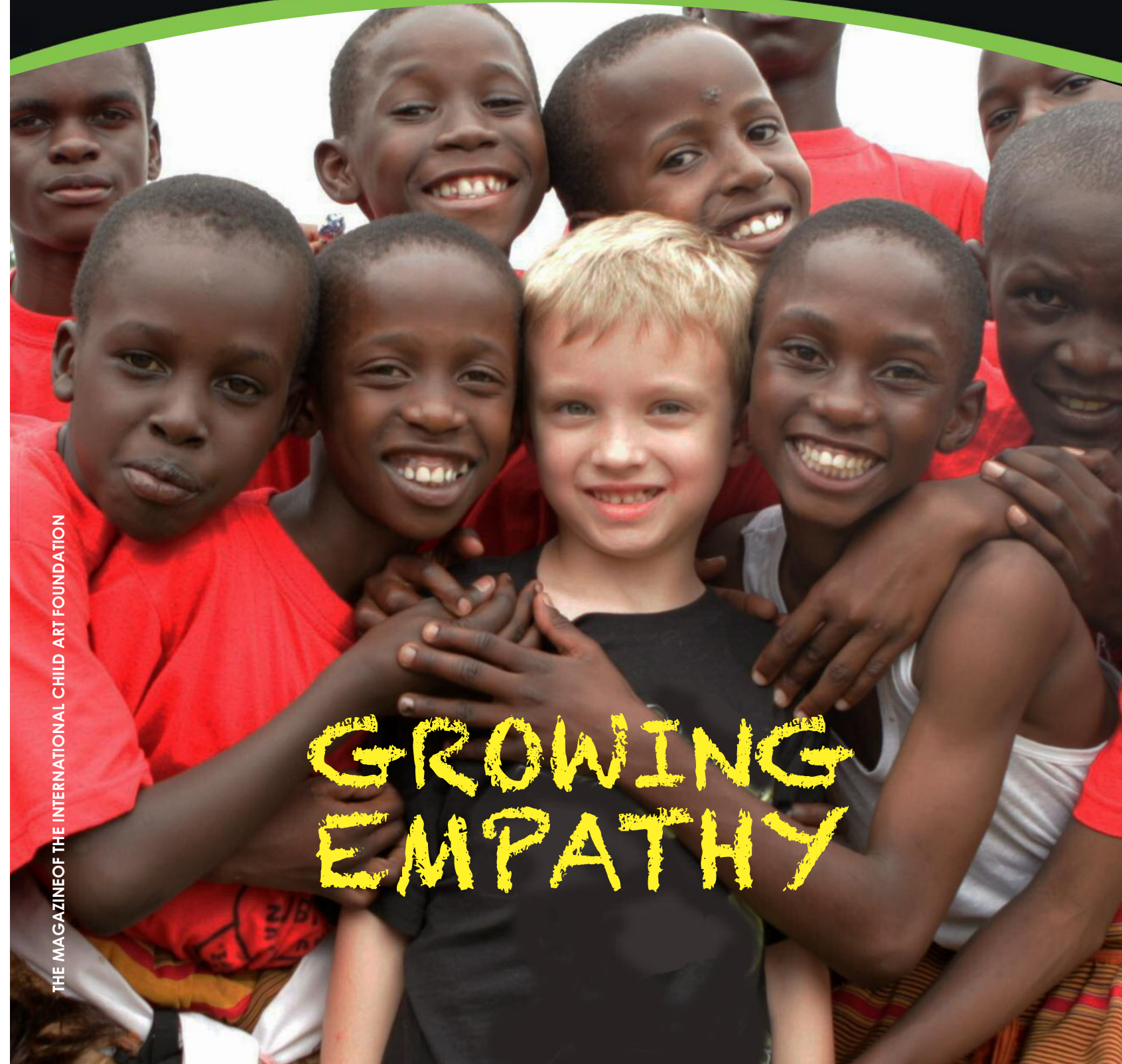


APRIL - JUNE 2019

ChildArt



THE MAGAZINE OF THE INTERNATIONAL CHILD ART FOUNDATION

GROWING
EMPATHY

Dear Reader,

This issue of ChildArt is path-breaking for two reasons. First, its focus is empathy—mother of all emotions which influences our perspectives and actions. Some never feel empathy or find the need for it, but the world cannot improve without it. We are most grateful to the experts who took the time to contribute to this issue to make you realize the importance of growing your own empathy.

The second reason is that this is the very last issue of ChildArt quarterly.

Publishing this ad-free magazine since 1998 has been a labor of love. It is no longer feasible to persist against an environment that does not induce private foundations to lend support to worthy publications for young readers.

We are grateful to you and all ChildArt subscribers, some who have stayed with us for many years. We are sorry that this quarterly for a brighter future is now a thing of the past.

Happy reading and best wishes.



Growing Empathy

Volume 19, Issue 2, Number 58

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Cover: World Children's Festival Photo

Back cover: Artwork of Amal Al Hajj, age 11, Yemen

The International Child Art Foundation dedicates this final issue of ChildArt quarterly to Dr. Emile Bruneau and his battle against a brain tumor.

GROWING EMPATHY

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How does the World Children's Festival develop empathy?

by Dr. Ashfaq Ishaq

As ICAF founder and chair, Dr. Ishaq organizes the Arts Olympiad in schools across the US and around the world. He has produced the World Children's Festival every four years since 1999 to honor the Arts Olympiad winners. Held at the National Mall in Washington, D.C., the World Children's Festival is a celebration of "Creativity, Diversity, and Unity."

Do you know that what makes us human, our creativity and empathy, are key attributes of successful learners and leaders? Creativity can be learned and developed without assistance, but empathy requires a teacher and an enabling environment. Learning and embracing empathy is not simple or easy. This is because we are all born into tribes, and the nature of our heritage is sacrosanct and inviolable. Our traditions lend meaning to

our life, animate our creativity, and mark our destiny. Without our native shell and its familiar trappings, we feel rootless and naked, at risk of becoming adrift in a rapidly evolving, eternally revolving, and evermore complex and confusing world. For reasons that include avoiding conflict with loved ones, we stay in our native abode, in harmony with the tribe. We defer to the tribe's dotty opinions and false narratives about out-groups in a deliberate act of loyalty and solidarity, but also because we do not entertain the perspectives of outsiders whom we are instructed never to trust. When conflict arises with an opposing tribe, we proclaim that history and morality are on our side; and to preserve stability and unity, any compromise is considered treason. In this primitive order, our past stalks the present and scares the future away.

To reduce the intergenerational transmission of prejudice and hatred in our world, the ICAF identifies the world's most creative children—its leading child

artists—through the school-based Arts Olympiad and brings them together at the World Children's Festival (WCF) in Washington, D.C. to imbue their creativity with empathy. The parents and teachers who accompany the Arts Olympiad winners, along with crowds of visitors and attendees—since the three-day celebration is free and open to the public—add a level of diversity and complexity to the WCF.

The seeds of creativity and empathy are planted in schools with the Arts Olympiad. In a typical classroom, students self-segregate into groups they often label as jocks, nerds, techies, or artists. Through structured lesson plans, the Arts Olympiad introduces students to the "Artist-Athlete Ideal" of a creative mind in a healthy body. This new identity awakens the dormant "inner artist" in young athletes and the "inner athlete" in young artists, academics, and intellectuals. The idea is to liberate children's natural tendency toward creativity and good health by linking imagination with embodiment. The program works because it targets students aged 8 to 12—a cohort most vulnerable to the well-documented "fourth grade slump in children's creativity" and to the obesity epidemic. Students' self-images solidify and the class becomes a more integrated community when they depict themselves as "artist-athletes" as part of the Arts Olympiad school art contest.

Developing empathy in kids from different cultural, ethnic, social, religious, or national backgrounds is more problematic than growing mutual empathy in students living in the same neighborhood or attending the

same school. Though learning is a biological activity that causes neurons to create new connections, learning empathy requires unlearning inherited bigotry and prejudice. A tribe's cadets must be separated from its emissaries, even if for a single day before the WCF. The children congregate in one conference room while their parents and teachers convene in another. In both rooms, everyone must walk up to the microphone and introduce themselves, with interpreters assisting where needed. Art therapy follows to alleviate anxieties and ease tensions. Activities for children are specially designed to help them form a tribe of their own—a united tribe of the world's children. Our presentations to parents and teachers explain why creativity and empathy are necessary to advance, or even save, a civilization.

The WCF is curated as an intervention to turn delegates into creative empathists. Workshops and activities are based on STEAMS education to integrate STEM disciplines with the arts to foster imagination, and sports to develop teamwork. This engages the entire body, not just the intellect. Since the brain filters all new information and discards that which challenges ingrained beliefs, encoding empathy requires circumventing the nativist ramparts to activate mirror neurons. Once a brain is convinced that the WCF is enhancing its executive functions and creative potential, it can fully commit to opening up and joining in.

Gaining children's confidence is essential to this process. When kids enter the festival grounds, they are astonished that other kids their age or only slightly older are running the

show. They meet the ICAF Youth Board Members acting as emcees and are amazed to learn that they too could be selected to join the Board and emcee the next WCF. They feel awe to see that all performances on the WCF's "World Stage" are conducted by children, and that some kids are hosting activities while workshops are led by prominent experts. They realize the WCF is truly a children's festival where they are the celebrities and in complete control. This consciousness boosts their confidence and self-esteem—smiles break out and ramparts crumble.

The WCF educational programming begins with "Health & Environment Day" with workshops and activities focused on the children's concerns, and these shared interests develop a sense of community and purpose. Next is the "Creativity & Imagination Day" with workshops and activities about children's own potential and future prospects, so they can come to understand their creativity and learn how to enhance their potential for a successful future. The third and final day is "Peace & Leadership Day," which imparts leadership training and inspires them to become change-makers.

Each WCF has prepared a cadre of creative-empaths, inspired and ready to bring about positive social change in their respective communities. They garner support from each other because they have shared the WCF's transformative experience, and can stay connected with each other virtually throughout their lives. Such a grassroots movement, never possible before, promises a more prosperous and peaceful world. ■





“Creativity can be learned and developed without assistance, but empathy requires a teacher.”

Though learning is a biological activity that causes neurons to create new connections, learning empathy requires unlearning inherited bigotry and prejudice. //



“We live in a culture that discourages empathy. A culture that too often tells us our principal goal in life is to be rich, thin, young, famous, safe, and entertained. A culture where those in power too often encourage these selfish impulses.”

—Northwestern University 2006 commencement address
by then-Senator Barack Obama



July 2020
WASHINGTON D.C.

“Someone always gets hurt when masses of individuals do what is only in their own self-interest. Freedom is liberty coupled with responsibility to something bigger or higher than the self. It is a selfless freedom. It is sacrificial freedom. It is the pursuit of our dreams with an eye towards the common good.”

— Heritage Foundation speech in 2005 by then-Senator Rick Santorum



Amal al Hajj, age 11, Yemen

The mission of the International Child Art Foundation to democratize creativity and grow empathy universally is worthy of your involvement and support.

To donate online, please visit ICAF.org
To mail your tax-deductible contribution, please send your check to:
ICAF, Post Office Box 58133, Washington, D.C. 20037





To Receive the Full Magazine

- a) Please make a donation of at least \$10.00 to ICAF at www.icafe.org
- b) Email ChildArt@ICAF.org the payment information
- c) You will receive the special issue on “Growing Empathy” by return email.

Any 8 to 12-year-old you know can participate free this year in the *6th Arts Olympiad* www.ICAF.org/ArtsOlympiad

You can join the children at their *6th World Children’s Festival*, a three-day celebration of “Creativity, Diversity, and Unity” to be held in July 2020 at The National Mall in D.C.