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Brattleboro Museum & Art Center
10 Vernon St.
Brattleboro, VT 05301

April 28, 2014

Vermont Humanities Council
11 Loomis Street
Montpelier, VT 05602

To the judging committee of the Victor R. Swenson Humanities Educator Award:

My name is [redacted], and I would like to support the nomination of [redacted], 6th grade teacher at [redacted] School for the 2014 Victor R. Swenson Humanities Educator Award. I am the Education Curator at the Brattleboro Museum & Art Center (BMAC), and have known [redacted] and his inspiring work with 6th grade students for about 12 years.

My first introduction to [redacted] was in my early years at the Museum (c. 2002-2003) when he participated in a VTS (Visual Thinking Strategies) symposium at BMAC. His excellent presentation – which I saw him do in his classroom with students in ensuing years – was on extending VTS to support a geometry lesson. He used a projected image of an M.C. Escher print as a starting point. After a student-centered discussion about the piece, he put a piece of translucent paper over the image on the wall and asked students to come up and find an angle in the picture and to trace it with a thick marker. After many of the angles had been marked, he asked the students to identify the triangles by type or degrees. What a fun way to reinforce learning geometry!

[redacted] internalized and synthesized the VTS approach, which uses images to foster critical thinking skills, problem-solving, cooperation among peers, and more, for his teaching goals. He was one of the first in our area to incorporate this method into math, literacy, history, and science projects.

"Characterization in Fiction" is an example of how [redacted] employed and amplified the VTS basics. He shared this in another BMAC teacher workshop in 2006. Briefly, students in groups discuss a portrait that they then write about – physical description, personality, attitudes, and reputation. Similarly, [redacted] uses this technique to help students learn to organize their thoughts and to cite examples when writing about a character in a book.

[redacted] integrates art and science in two interesting and substantive hands-on projects. Firstly, each student receives a small, square wooden frame that is then taken to the outskirts of the school's land where natural habitats thrive. The

student chooses a place to put the frame on the ground and then is responsible for observation of what is happening in that square for certain lengths of time, and on subsequent days. Journal writing and drawing are part of this exploration of details and changes over time. I have observed another of [redacted]'s science/art projects displayed at [redacted] School. Students draw a flower and then dissect it and draw each of the parts. There are microscopes and/or magnifying glasses available to examine details. The VTS-inspired discussions that are part of the regular classroom routine ensure that [redacted]'s students are primed to be discoverers. The results in every area show [redacted]'s ability to capture students' innate curiosity and to turn on their desire to succeed because the projects are grounded in reality and respect.

Finally, there is another wonderful example of how [redacted] involved his students in their small community in a very significant way. What I remember is that each student had to interview someone in the community and write about them for a book that was then published. This project – the details of which [redacted] or Principal [redacted] could provide – was in-depth and memorable for the whole community.

As I got to know [redacted] better through a multi-visit, museum-school partnership (BMAC's Art & Literacy Connection [2004-2010]), I learned more about his various skills, fascinating projects, and absolute integrity as a teacher and mentor. Each year, besides leading lengthy 6th grade trips outside the community to either New York City or Cape Cod, [redacted] always brings his class to their local art museum, where he leads the group around current exhibits. I see him genuinely interested and supportive of each student's comments and insights.

[redacted] is the kind of teacher one would wish for *every* student. His classroom is personalized by his students each year; there are comfy chairs and a couch; and expectations are for civil and courteous interactions, and his students clearly love him. I highly recommend [redacted] for the 2014 Victor R. Swenson Humanities Educator Award.

Sincerely,

[redacted]