

Teacher of the Week

Every week, DNAinfo.com Chicago goes straight to the head of the class. Our neighborhood reporters sit down with teachers in Chicago's public and private schools to discuss their educational philosophies and the challenges they face. *Send your suggestions for Teacher of the Week to chicago-newsroom@dnainfo.com or call us at (312) 508-4300*



ROGERS PARK — A lesson in bullying and gang violence ... in art class?

That's just what Masooma Khan, a second-year art teacher at the [Chicago Math and Science Academy](#), decided her students needed after a spate of neighborhood shootings and the death of [one of the school's students](#) who was shot in October.



Khan, 25, asked her students to write a letter to the Rogers Park community, describing how they feel about their safety, then form those words into a self-portrait made of only manipulated text.

"They all had such powerful letters," she said, and now the artwork hangs in the school's lobby. "It was an eye opener for them. That's what I try to do as a teacher."

Khan said she studied social justice issues at her alma mater, the [University of Illinois at Chicago](#), and wanted her students to reflect on what violence does to their neighborhood and school.

Some students, she said, told her it's not worth talking about.

"We are going to talk about how you don't want to talk about it," she recalled telling them.

Adorning the school's hallways are other paintings and drawings completed by her students.

Another project's theme was bullying.

Khan directed her students, who are seventh- through 12th-graders, to write letter to a bully from a bystander's perspective, then use it as inspiration for a painting.

"Words choke whether you see it or not," read the text on one piece that shows a woman being strangled by an arm made of words, including "redneck," "wetback" and "cracker."

Senior Daniel Sanchez, 17, has been in Khan's classes for two years.

He said the art classes he had taken before were "bland" in comparison.

"Art was just art," he said, but this year Khan's classes have inspired him to pursue a minor in the subject when he goes to college to major in English.

Eventually, he said, he wants to write and illustrate a comic book.

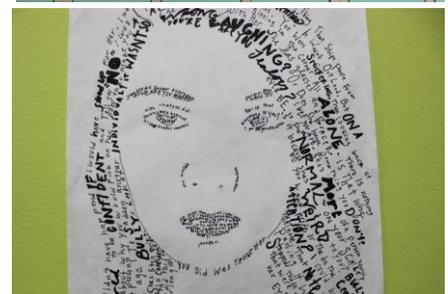
"That's my dream," he said after school, working on his Advanced Placement art portfolio in Khan's classroom. "Art and writing for me connects deeply with one another."

Khan also invites community members to teach after-school programs for her students.

One afternoon, students crowded around trays of a colorful mixture used to marbleize paper, a Turkish art form called Ebru.

This year she said she's learned how to pace herself as a teacher and not "bite off more than I can chew."

"I don't know how I made it through my first year," she said.



Read more: <http://www.dnainfo.com/chicago/20130311/rogers-park/charter-school-art-teacher-gives-lesson-gang-violence-bullying#.UT3xugjTO4o.gmail#ixzz2NQcFWPdA>