipation to return to the classroom and embark on another school year. However, this particular year I did not experience those same feelings. The past few school years have become increasingly challenging and deep down I knew this upcoming school year was going to be no different. I took a deep breath, sat at my dining room table, cracked open a brand-new journal, and sketched my goals for the upcoming school year (Figures 1 and 2).

During the 2017-2018 school year I decided to try something new; I set a goal to visually journal my teaching experiences. I initially embarked on this project to reflect on my teaching to help myself improve and to make sense of everything else I was experiencing during my school day. Visual journaling was also an experiment as I searched for a tool to help me navigate new challenges within a public school system that was struggling to adapt to the changing student body.

The 2017-2018 school year turned out to be one of the most challenging years of teaching that I had experienced. I was experiencing increasing demands and responsibilities including teacher evaluation, advocating for my subject area, a frozen materials budget, and an increased teaching load. The combination of an unprecedented workload and seemingly never-ending school year due to numerous snow days, left me feeling absolutely depleted (Figure 3). But somehow, I kept going. Although I experienced much frustration and unprecedented challenges that year, I somehow still managed to stay positive and do my best to make things better. Despite it all, in the end, I was able to say that I had a good year (Figure 4).



Figure 3. "Juggling the Demands of Teaching" – Original visual journal entries from 4/30/18

- 5/1/18.

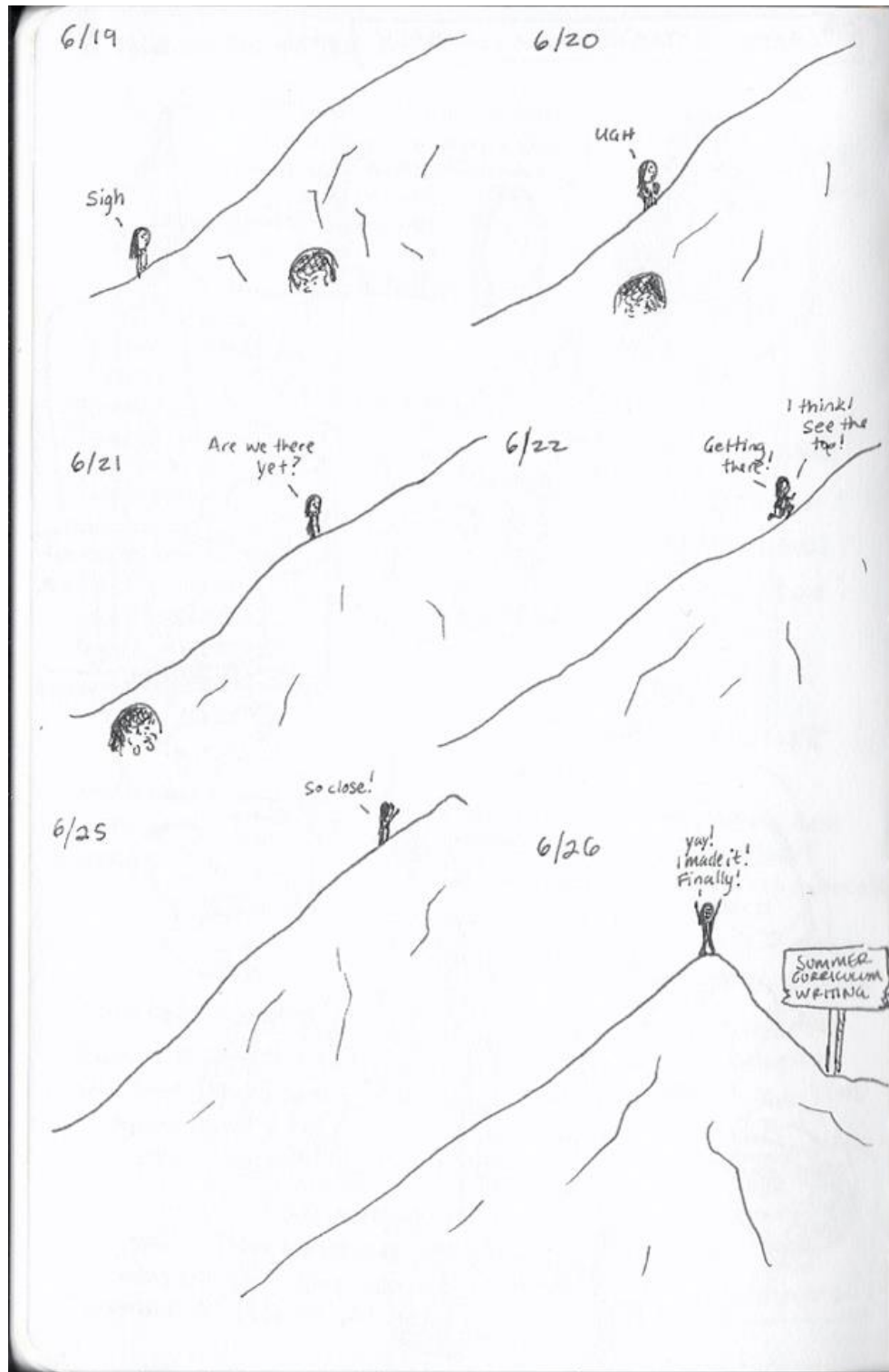


Figure 4. "Climbing to the End of the School Year" – Original visual journal entries from 6/19/18 - 6/26/18.

### **Demoralization**

The term “teacher burnout” has become a commonly used term when describing teachers’ frustrations and subsequent decision to leave the profession. Santoro (2011) states:

Burnout may be an appropriate diagnosis in some cases where individual teachers’ personal resources cannot meet the challenge of the difficulties presented by the work. However, the burnout explanation fails to account for situations where the conditions of teaching change so dramatically that moral rewards, previously available in ever-challenging work, are now inaccessible. (p. 1)

While self-care is often prescribed as the solution to teacher burnout, it is not sufficient to support teachers who are demoralized because of imposed policy and lack of support (Figure 5). According to Santoro (2011), “Demoralization is better understood as a process of continually being frustrated in one’s pursuit of good teaching” (p. 17).



Figure 5. "Waves of Doubt" – Original visual journal entry from 1/20/18.



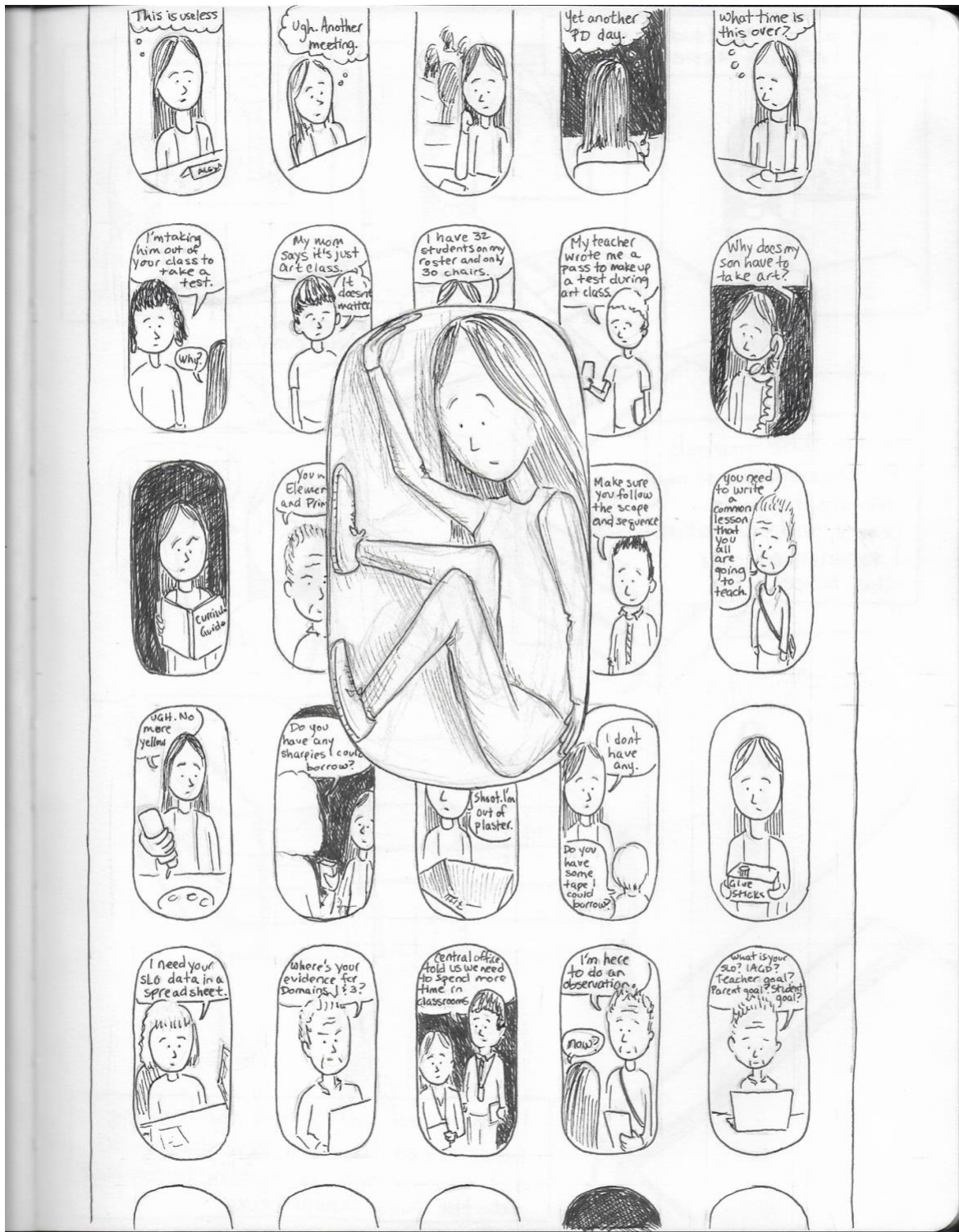


Figure 6. Navigating the challenges of the teaching profession including large class sizes, limited resources, and the mechanization of teaching and learning.

Teachers face many challenges in their profession; they are often placed in challenging contexts with large class sizes, too little time and resources, while bureaucrats are constantly looming in the background (Arnup & Bowles, 2016; Ayers & Alexander-Tanner, 2010; Evans-Palmer, 2010). Increasingly teachers have faced more supervision and accountability because of policy changes that seek to standardize and mechanize teaching (Ayers & Alexander-Tanner, 2010; Santoro, 2011)<sup>1</sup>. This shift towards mechanization and measuring learning by what students do not know conflicts with ideals held by most arts educators (Sullivan & Gu, 2017). Adding to these challenges is the consistent marginalization and ill-fittedness of the arts within education systems (Rolling 2010, 2013). Many arts educators often find that they must spend their extra time advocating for their subject, their students, for funding etc., leaving little time or energy for other endeavors (Figure 6). Therefore it is important that arts educators find tools that can help them navigate the challenges of teaching and see the good work that they do to give them the resilience to stay.

During the 2017-2018 school year, I faithfully journaled nearly every day. Within my visual journals are documentation of the defeats, triumphs, hopes, and frustrations I experienced over the school year. By the end of the school year, I came to the realization that my visual journals became a resource to better understand myself as a teacher, my place within the system, and a resource for resilience. But the question that remained is why and how did my visual journals do this (Figure 7)?

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<sup>1</sup> More recently in the U.S., K-12 teachers have been facing additional constraints. New laws in some states have restricted the content teachers can teach and discuss in the classroom regarding race, American history, politics, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

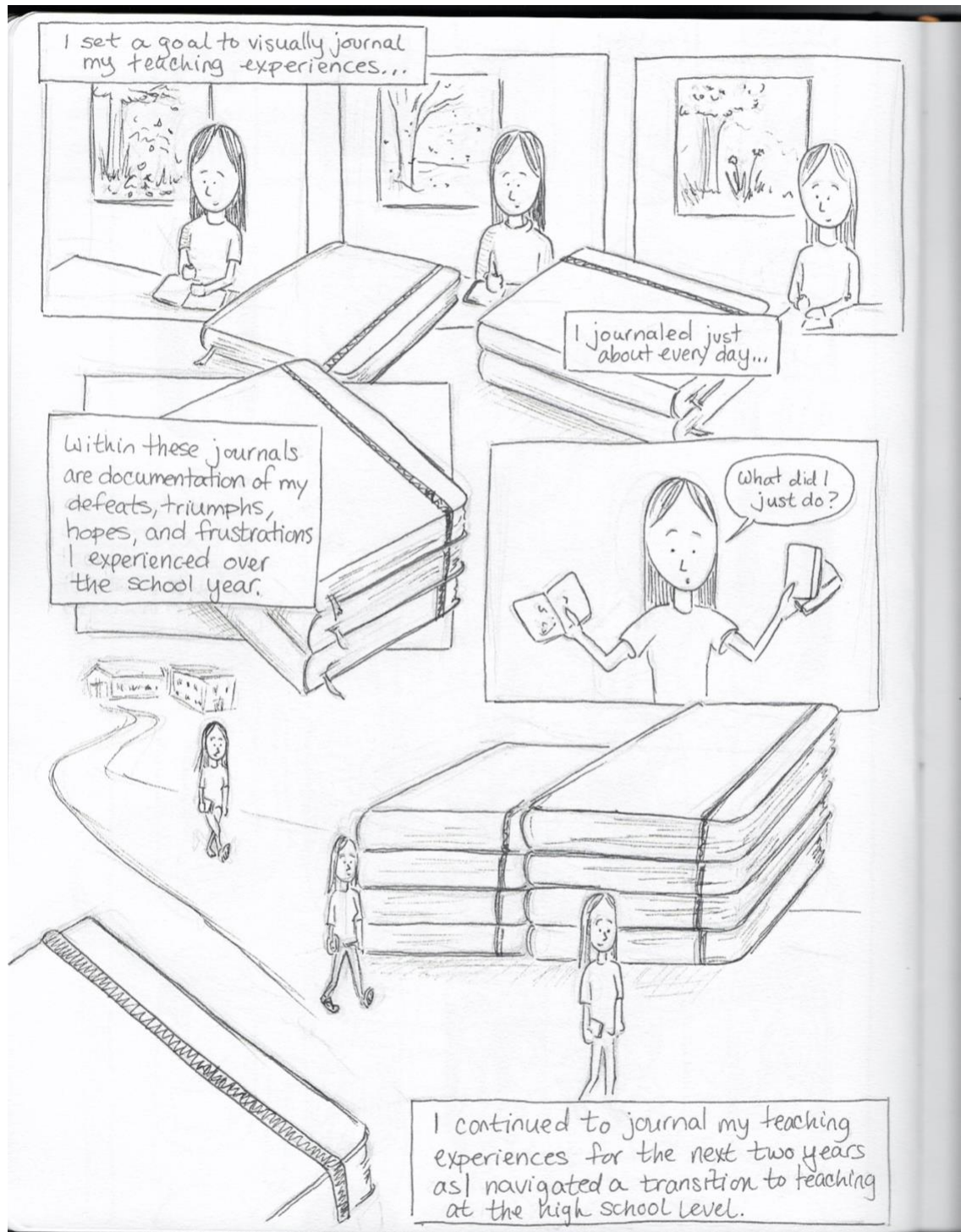


Figure 7. Documentation of my experiences in my visual journals became a daily practice.

### **Visual Journals as Narrative**

A visual journal is a notebook or book in which an individual documents, explores, and reflects on their thoughts, feelings, ideas, and experiences using both visual imagery and written text (e.g., Guyotte, 2014; La Jevic & Springgay, 2008; Scott & Modler, 2010; Scott Shields, 2016). While there are infinite approaches to and possibilities for visual journaling (Scott & Modler, 2010; Scott Shields, 2016), it is known that visual journals can promote deeper layers of reflection and cognitive understanding (Guyotte, 2014; Scott Shields, 2016). For this reason, visual journals have been used in a variety of settings including the classroom, research, and therapy (e.g., Deaver & McAuliffe, 2009; La Jevic & Springgay, 2008; Scott Shields, 2016; Willcox, 2017).

The visual-verbal thinking fostered within visual journals can be a powerful tool to aid in the formation and development of teacher identity (Scott Shields, 2016). Visual journals provide the space to allow individuals to learn about their practice and themselves (Scott Shields, 2016; Shipe, 2016). This artform inherently harnesses the potential of narrative by capturing the stories and experiences of daily life while attending to the visual proclivities held by its user (Figure 8).

I leveraged the expressive and reflective nature of visual journals to document, reflect on, and tell the story of my own teaching experience. This certainly is not a novel approach to using visual journals. For example, Shipe (2016) utilized visual journals as a tool for arts-based research in the classroom to learn more about her teaching practice and the ways she connected with her students. Klein and Miraglia (2017) proposed a similar idea framed through the lens of self-study, providing examples of visual journaling as a concrete method for integrating visual reflection. They contended that visual journaling as a reflective practice, is a useful tool to engage in conversations that can help art teachers “envision and re-vision and transform and reform their practices through the eyes of an artist” (Klein & Miraglia, 2017, p. 30).

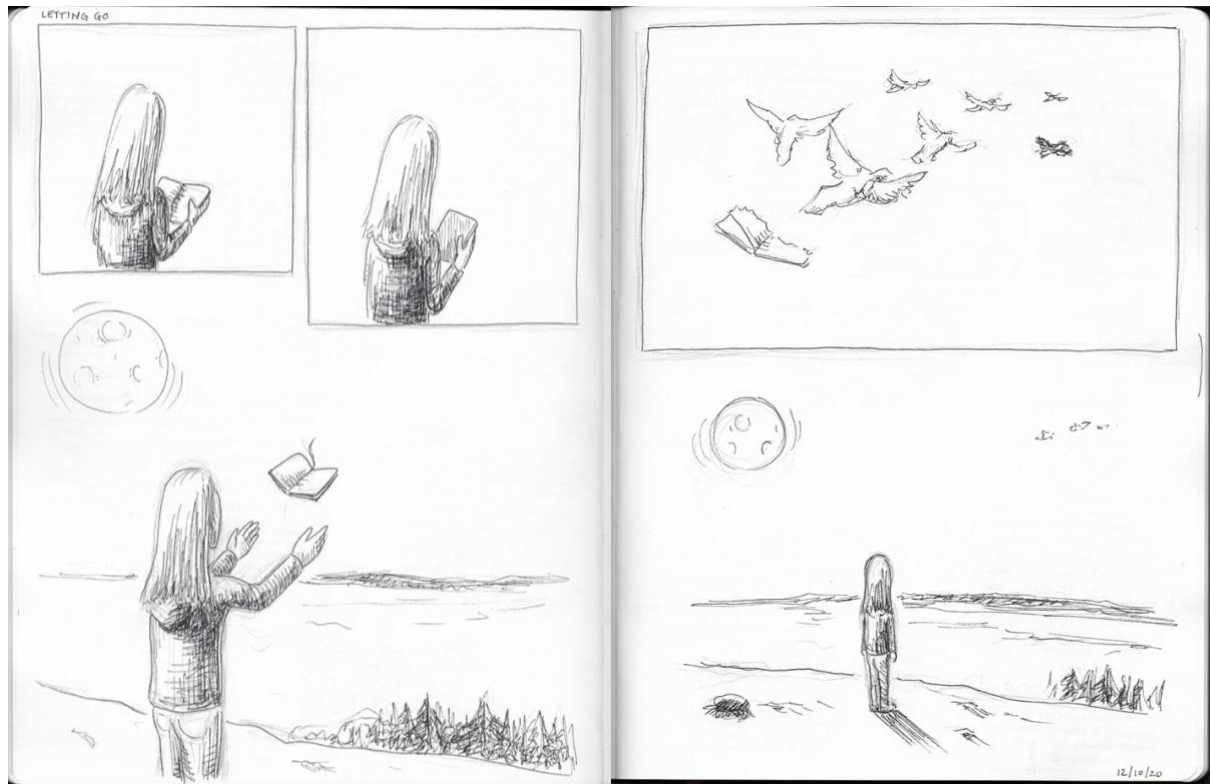


Figure 8. “Letting Go” – Original visual journal entry from 12/10/20.

There is an ever-increasing recognition of the power in telling stories through both visual and verbal means (Day Sclater, 2003; Johnson, 2004). The use of visual presentation can convey additional ideas and meaning, providing “expression where words fail” (Sousanis, 2015, p. 59). Using visual-verbal analysis, Johnson (2004) found that the personal experience story of a novice teacher as told through comics shifted from a story of personal experience to a critique of the educational system when she recognized that multiple voices resided between these visual and verbal narratives. Through this, Johnson (2004) encouraged reconsideration of ways teachers’ personal experience stories can be “re-claimed so as to encourage a more critical approach to teacher identity” (p. 425).

With this in mind, I began exploring ways I could use visual and verbal analysis to re-tell the stories within my visual journals and thereby illuminate a far more critical narrative. I conducted an arts-based narrative inquiry into the stories and events documented in my visual journals from my last four years as a K-12 art teacher. Through this inquiry, I sought to answer the question: In what ways has my visual journaling practice fostered my resilience as a teacher?

“Narrative is a method of inquiry and a way of knowing – a discovery and analysis...” (Ely et al., 1997, p. 64). The narrative presented in this article is situated in the construction-based (form) approach (Bleakley, 2005). In my analysis, I dissected particular stories within my visual journals and then reconstructed them within the context of specific themes to form a larger narrative (Bleakley, 2005). As I analyzed the individual stories and the overall narrative of my experience, I inductively drew categories and themes (Bleakley, 2005) that explain how my visual journals fostered my own resilience as a teacher. I extracted excerpts from my visual journals and also created new images that re-tell these stories as framed through these emergent themes.

In narrative, the verbal tends to be the predominant vehicle for meaning while images typically serve a supporting role (Johnson, 2004). I, however, will use a visual-verbal format to present the emergent themes through a combination of drawings and text to demonstrate how the visual journal can be leveraged as a viable tool for teacher resilience. Much like comics leave space in between cells, thereby allowing the reader to insert or draw their own meaning, I purposefully present selected anecdotes together. It is my hope that the space between and juxtaposition of these anecdotes in visual and written form conveys additional layers of meaning of my experience. It is important to note that visual journaling is a personal endeavor and there is no right or wrong way to go about it. I am presenting what worked for me.

To provide context for my resilience narrative, I will first describe the origin story of my visual journaling practice.

### **Research Monster – The Origin Story**

During the summer of 2016, I was mid-way through the Qualitative Research 1 course required by my master’s degree program. At this point, we were beginning to form our research topic and questions while also mentally preparing to conduct research in our own classrooms the next semester. In the back of my mind, I worried if my school district was going to allow me to do my research. The professor started class that day by asking us to create a drawing reflecting on our fears of conducting research.

I began sketching an angry looking creature, giving it my Department Coordinator’s hairstyle and the signature bowtie worn by my school district’s Superintendent. Then I gave the creature a big snout so he could snort out a growl and an emphatic NO, representing my fear that the administration was not going to support my research. Then I drew a watch on one of the creature’s wrists while he dangled a timepiece in the other hand to visualize my worry

about the amount of time required to conduct my research while also fulfilling my teaching duties.



Figure 9. The origin story of my visual journaling practice.

I found this drawing to be very cathartic. While it did not resolve my issues with my school district, it placated some of my anxieties and allowed me the space to step back, giving me a new perspective. It was at that point that I realized that this kind of reflection and drawing was not only going to help me through the research process, but it was also going to be a source of strength as I navigated my return to my middle school classroom (Figure 9).

As I prepared to conduct a qualitative case study in my classroom, I bought a journal primarily to have a place to write all my field notes as well as to jot down some reflections about the research process. Recalling my research monster drawing, I figured this research journal could also be a space for additional drawings. Unbeknownst to me at the time, my visual research journal would eventually become my research companion (Scott Shields, 2016) and stay by my side throughout the study and beyond.



*Figure 10.* Drawing of a quiet moment in my middle school classroom from my research journal – Original visual journal entry from 9/16/16.



As the school year started, I began documenting some of the context in my research journal. I created drawings of the school and my classroom as well as jot down a few notes about the school and school district (Figure 10). The 2016-2017 school year seemed to begin like most others. After a slew of professional development days and meetings, the first day of school commenced. A sea of glum middle schoolers who wished their summer vacation could have lasted a bit longer, slowly made their way into the school. It appeared to be a calm start to the year. However, that quickly changed. By the end of the third week of school, so much chaos was happening within the building that I had to document it. My Week 3 Reflection entry became one of the first times that experiences from my school day, beyond the field notes and memos from my study, made their way into this journal (Figure 11).

Based on my seven years of teaching experience at that point, I knew that my classroom was not a bubble. Anything that happened around the school, outside of my classroom always found its way through my classroom door. So, while my study was bounded to a single class, I still felt it was important to document what was going on around the school because it was most likely impacting my students in some way. My Week 3 Reflection entry and the ones that followed began to document what I felt were the realities of my context. For me this was an important first step. This documentation was acknowledgement of what I was experiencing. It became a means to understand what was within and beyond my control – what I was able change and what I was not.



Figure 11. Re-creation of visual journal entries from my 2016-2017 research journal.

After first experiencing the potential of visual journals during the 2016-2017 school year, and further seeing their value in helping me navigate the challenges of teaching during the 2017-2018 school year, I continued to visually journal my teaching experiences for the next two years. During this time, I navigated a transition to teaching at the high school level, a change in department leadership, and encountered new and unexpected challenges in my teaching and new environment. Now removed from my teaching context and nearly seven years removed from my first visual journal, I closely examined the ways my visual journals from those years fostered my own resilience as a teacher. Through my analysis, I found that my visual journal became a means for my own resilience by integrating humor, fostering a sense of accomplishment and self-efficacy, as well as providing the space to retake ownership of my own journey.

### **Resilience**

Resilience is a way of understanding what enables teachers to persist in the face of challenges (Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011). While defined in various ways, some scholars agree that resilience is the outcome of the dynamic relationship between risk and protective factors (Arnup & Bowles, 2016; Beltman et al., 2011; Bobek, 2002). Resilience is complex, idiosyncratic, and cyclical as it involves the dynamic interaction between an individual and the environment over time (Beltman et al., 2011). To be resilient means that when faced with challenges, an individual can leverage their personal and environmental resources to bounce back quickly and efficiently, persevere, and successfully adapt (Beltman et al., 2011; Bobek, 2002).

Individual characteristics such as self-efficacy, confidence, and coping strategies are recognized to help an individual be resilient (Beltman et al., 2011; Bobek, 2002). However, resilience can also be acquired by learning from past experiences (Beltman et al., 2011; Bobek, 2002). “To become resilient, individuals must learn to adjust to negative conditions with the aid of their resources, which can inform their perspectives and decision-making” (Bobek, 2002, p. 202). According to Bobek (2002), resources that are important to developing resilience include: significant adult relationships, a sense of personal responsibility, social and problem-solving skills, a sense of competence, expectations and goals, confidence, a sense of humor, personal ownership, and a sense of accomplishment.

Many scholars stress the importance of fostering resilience in preservice teachers to help prepare them to navigate the challenges of the first few years of teaching and increase their longevity in the profession (Arnup & Bowles, 2016; Beltman et al., 2011; Bobek, 2002; Evans-Palmer, 2010). Additionally, it is recognized that in-service teachers who maintain their resilience are able to teach more effectively (Evans-Palmer, 2010). Therefore, in these

ever-challenging times, fostering resilience is important for teachers in all stages of their career.

Extending the monster metaphor from my research monster origin story, resilience entails finding ways of overcoming the monsters that make our journey as teachers more difficult. This includes monsters of self-doubt as well as daily teaching demands and responsibilities. In essence, I use the monster metaphor to represent the challenges that we face as teachers. In the following sections, I detail how I leveraged my visual journal to maintain a sense of humor, foster a sense of self-efficacy, and ultimately help me retake ownership of my journey, all of which helped me to fight back against the monsters I encountered as a public-school teacher.

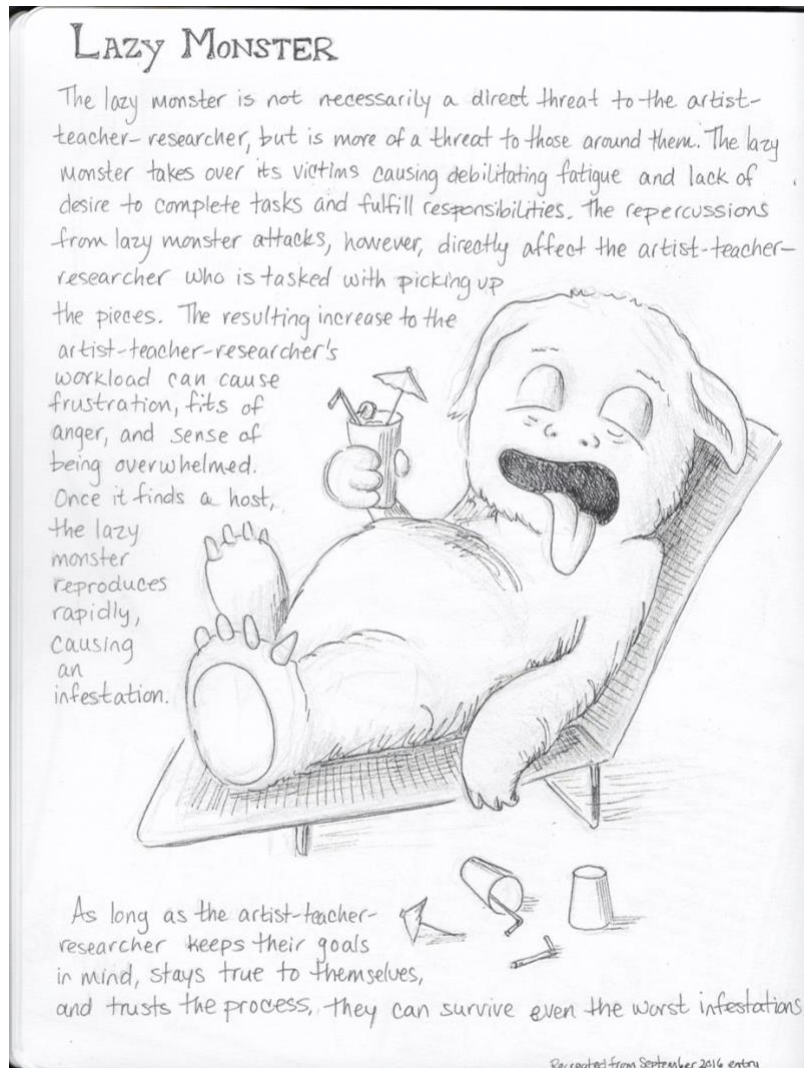
### **Finding Humor**

Humor is recognized as a tool for resilience because it can be an effective way of releasing frustrations (Bobek, 2002). “The core of humor is that we adopt a playful attitude toward something incongruous and we enjoy it” (Morreall, 2014, p. 126). Encompassing this notion, as I set up my research journal in 2016, I took the time to re-create and expand on the original drawing of my research monster. Exploring the idea further, I also wrote a brief biography about the monster to go alongside my new drawing (Figure 12). Although fictional on the surface, the drawing and accompanying writing reflected the realities and feelings I was experiencing as I embarked on my research project. This was my way of working through my anxieties about the challenges that laid ahead.



Figure 12. "Research Monster" – Original visual journal entry from September 2016.

Alongside these journal entries, more creatures and stories began to emerge. These creatures gave voice to the different aspects of my reality that I was experiencing and articulated how I was feeling in ways that I could not otherwise convey. The "Lazy Monster" was one such creature that emerged in response to extra work and responsibilities that were needlessly placed upon me within the first three weeks of school (Figure 13). The process of drawing and writing about these fictional characters also became a method to step back and begin to understand what was happening from a different perspective.



*Figure 13.* Re-creation of my “Lazy Monster” drawing to remove identifying information. Original drawing appeared in my research journal September 2016.

Most of these creatures were satirical in nature, gently critiquing the situation depending on the degree of exaggeration to cope with my frustration. As I continued observing and drawing, I found that there was a time and place for my creatures. Humor facilitates creative and divergent thinking, mental flexibility, as well as fosters tolerance of disorder and ambiguity (Evans-Palmer, 2010; Morreall, 2014). More so, humor is recognized as a way of teaching us wisdom, which in turn helps us cope with challenges that we encounter in our lives (Morreall, 2014).

I learned to harness these benefits of humor as I journaled my interaction with a colleague one morning early in the 2017-2018 school year. As I journaled this episode later that day, two

characters emerged – the “frustration bug” and the “cool cucumber.” The frustration bug was created as a reminder to myself of how easy it is to fall into a frustrated state of mind. The Cool Cucumber character was inspired by the well-known pun to stay as cool as a cucumber. I created this character as a reminder to step back and not overreact to frustrating moments. These two characters along with others reemerged numerous times in my journal throughout that school year. I eventually adopted the cool cucumber as my trusty sidekick who gave me advice in my journal when I most needed it. I found that drawing these humorous characters helped my mindset and helped me to more look more rationally at what was happening as I experienced challenging moments in and out of the classroom (Figures 14 and 15).



Figure 14. Re-creation of 9/7/17 visual journal entry to remove identifying information.



Figure 15. “The Wise Owl and the Cool Cucumber” – Original visual journal entry from 3/10/19.

However, there were also times in which I needed to create drawings that more realistically depicted specific events to better convey the gravity of the situation. Through combination of text and image, I sought to exploit the irony that I witnessed throughout the school year (Figure 16).





Figure 16. Re-creation of April faculty meeting drawing to remove identifying information. Original drawing appeared in my research journal April 2017.

When we can respond to incongruities with mental distance and laugh, we are also enabled to look at events more rationally (Morreall, 2014). In doing so, we learn to think our way through problems rather than feel our way (Morreall, 2014). Through the process of creating these drawings, I came to realize that there were many things I was not going to be able to

change, and more so, they were not worth getting frustrated over. It is important to note that the extent something is viewed as funny depends on the viewer's recognition and appreciation of the incongruities presented (Klein, 2008). These journal entries were not made for others to laugh. Instead, they were made for me as I sought to find ways to cope with the daily challenges I encountered as a teacher. Through the use of humor, I was able to reduce seemingly intimidating monsters that sought to make my job more difficult to goofy creatures that helped me find ways to productively continue along my teaching journey.

### **Fostering a Sense of Self-Efficacy**

Many teachers are drawn to teaching for the intrinsic reward of influencing cognitive, social, and personal growth in students (Bobek, 2002; Santoro, 2011). Often we can draw sustenance from our own self-efficacy, making experiences of success and accomplishment necessary components of resilience (Beltman et al., 2011; Bobek, 2002). It is known that positive events can have a stronger impact than negative, and the frequency of these experiences can have a stronger influence than the intensity (Beltman et al., 2011). My visual journals provided the time and place to think, process, question, and reflect on my teaching. As a result, a significant portion of my visual journals documented what I taught, how I taught it, how students responded to my teaching, and reflections on how I could improve. This reflective practice was integral to fostering my own sense of self-efficacy as a teacher while also pacifying the doubt monsters that consistently loomed in the background.

I used my visual journal to slow down and look more closely at and document my students' work (Shipe, 2016). During some projects, I documented my students' artmaking process by creating a drawing of their in-progress work after each class session (Figure 17). Doing this helped me to see their process and their problem-solving. From this, I realized that there was a lot more going on than what I was initially seeing during class. Drawing allowed me to notice subtle changes in the materials they were using, how they were manipulating them and the changes they made from day to day.

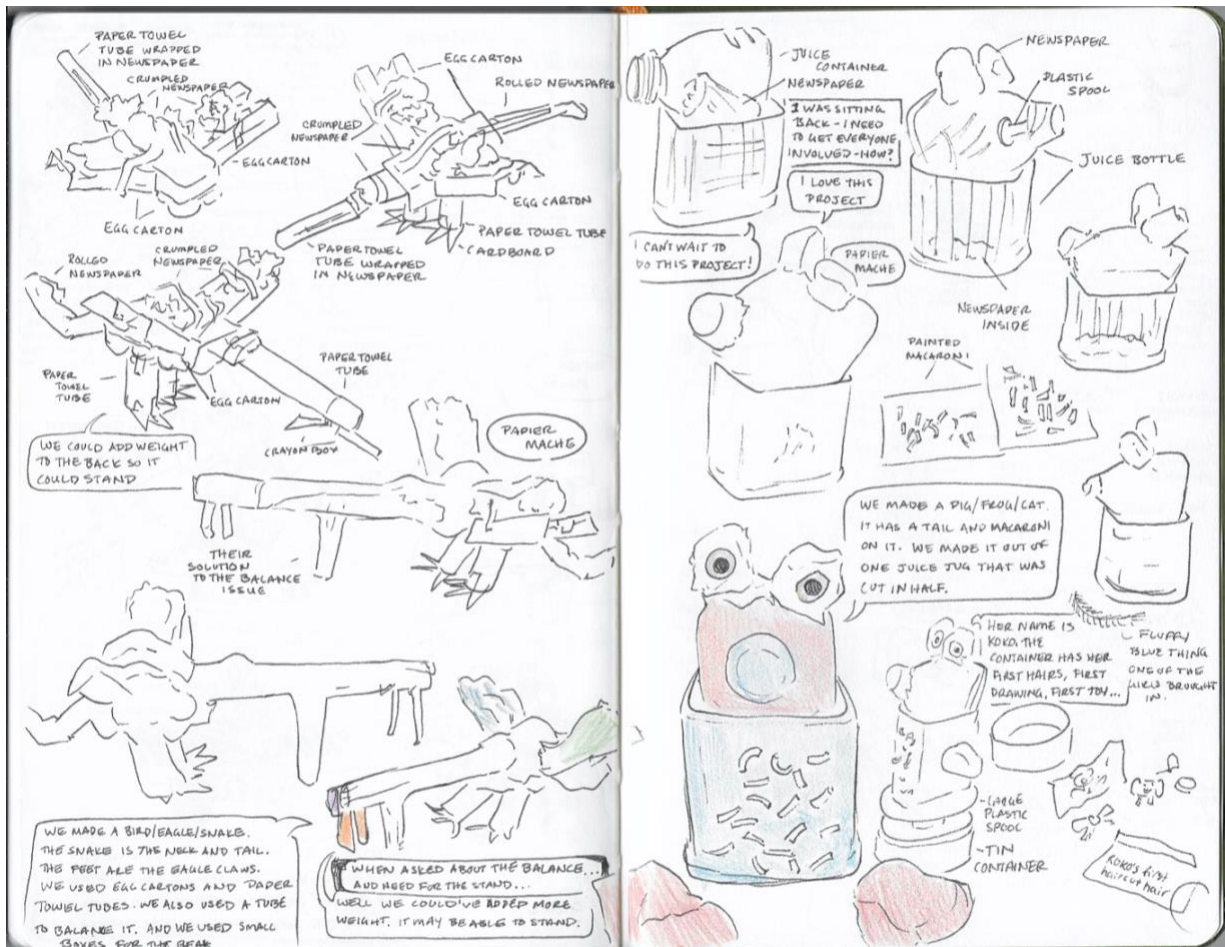


Figure 17. Drawings of students' in-progress work – Original visual journal entry from December 2017.

I also drew a variety of examples of students' finished artwork alongside their artist statements (Figure 18). This practice gave me more insight to better assess my students and fostered a new appreciation for the thought and effort they put into their work. This practice was not only a great reflective practice that afforded me the time and space to evaluate the lesson itself, but as I began documenting multiple projects by the same students, it also helped me to see that I was having a positive impact on their artistic and creative development. This insight gave me the fuel to forge ahead.

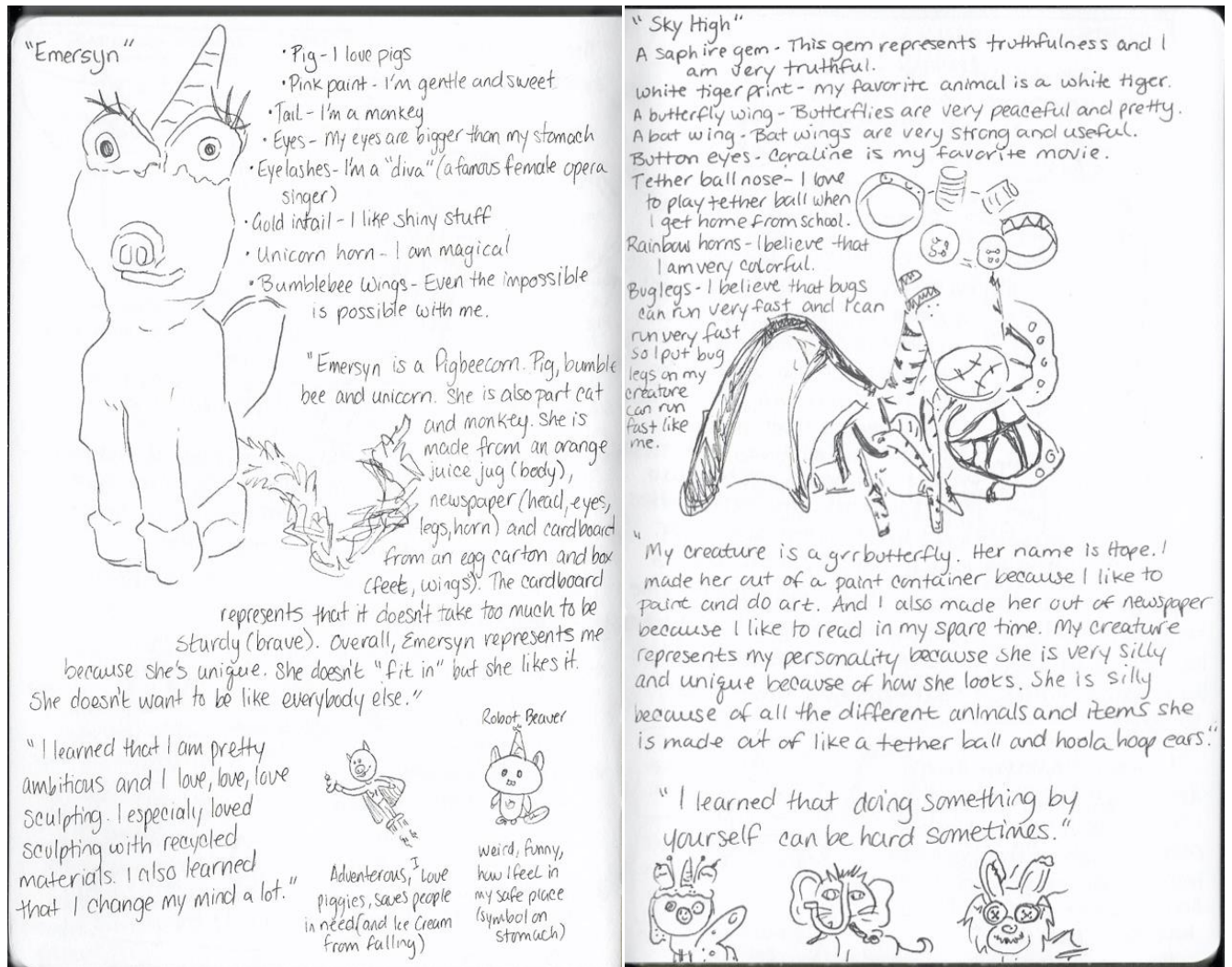


Figure 18. Drawings of students' finished work and artist statements – Original visual journal entries from January 2018 and June 2018.

Similarly, I documented students' responses to my lessons and end of year reflections they wrote about my class (Figure 19). From these, I was able to see what my students liked and did not like about my class as well as gain greater understanding of what they were learning. The negative comments pinpointed areas where I could improve while the positive comments helped me to see that I was on the right path and having a positive impact on my students within the classroom.

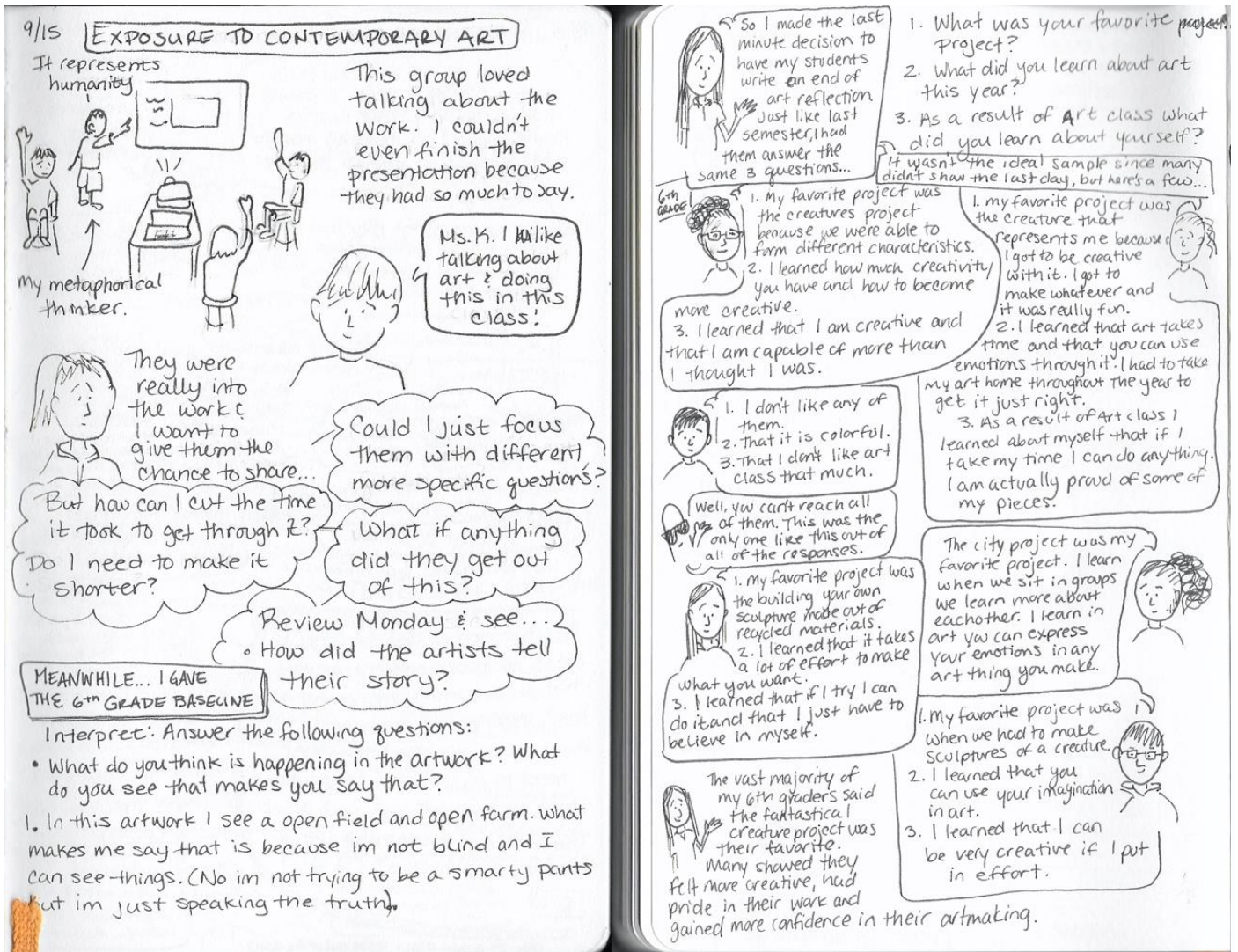


Figure 19. Drawings documenting students' responses to lessons and end of year reflections – Original visual journal entries from 9/15/17 and 6/26/18.

My visual journals also provided the space to document interactions and connections with students beyond the physical classroom. I documented instances outside of class when former students approached me to show off their self-initiated artwork and talk about how they have grown as artists as well as the anonymous notes from students that were occasionally placed in my school mailbox (Figure 20).

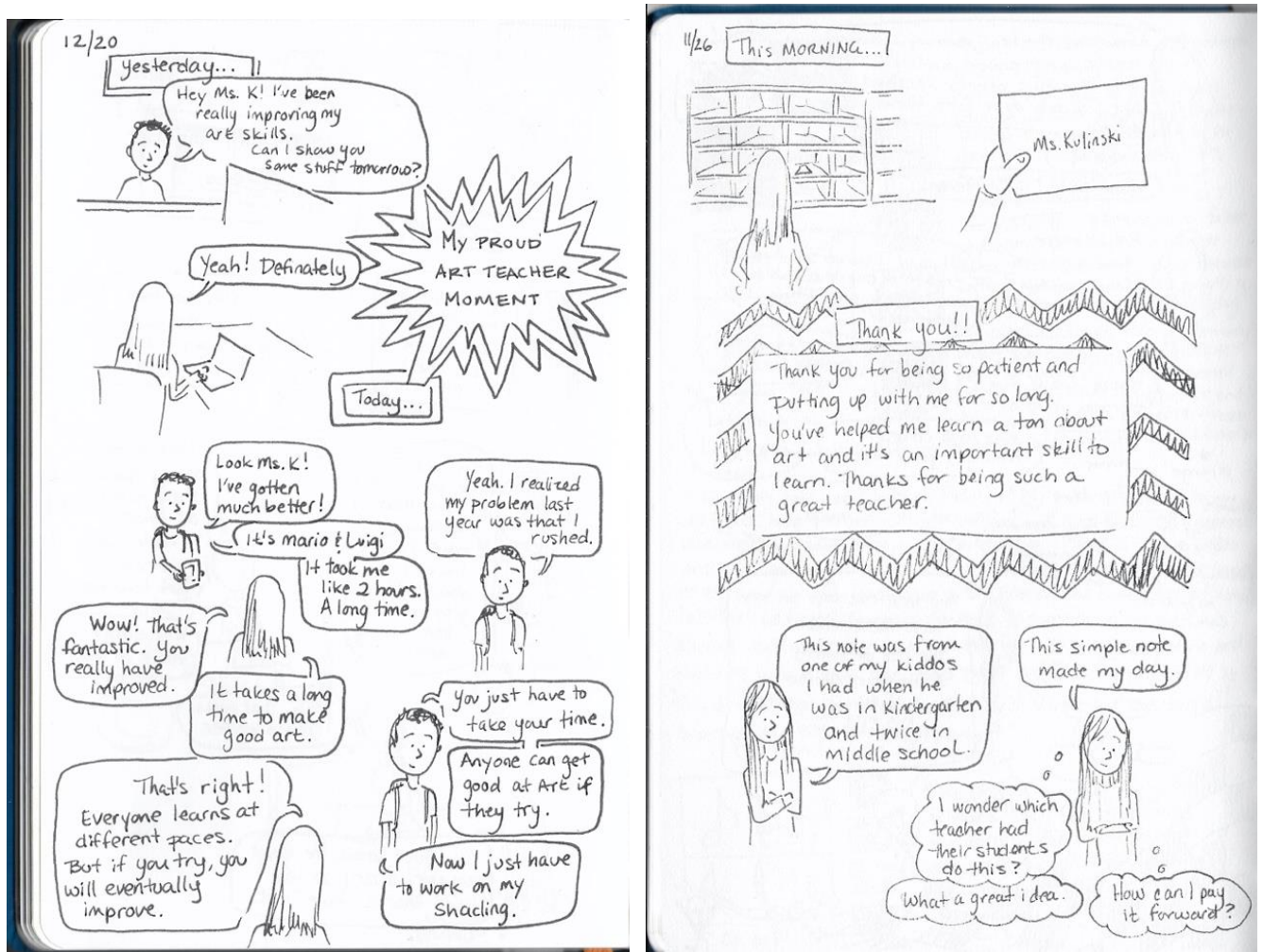


Figure 20. Drawings documenting my interactions with students outside of the classroom – Original visual journal entries from 12/20/18 and 11/26/18.

Drawing my experiences in my visual journal also allowed me to manipulate time and space (Ayers & Alexander-Tanner, 2010; Sousanis, 2015). Within a single page, I documented and brought together similar events that happened over the span of a few days. In one example, I documented the many students who asked for my assistance in repairing their worn-out sneakers. Through combining these instances onto a single page, I was able to convey the volume and nature of the requests I received.

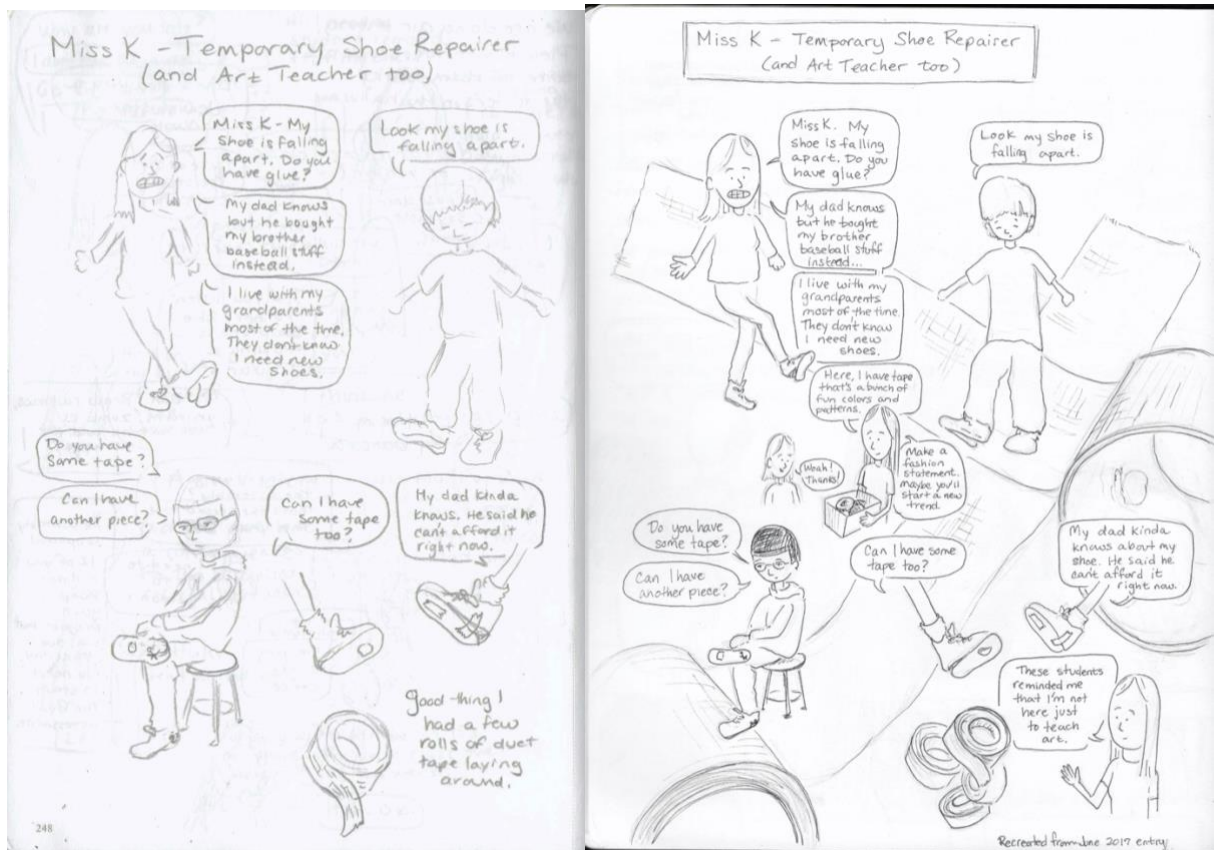


Figure 21. Left: Original drawing of students' requests for shoe repairs from my research journal from June 2017.

Right: Re-creation of drawing of students' requests for shoe repairs from my research journal with added drawings.

Four years later, I revisited this entry through the process of drawing. As I re-created the drawings of my students and copied their quotes, I was taken back in time. I recalled the concern I had for their safety and well-being as I asked these students if they informed the adults they live with about the state of their shoes. And I also recalled how I tried to help them make the best of their situation by pulling out the designer duct tape I had stored away in my closet so they could make the repairs look intentional. As these memories came back, I added this information to my new drawing (Figure 21). Through this process I now have a greater appreciation for the significance of these moments. While the drawing shows how I helped my students extend the life of their shoes for a bit longer, it also helped me to step back and remind myself that my role within the school was much more than just teaching Art. In this sense, this drawing represents how my students reminded me of my purpose, and in turn, helped me persevere through the rest of my school year.

For me, visual journals are a place where I can document and celebrate both my students' and my own successes and accomplishments. It is easy to focus on the negative, but it is important to remind ourselves of the good that we do. Documenting these moments washed away any doubts I had about my career choice and reaffirmed why I became an art teacher in the first place. In this sense, my visual journal provided the space for me to gain self-confidence in my skills and knowledge to fight the doubt monsters that stood in my path.

### **Retaking Ownership of my Journey and Fighting Back Against the Monsters**

When I was teaching at the middle school level, I was viewed by many as the leader of my middle school department. My actions, knowledge, and work earned the respect of my colleagues and administrators. When faced with issues that needed to be addressed, my colleagues often turned to me to speak for the group. Since I made sure to be well-informed about the issues in order to effectively make our case understood, I had no problem stepping up to advocate for myself and my colleagues (Figure 22). This did not go unnoticed. Numerous individuals at the middle school at the time commented how they appreciated and respected my “quiet” leadership style. These were some of the most productive years I had working within the public school system. I felt heard.



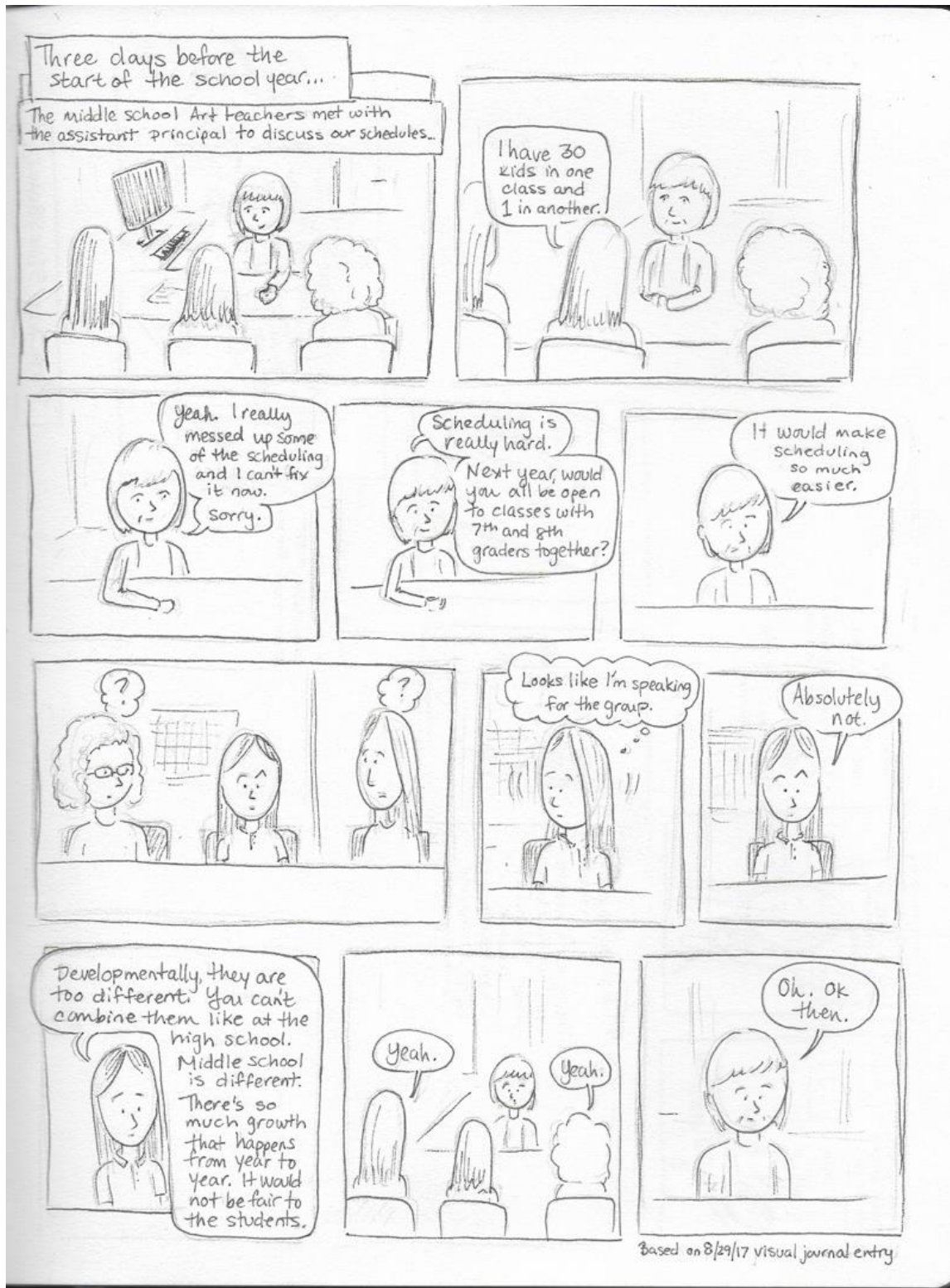
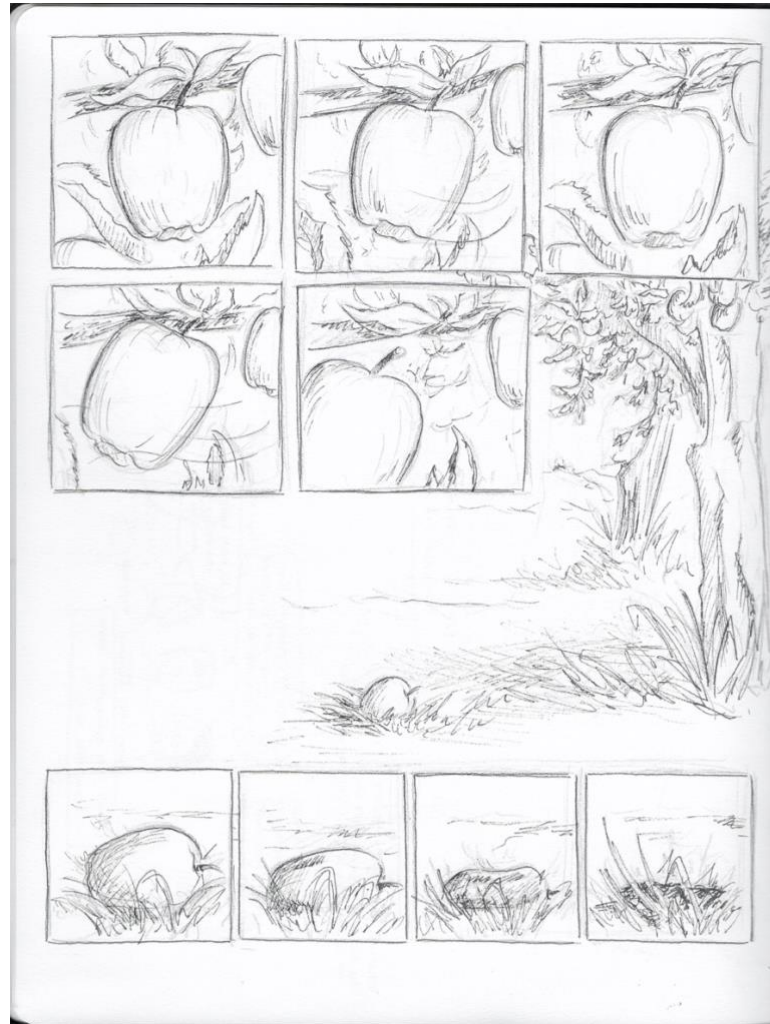


Figure 22. Re-creation of 8/29/17 visual journal entry to remove any identifying information.

However, this narrative changed when I transferred to the high school. My quiet demeanor was misconstrued as complacency rather than active listening and problem solving. As a result, I was told that because I was not talking, I was not paying attention and was uninvolved. However, when I did speak up, my concerns were not addressed, and my ideas were ignored (Figure 23).



*Figure 23. “The Rotting Apple” – Original visual journal entry from 3/18/21.*

In his book chapter, Rolling (2013) recounted his experience dealing with an unresponsive school administration. Using the ceiling in the art studios as a metaphor to illustrate the “recurring ill-fittedness of the arts within modern taxonomical educational structures” (Rolling, 2013, p. 204), Rolling also recognized the imposed ceiling as “an anomalous

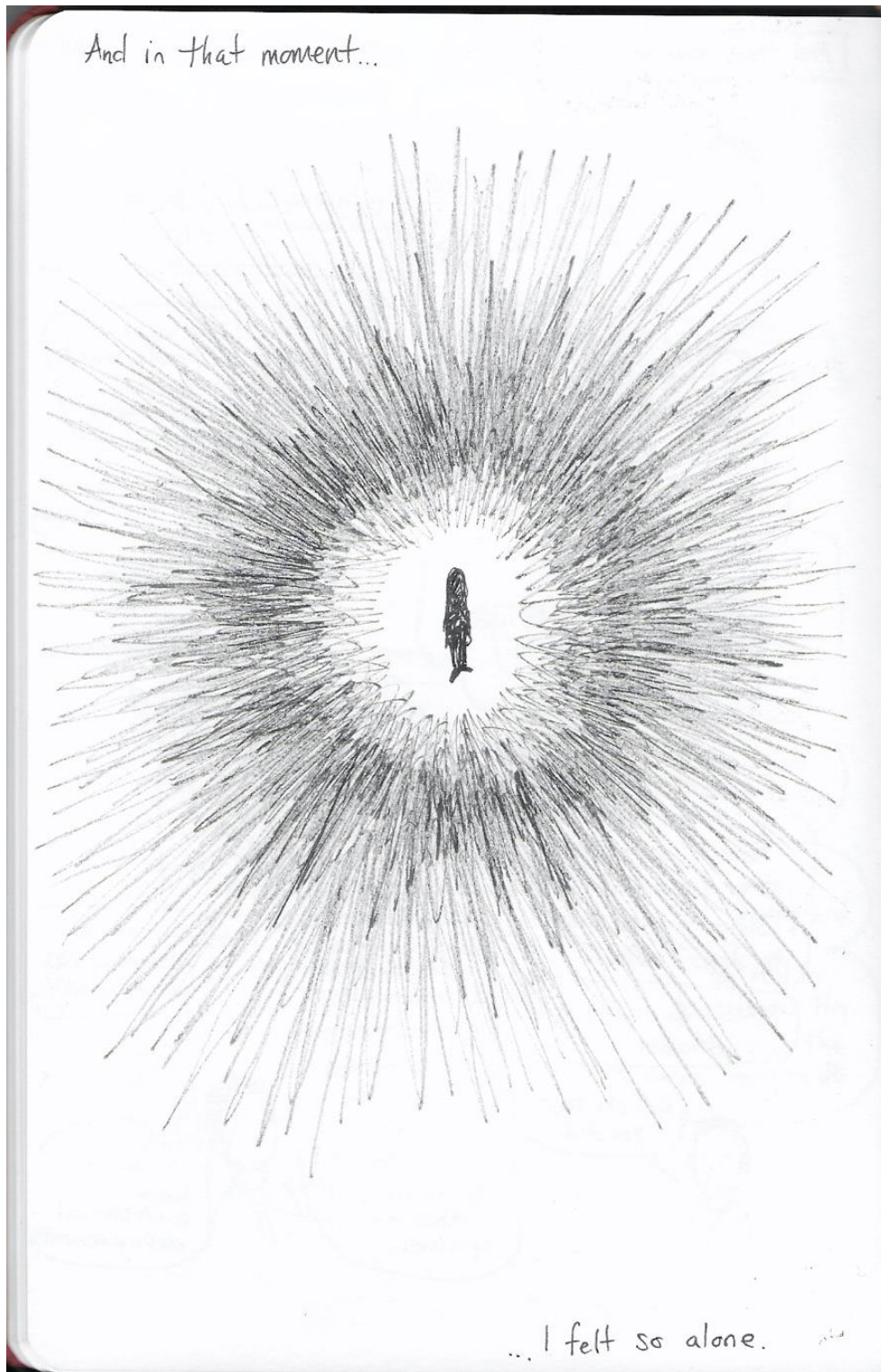
pathway” (p. 205) for his learning, professional development, and educational research. With time, I came to see my visual journals as a tool to help me reflect and act as a source of resilience when faced with the daily challenges of teaching. However, looking back at my journals from those four years with a new lens, I see that they were also an anomalous pathway for my own resistance.

My journals from my two years at the high school increasingly incorporated and responded to the narratives thrust upon me. Deep down, there was part of me that wanted to document my experiences so I could bring them to the forefront and tell my story. Documentation of my stories within my visual journals allowed me to retake ownership of the narrative and journey from the one that did not represent me and who I was (Figures 24, 25, and 26).

In this sense, my resilience was an act of resistance. It was not a matter of adapting, instead it was a matter of finding my voice and agency as a teacher and as a person (Bartell, Cho, Drake, Petchauer, & Richmond, 2019) to fight back against the imposed narrative monsters that stood in my path. Within my visual journals, the perspective and self-confidence I gained from using humor and documenting my successes provided the space and capacity to muster the courage and energy needed fight back against and counter the narratives imposed upon me so I could do my best work with my students.



Figure 24. Re-creation of 11/15/19 visual journal entry to remove any identifying information.



*Figure 25.* "And in that moment... I felt so alone" – Original visual journal entry from 11/15/19.

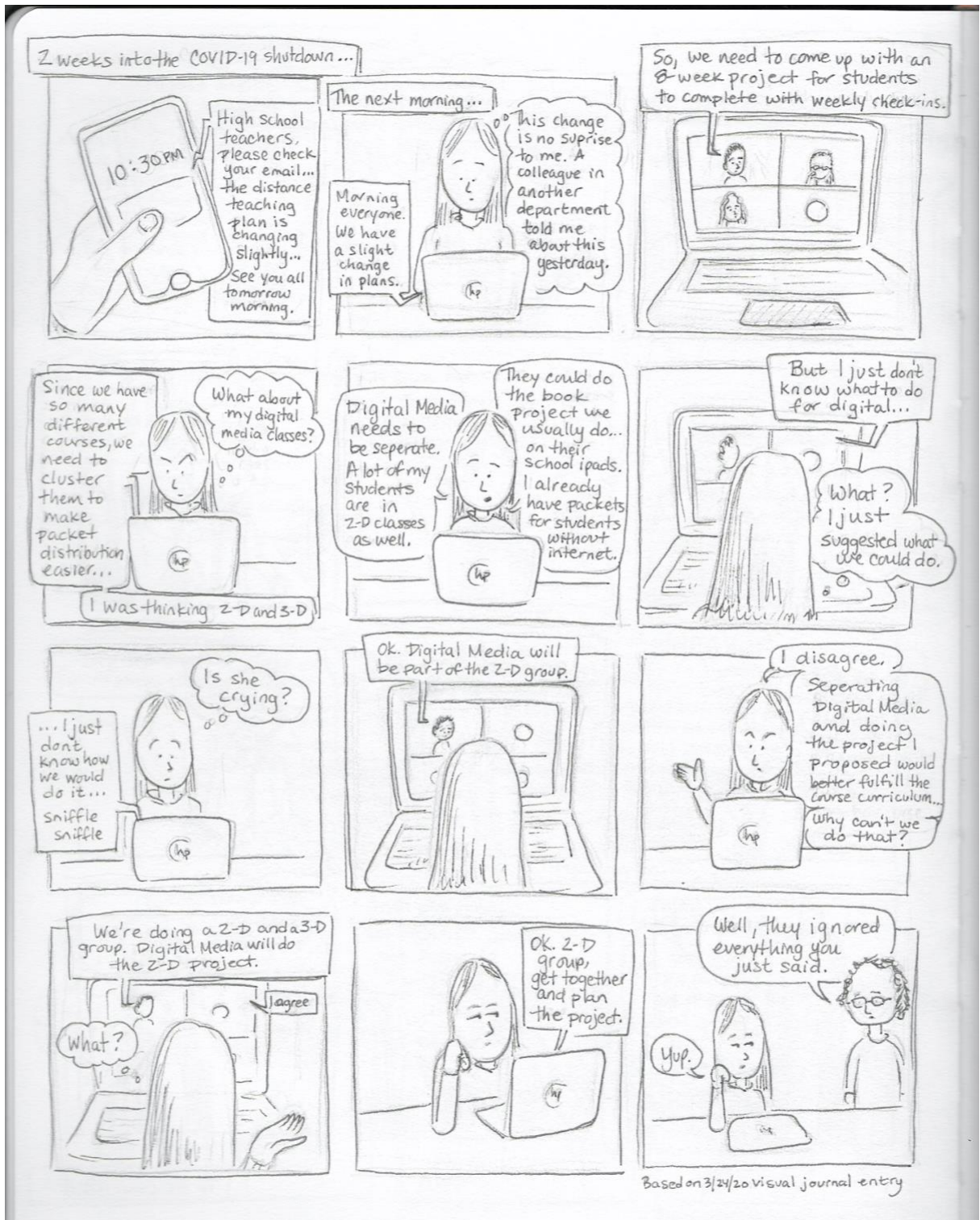


Figure 26. Re-creation of 3/24/20 visual journal entry to remove any identifying information.

### Finding Resilience and Strength to Resist

Chaim Noy (2003) described narrative research as a journey of uncharted paths that enacts, performs, and evokes, rather than conveys central experiences and relationships that form meaning. When I began my journey with visual journals seven years ago, I could not have imagined where they have taken me. Looking back at this time in my career, I did not just survive; I thrived as a teacher and as a person. And I attribute much of that to my visual journaling practice. By leaving it all on the page, finding humor in challenging situations, recognizing the successes and taking ownership of my journey, I was able to stay rooted in my purpose as I worked towards my goals (Figure 27). I came to know myself and the kind of person and teacher I wanted to be. “When teachers articulate and interpret the stories of their practice, their own practice, they develop their personal practical knowledge to the extent that they act in the future with insight and foresight” (Barkhuizen & Hacker, 2009, p. 2).

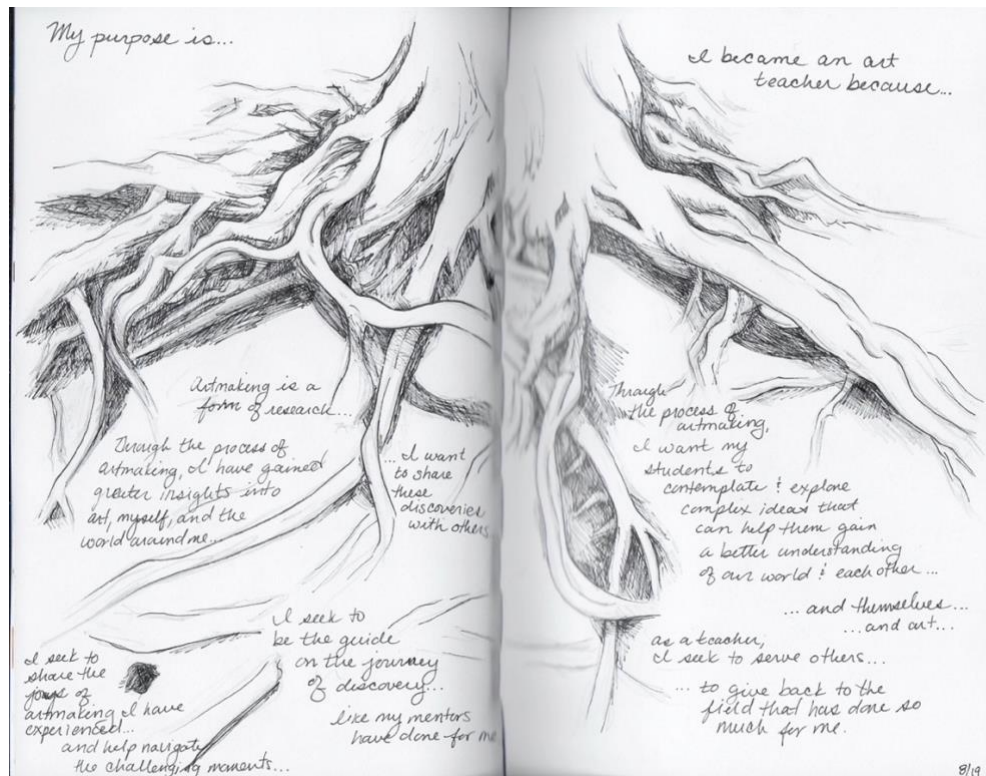
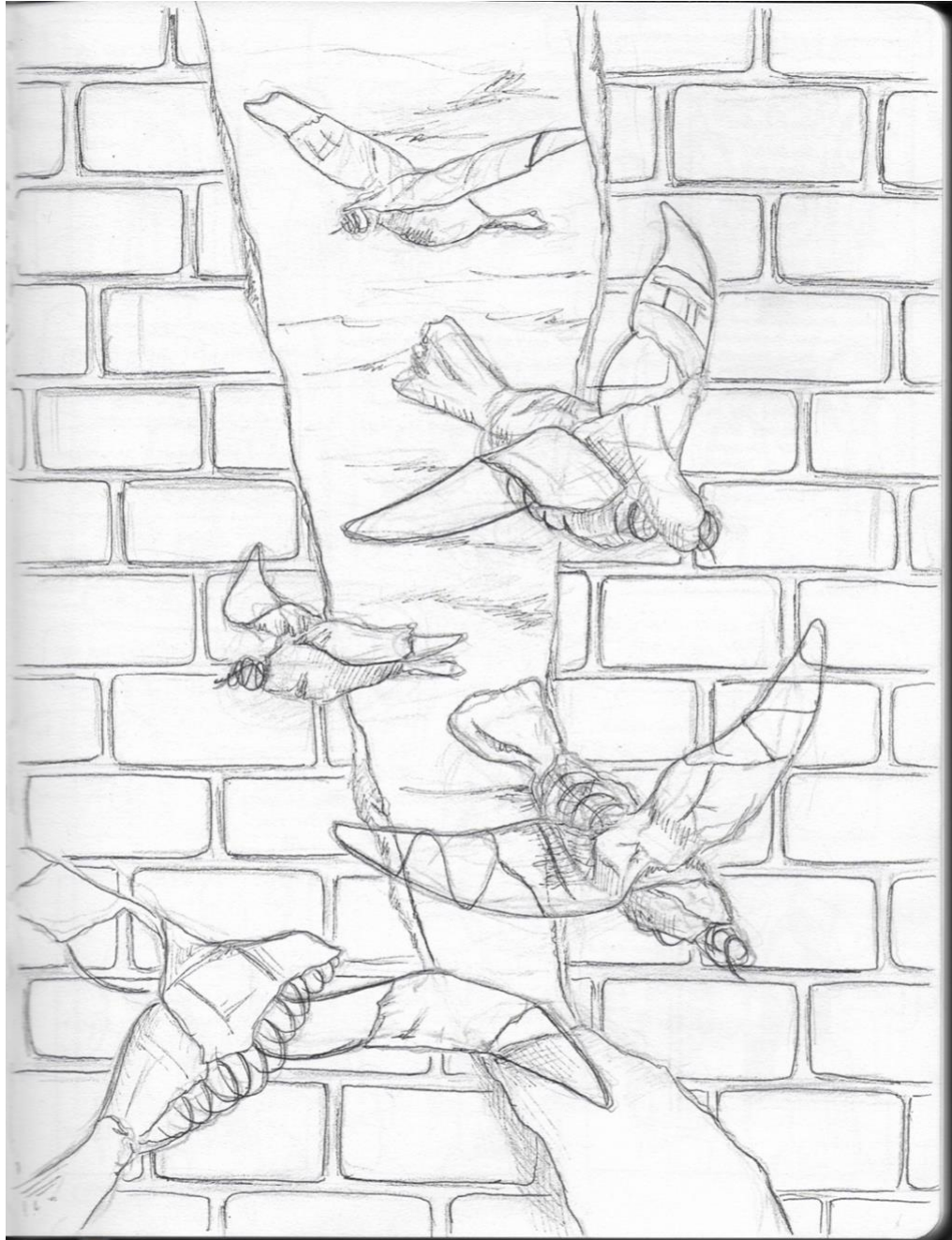


Figure 27. “Staying Rooted” – Original visual journal entry from August 2019.

Although I have since left my teaching position to pursue a PhD, my visual journal continues to accompany me as I revisit and re-write my past stories and also write new stories (Figure 28). This narrative is not complete. However, through the act of continual unification, disruption, and (re)writing (Rolling, 2010), I hope that this new narrative and the ones that

follow will help me and others understand ways visual journals can help find resilience and strength to resist during challenging times.



*Figure 28. “Breaking Through” – Original visual journal entry from 3/18/21.*



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