MASTER ARTISTS PAST AND FUTURE:
UNDERSTANDING CREATIVITY TO DEVELOP THE NEW GENERATION

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ABSTRACT

Artists have historically been catalysts for major social change in America and therefore have an important place and purpose in society. By defining and understanding creativity, communities can promote creativity in young children, potentially producing future Master Artists. Literature contends that creativity in children is based not only on biological factors, including genetic predisposition and I.Q., but also sociocultural factors and a child’s environment. Exploration of the environmental factors scientifically linked to burgeoning creativity will prove to be rooted in pedagogies practiced by Family (parents, siblings, homestead atmosphere, ethnic culture), Community (local culture, peers, creative opportunity, neighbors), and Education (creative teachers, mentors, Master Artists, and college). These factors in the childhoods of Master Artists are prevalent and give example to the implementation of the practices. The Master Artists the thesis considers, trailblazers in their respective fields before they turned 30, all had common experiences that fostered their creativity and propelled them to master status. This thesis proposes ways in which local communities can develop creativity in today’s young creative minds and promote their maturation into Master Artists of the 21st Century. Examining the lives of current budding Master Artists will reveal that no matter the
economic level and trials in the family environment, potential Master Artists need not much more than support from their communities, which ultimately nourishes exemplary levels of creativity and passion. This thesis will show that the same environmental factors that promoted creativity in the Master Artists of yesteryear are present in the childhoods of today’s creative children. Local communities should be empowered to recognize these factors and encourage their development or see the absence of these factors in young artists’ lives and introduce them. This thesis emphasizes the impact creativity has on society and why it should be developed in today’s children.
DEDICATION

To Chantelle. For you, I live, love, and laugh.
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Professor Michael Collins - Thank you for bringing the arts into your classroom, and thus fostering my own creativity. Your mentorship is not taken lightly.

Krystal Elaine Knight and Elizabeth Reynolds – Readers of this thesis are perusing my words, but mostly your edits. There are not enough thank yous for the hours you gave.

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Daddy, Mom, Daddy, and Graddaddy – Thank you. I love you.
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INTRODUCTION

Try to spell the word Earth without art. Really. Try. Impossible, right? Earth without art is Eh. Yes, eh, the interjection commonly used to denote confusion and need for clarity. Our earth, our world, our universal home would be eh absent the presence of art. Art evokes feeling, provides relief from pain, gives us an outlet for expression, and unites cultures. For thousands of years, inhabitants of earth have been using literature, music, dance, visual art, film, and the like to communicate to each other. Hindu women offering erotic pleasure to men will tap into the practice of Kama Sutra and perform a seductive dance. West African griots use song for storytelling, passing on tradition, political commentary and gossip. Art, sometimes personal and full of emotion, is truly ingrained in the human experience.

Every man, woman, and child on this earth has a connection to the tradition of the arts. Whether it is a man who loves jazz music, a woman who reads poetry in her leisure, a young teen who has a new fascination with hip-hop dance; no person is unreachable through at least one art discipline. This fact makes art one of the most powerful forces in the world. When it effectively used, one can tap into the hearts and minds of families, cities and nations. Once an artist has gained the attention of the masses, he is able to communicate ideas and influence thought beyond measure.

While some art instantly garners the world’s attention, and may have high entertainment value (think 1995’s international music and dance hit “Macarena” by Los del Rio), certainly many artists around the world utilize their art to invoke social change. Graphic designer and street artist Shepard Fairey has spent over 20 years creating street
art stickers that simply state “Obey,” paired with images of world leaders and activists to make sociopolitical statements. In the 2003 showcase This is Your GOD, Fairey stickered the message “obedience is the most valuable currency” and challenged the public to notice the ways in which their spending speaks to where and whom they choose to give power.¹

Figure 1: Shepard Fairey, Obey Dollars sticker campaign


Gordon Parks spent his life as a photographer capturing stills that forced Americans to see aspects of society they would otherwise shut out. His first photographic essay in Life magazine was an examination of the life of Harlem gang members, specifically following young teen Red Jackson, leader of the Nomads. One photo

captures a poignant moment of Red and friend Herbie looking upon the casket of a fellow
gang member who was slain in a gunfight. (Figure 2) The photos shed light on the real
life struggles for young, black gang members in Harlem and changed not only the
perceptions many people had towards those young men, but also the young men’s
perceptions of themselves. Red ultimately moved to New Jersey to get out of the gang
life, and Herbie joined the armed forces.²

Figure 2: 1948, Red Jackson & Herbie Levy look at gang member Maurice Gaines


² Gordon Parks, “Welcome To Life,” in To Smile in Autumn: A Memoir, 1st University of
Minnesota Press ed. (Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2009), 33-44.
The influence of the arts reaches so far, that at some point an artist’s effect on society reaches beyond their actual discipline. The choices the artist makes as a person in society, and not necessarily through their medium, are noticed by their followers and beyond. In 1957, trumpeter Louis Armstrong was scheduled to perform a government-sponsored trip to the Soviet Union. Soon after his scheduling, nine black children in Little Rock, Arkansas, were met by an angry mob while attempting to enroll into Central High School following the Brown vs Board of Education ruling on May 17th of that same year. As of September 14th, President Eisenhower had not taken any steps to ensure their admittance. While giving an interview in North Dakota to Larry Lubenow of the Grand Folk Herald, Armstrong called President Eisenhower “two-faced” and a man who had “no guts” and was a “no-good motherfucker”. Armstrong continued, “The way they are treating my people in the South, the government can go to hell.” He even went on to play/sing an impromptu parody of The Star-Spangled Banner that included the lyrics: Oh, say can you motherfucking see / By the motherfucking dawn’s early light. Lubenow confirmed with Armstrong the next day that he had permission to print the story, including the statements against the president. Armstrong instructed for no word to be excluded from his statements and that he meant what he said. The story was printed in the Associated Press hours later. Eisenhower soon after declared the Little Rock Nine must be admitted to Central High. While Armstrong’s statements alone most likely did not

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force the President’s hand, it most certainly was a voice in the chorus from which the President felt unrelenting pressure.

Through these three examples (and thousands more that would take innumerable hours to recount), we can see that the influence of the arts, as well as the artist, go far beyond what can be controlled. The emotions evoked by a particular piece can touch the hearts of countless people, the creativity of the artist paired with his political views can produce unforgettable images that mold the minds of many, and simply the life choices and spoken beliefs of an artist can make a powerful statement to those around him. All of these evoke social, economic, political, and cultural change that may not have otherwise been possible.

But where do these artists come from? We’re not talking about your local poet who only performs at a cafe on the weekends, or those who dance salsa with friends on Thursday nights, or even a stage actress performing consistently in New York City. While those people certainly do have communal value, for the purposes of this essay, it’s not enough. This research looks past the everyday artists and is instead in pursuit of the artists who have touched the world—the artists who turn our *Eh* into *Earth*. The Louis Armstrongs, the Shepard Fairleys, the Josephine Bakers, the Frida Kahlos, and the Eve Enslers. Artists who, through the arts, have touched generations and cultures beyond their own.

What do these world-shaking Master Artists have in common? Some are women, some are gay, some are visual artists, some are African American, and some are now dead. Despite individual differences, all have been able to reach international audiences
through one thing – creativity. Creative expression through dance, literature, paintings, music, and the like has given these Master Artists a power that only a select few in the history of the world can claim. Through their voices, their pens, their bodies, they tell the stories of those who can’t tell it themselves and fight against oppressive forces in ways that cannot be ignored. The impact and influence of the Master Artist are only limited by their own creativity and their willingness to share that creativity with others.

Today’s society is no less packed with controversy and contention than the generations preceding it. In the United States of America alone, the current 24-hour news cycle feeds citizens stories of homelessness in major cities, Capitol Hill’s inability to display true bipartisanship, mass shootings in elementary schools, obesity at an all-time high, the ever-evolving technological revolution, two wars fought over the course of ten years, the fight for gay marriage rights on the federal level, abortion laws causing constant moral debate, the battle to decriminalize marijuana, and our obsession with the lives of celebrities who serve as our escape from the struggles of every day. Some controversies are old, some are new, and some controversies are old but being argued in a new way. For every issue there is a Master Artist who fights for or against it, usually for the sake of “The People”. Cornel West calls the artwork of painter Horace Pippin “high-quality craftsmanship of art objects that disclose the humanity of people whose plight points to flaws in American society.”

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But Horace Pippin is now deceased. And so is Louis Armstrong. And Gordon Parks. And Josephine Baker, Frida Kahlo, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Lena Horne, Kayo Hatta, and Fritz Scholder. As the Master Artists of our decade continue to age and pass on, who will replace them? Master Artists aren’t “growing on trees.” The aforementioned are invaluable: they are well-trained, disciplined, passionate, perceptive, and most of all, creative people. Master Artists were introduced to their creative fields, learned their fields, mastered their fields, challenged their fields, and reconstructed art to the point of redefinition. Arguably, Master Artists are some of the greatest creative minds to have walked this earth. As such, they intrigue us. As the ones who are primarily impacted by their existence, we crave knowledge of who they are personally, where they came from, and what journey brought them to this place of epic relevancy.

Somewhere in the U.S. a 4-year-old little girl will become a future Master Artist. An artist will emerge from her life experiences, her parents, her education, her inner passion and drive, and she will move forward to change the world through her creative expression. But, how? How will she get there? And who will guide her? And what exactly will her community do to urge her forward in her creative growth? Truly it takes a village to raise a child, so it must take a whole city to raise a Master Artist!

The America of 2013 is a society still recovering from The Great Recession of 2007-2009. Parents still struggle to pay mortgages and put food on the table, let alone buy artistic supplies. The federal government has named 1 in almost 7 households "food
insecure. The federal government continues to cut monies to The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), which provides funding to arts programs across the country--cutting done mostly in the name of shrinking the deficit. In April 2010, U.S. Department of Education Secretary Arne Duncan said:

\begin{quote}
In America, we do not reserve arts education for privileged students or the elite. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds, students who are English language learners, and students with disabilities often do not get the enrichment experiences of affluent students anywhere except at school. “President Obama recalls that when he was a child ‘you always had an art teacher and a music teacher. Even in the poorest school districts everyone had access to music and other arts.” Today, sadly, that is no longer the case.
\end{quote}

The U.S. Department of Education Secretary’s admission of the unavailability of arts education should bring us the ultimate level of discomfort. With the U.S. constantly focusing on being at the lead of technological advancements and scientific discoveries, the push for education in math and science precedes any desire for education in the arts. President Obama has launched the “Educate to Innovate” campaign in an effort raise math & science achievement in US schools over the next 10 years. Meanwhile, the NEA reports findings that suggest declines in access to arts education across the nation. The average elementary school student in Chicago, for instance, received less than 45 minutes

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of art or music a week. Washington state schools experienced a 40 percent reduction in time allocated for music instruction between 2005 and 2009. Instruction time for the visual arts in Washington schools, the next most commonly provided art form after music, was reduced by 42 percent in the same period.8

In order to continually replenish our supply of Master Artists, our creative, social justice advocates, we must understand the places from which they themselves are created. We must identify the environmental factors in their formative years– resources, experiences, and people–that brought them to their positions of distinction today. We must understand the financial and societal obstacles they confronted and overcome. And, even more important, we must understand creativity. It is nearly impossible to purposefully foster creativity in a child if one does not understand what creativity actually is. Acknowledging that some aspects of a person’s creative success are strictly internal and reliant on their motivations and genetic inclinations is not a reason to assume that Master Artists create themselves. The communities of parents, neighbors, friends, and teachers have to play a role in the formation of the Master Artist, and this thesis will examine processes through which they can do so. The intention is to begin to create a guide map for our contribution to eARTh.

8 National Endowment for the Arts, Arts Education in America: What the Declines Mean for Arts Participation, 58
PART I.
THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CREATIVITY

Creativity is more than just being different. Anybody can plan weird; that’s easy. What’s hard is to be as simple as Bach. Making the simple, awesomely simple, that’s creativity

—Charles Mingus
CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS CREATIVITY?

Why does the artist create? How do their creative ideas come to be? Is an artist even aware of the origin of his creative thoughts? How does the artist’s surrounding environment affect his work? Data suggest that there are strong relationships between artists’ life experiences and the themes that they present continuously in their work. Some artists can identify specific moments in their lives that marked the beginning of their interest in the arts.\(^1\) The assumption that an artist must possess extraordinary creative genius solely in childhood is misguided. In fact, many studies have shown that precocious childhood behavior and extraordinary talent are not necessary for future creative accomplishments in adulthood. World-renowned painter Jean-Michel Basquiat alludes to his own lackluster childhood performance:

I was a really lousy artist as a kid. Too abstract expressionist; or I’d draw a big ram’s head, really messy. I’d never win painting contests. I remember losing to a guy who did a perfect Spiderman . . . . I really wanted to be the best artist in the class, but my work had a really ugly edge to it . . . . There was a lot of ugly stuff going on at the time in my family.\(^2\)

On a surface level, we know that art truly is expression of the lived experience, “the flow of human experience, feeling, and thinking in concrete, embodied forms.” Making art provides artists with the opportunity to shape their identities, fashion their

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ideologies, and completely immerse themselves in their creative media. But psychology looks to define creativity more thoroughly than that. What is creativity? How do we characterize something so subjective and intangible? Significant advances in the psychological study of the creative process are fairly recent in comparison to other areas of psychology, starting mostly in the early 20th century by Graham Wallas, who was inspired by 19th century philosopher Henri Poincaré. The intricate relationship between the artist and their process of expression has brought out many theories of creativity, ranging from psychoanalytical to computational to Darwinian to various personality studies approaches. These theories have been featured in various scholarly journals, including *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity and the Arts* and *Creativity Research Journal*.

Despite all the research, the study of creativity is complex. Every piece of research only generates a theory – a supposition or a system of ideas intended to explain something, especially one based on general principles independent of the thing to be explained. In layman’s terms: everyone is making his or her best guess regarding the development of creativity. Some guesses are better than others, and some are more popular, but in general, creativity remains a complex discussion due to varied research.

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5 Ibid., 1034-1035.

approaches.\(^7\) In fact, while dozens of researchers discuss creativity, few attempt to define it. In 2004, researchers Plucker, Beghetto, and Dow read through 90 separate articles from their fellow researchers, all with the word “creativity” in the title. Out of the 90 articles, only 38 percent explicitly define it.\(^8\) Gruber and Davis argue “creativity can only be understood with the assumption that each person is unique . . . and by examining commonalities we lose the richness and complexity of the information gathered.”\(^9\) With that theory, the thesis is over before it begins. The only thing worse than a hodge-podge definition of creativity is no definition at all.

Constructing the most useful definition requires establishing the differences and commonalities from the most respected theories on creativity. The primary obstacle in defining creativity is considering the terms in which the definition lies: the creative process, the creative person, or the creative product. There is a long history of debate about where the definition resides in regards to these three areas.\(^10\) Contemporaries most often use creativity in terms of the product: creativity is the measure of the person and the effectiveness of his or her process. Under this definition, creativity is most commonly

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seen as “an outcome, focusing on the production of new and useful ideas concerning products, services, processes and procedures.”\textsuperscript{11}

Many philosophers and psychologists place the definition of creativity in the natural world. Plato thought it to be the activity of the gods, and Immanuel Kant put creativity in the domain of genius, stating “no genius can explain the origin/process of his ideas.”\textsuperscript{12} Jerome Bruner claimed that creativity required “effective surprise.” A.J. Cropley assumed that all things creative need to be “worthwhile and reflect some compelling property.” George Frederick Kneller felt all creative products must have relevancy.\textsuperscript{13} Through the studies of J.P. Guilford, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Dean Keith Simonton, Robert Sternberg, and Todd I. Lubart, slowly a consensus begins to appear. The common thread is “a concept of creativity as multi-dimensional and adaptive in nature.”\textsuperscript{14} Ultimately, the simple descriptors of \emph{original} and \emph{valuable} arise as the common terms to which most theorists can agree.

Originality holds an absolute connection to creativity, for if something is not \emph{novel, unusual, unexpected} or \emph{unique}, it is then banal, commonplace, humdrum, normal, or routine. Certainly the word is analogous to any concept of creativity. But originality

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{11} Christina E. Shalley and Lucy L. Gilson, “What Leaders Need to Know: A Review of Social and Contextual Factors That Can Foster or Hinder Creativity,” \textit{Leadership Quarterly} 15, no. 1 (2004): 34.
  \item \textsuperscript{12} Gaut, “The Philosophy of Creativity,” 1038.
\end{itemize}
alone is not sufficient.\textsuperscript{15} Kant argues that there exists “original nonsense.”\textsuperscript{16} Therein lies the need for value, which is necessary to remove from the dialogue any worthless originality masquerading as creative.\textsuperscript{17} If a product is original, as well as effective, useful, adaptive, fit, and appropriate, it can be upheld as a representation of true creativity.\textsuperscript{18}

As with all things not absolute, there are criticisms concerning the widely accepted originality and value definition of creativity. Robert B. McLaren argues negative value, citing torture and terrorism. Torture is infamously original in ideas and valuable to the terrorizer. David Novitz argues that these cases are not genuinely creative, but rather ingeniously destructive. Theorists like Rudolf Arnheim challenge the definition by applying it to nature. “Tectonic movements of the earth’s crust have the capacity to produce diamonds, which are valuable, and some are original (in the sense of being saliently different from other diamonds).” Does this make a tectonic plate a creative being? A related question is that of accidental creativity. A chimp given various oil colors and a paintbrush paints on canvas until the trainer deems it aesthetically pleasing. The painting is both original and valuable (assuming a person finds it worth buying), but the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} Runco and Jaeger, “The Standard Definition of Creativity,” 92-93.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Gaut, “The Philosophy of Creativity,” 1039.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Ding-Bang Luh and Chia-Chen Lu, “From Cognitive Style to Creativity Achievement: The Mediating Role of Passion,” Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts 6, no. 3 (2012): 282.
\end{itemize}
chimp had no real understanding of creative process. Criticisms such as these make it important to also further refine the definition of creativity, specifying that creative product must also have: relevant purpose (not accidental), a degree of understanding (no mindless mechanical procedure), a degree of judgment, and evaluative ability towards the task. Berys Gaut defines all of these stipulations to equal flair. Proposing that simple word, he suggests, removes most controversial elements.

Even with a seemingly clear and defined definition of creativity, the related semantics and cultural specifications must also be addressed. Focus on newness or complete originality is mostly a Western archetype, perfectly aligned with the New America and the ideals of “old is appreciated but new is better.” By contrast, Eastern societies’ ideals focus on “interdependence, collectivity, cooperation, and authoritarianism. For this reason a more internationally relevant way of describing creativity would consist of honoring existing knowledge, rules, standards, and tradition. This awareness is best formulated by Csikszentmihalyi, as stated by Elisabeth Rudowicz:

Creativity is a process resulting from an interaction among three main forces: the culture, which stores and transmits the selected ideas, values and beliefs to the next generations; the social system, which selects which behaviors, values and information (a new meme) are worth preserving; the individual, who brings about some transformation to the social and cultural domain . . . creativity is a product of an interaction of individual, social system and culture.

19 Gaut, “The Philosophy of Creativity,” 1040.

20 Ibid., 1041.


22 Ibid., 274.
Acknowledging the relationship between the culture, the social system, and the artist gives global relevancy to an extremely complicated and subjective construct. Every culture will have different notions on what creativity means to its society and in turn will support creativity in different ways. Arnold M. Ludwig explains that the creative socio-cultural environment not only influences the who, what, where, when and why of the creative product, but even establishes the how: how it is to function within the society and the consequences of it doing so. This thesis will look at artists who, while ethnically diverse, operate in an American socio-economical system, and thus the context in which their creative process and product came to be is shaped by American culture.

Semantically, creativity is often considered synonymous with imagination and innovation. But theorists argue these three have distinct differences. Kant sees the connection between creativity and imagination to be “frustratingly elusive.” He describes imagination as the presence of creative thought, even when the product is not present. He distinguishes between reproductive imagination (memory images) and productive imagination, which is voluntary and a catalyst for creativity. This distinction shows that not all imaginings are creative; rather, imagination is a vehicle for creative explorations. Innovation is exclusive to creativity, but creativity is not exclusive to innovation. Creativity involves production of “novel and useful products, processes, or services.” This definition can live in an individual or global reality. Innovation, on the other hand,

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23 Rudowicz, “Creativity and Culture: A Two Way Interaction,” 274.

implies implementation of creative ideas on a grand scale within a social structure or organization. Creativity is vital for innovation to begin.\textsuperscript{25}

After the term has been defined, critiqued, amended, put into cultural context, and differentiated from synonymous terms, the mysterious fog engulfing creativity is beginning to clear. What remains lies in the categorical distinctions of the creativity model. Much like the definition, categories of creativity vary greatly depending on the theorist. Margaret Boden introduces a variant of creativity that distinguishes H-creativity from P-creativity. H-creativity is historical, in the sense that no person has ever presented a specific creative product before. P-creativity is psychological, in the sense that the new creative product is a new idea to that particular person, but the creative product itself not entirely new, as it has been thought of by others in the past. Boden also argues that by using computational ideas, we can distinguish 3 kinds of creativity: combinational (unfamiliar combination of familiar ideas), exploratory (exploring conceptual space), and transformational (transforming conceptual space.).\textsuperscript{26}

Kerrie L. Unsworth breaks down creativity in relation to its connection with problem definition. According to Unsworth, another example of creativity’s intricate relationship with the society where it exists is that creativity is often spurred when the creative person wishes to confront external issues. Unsworth separates creativity into four parts: responsive creativity, in which a person solves a problem defined by other people

\textsuperscript{25} Shalley and Gilson, “What Leaders Need to Know: A Review of Social and Contextual Factors That Can Foster or Hinder Creativity,” 34.

\textsuperscript{26} Gaut, “The Philosophy of Creativity,” 1038.
expected creativity, in which a person solves a self discovered problem to satisfy other people’s demands; contributory creativity, in which a person is self-motivated, but the problem is defined externally; and proactive creativity, in which a person solves self-defined problems for his or her own personal satisfaction.  

One of the most important categorical distinctions of creativity for the purposes of this thesis is the Big-C/little-c construct. Little-c creativity involves novel approaches to problems that are interesting and useful, but makes no major impact on its corresponding field of study. Everyday innovation comes from little-c creativity and usually involves the participation of non-experts or laymen. A single mother who is able to efficiently run a household despite minimal resources exhibits a high level of little-c creativity. Her ability to survive in spite of the odds and beyond expectation proves novelty, and feeding her children and paying for the home they live in is unmistakably useful. Her ability to be original and valuable is certainly impactful to her family, but she is not necessarily making a major impact on American poverty or the unfortunate epidemic of working

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single mothers. This distinction recognizes every person’s potential to be creative in regard to every day problem solving.\(^{30}\)

Big-C creativity is equated to major contributions to a particular field. Big-C creative people are able to take on a paradigm, master that paradigm, completely deconstruct it, and redefine the paradigm in a way that is unmatched and revolutionary. Here is where we find our Master Artists, persons who have so drastically influenced a field that their creative product now exists within the foundation of how that field operates and is defined. Pulitzer and Nobel Peace Prize winners, persons whose major works are the basis for classroom textbooks, Kennedy Center Honorees, Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award winners; these are the type of persons who would be categorized as Big-C creative minds. Csikszentmihalyi’s Systems Model of Creativity theorizes the Big-C model, defining it as existing due to the relationship between the domain (ie: dance, music), the field (persons who regulate the field), and the person (creator of the object to be accepted by the field and incorporated into the domain).\(^{31}\)

A theory worth noting is that of Simonton, who was compelled to build upon the Big-C/little-c model by adding a third “c” – Boldface-C. Simonton argues that a Big-C creativity can be applied to any product/person that is creative enough to be published, patented, highly cited, or become mainstream, but aren’t particularly outstanding. Boldface-C creators are what Simonton calls “highly eminent individuals” who can be


\(^{31}\) Kaufman and Beghetto, “Beyond Big and Little: The Four C Model of Creativity,” 2.
more properly described as creative geniuses, having created masterwork beyond comparison to any before them. In Simonton’s view, Big-C creators are recognizable, but Boldface-C creators are often regarded as the “Founders” or “Godfathers” of their fields. Simonton’s theory is certainly compelling, but not one that will be a focus of this thesis. Many of the Master Artists studied in this thesis would be considered by Simonton as Boldface-C creators, but so as to avoid confusion between those who are Big versus Bold, we will consider them highly eminent individuals who exist on this high end of the formerly mentioned Big-C model.

Persons operating under this Big-C model’s level of creativity are so totally immersed in their respective fields that they are able to discover aspects of those fields that have yet to be uncovered. Little-c creators are so far removed from this level of discovery and accomplishment that any creativity on their part seems insignificant in the grand scheme of societal influence. But what about those who lie in the middle of the spectrum? Persons whose creativity is absolutely not everyday, but also can’t quite claim mastery? These creative minds will be referred to as Budding Master Artists. These artists are talented, and their creativity surpasses that of the average person, but their immersion in their field has not yet developed enough to the point where they can transform it. Also seemingly unmentioned in the Big-C/little-c model are the learners: children and teens that are newly exposed to a field and are naively constructing creative


33 Russ and Fiorelli, “Developmental Approaches to Creativity,” 234.
thoughts in response to concepts never seen before. These children are nowhere near Big-C, but also aren’t quite operating little-c characteristics either. How do we explain their creative explorations?

Kaufman and Beghetto recognized these omissions and decided to add to the Big-C/little-C model by growing it to four C’s that would more clearly define the levels of creative magnitude. They believe that creativity is better conceptualized with the Four C’s of Creativity model consisting of mini-c, little-c, Pro-C, and Big-C.

**Figure 3: The Complete Four C Model.**

Source: Kaufman and Beghetto, “Beyond Big and Little: The Four C Model of Creativity,” 7.
Figure 3 thoroughly highlights the relationship of the Four C’s and also highlights their transitional periods. Kaufman and Beghetto see the Four C Model as “representing a developmental trajectory of creativity in a person’s life.” While there is no guarantee that a mini-c will eventually become a Big-C, the possible pathway is clear and provides a framework for the creative journey of the Master Artist. With enough exposure, interest, and formal training a mini-c can very reasonably develop into a Pro-C, possibly even bypassing the little-c phase. The Pro-C phase successfully establishes the existence of the Budding Master Artist, to whom greatness is only an arms reach away. Big-C stands as the pinnacle of accomplishment on the creative scale; at this stage, the Master Artist is a legend in his or her field and exemplifies greatness.

Creativity is evidenced by product that is both original and valuable, created by a creative person through their unique creative process. While its definition is subjective culturally, within the American socio-economic system we can identify key characteristics that legitimize the product, as well as distinguish it from imagination and innovation. Through the Four C model, we can adequately identify the journey of the Master Artist from their youthful formative years to their eventual prodigiousness, separating them as preeminent, and not simply everyday innovators (little-c) or even abnormally creative (Pro-C) Budding Master Artists.

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34 Kaufman and Beghetto, “Beyond Big and Little: The Four C Model of Creativity,” 1-2.
CHAPTER 2

NATURE OR NURTURE?

The human mind is one of the most fascinating and historically complicated areas of research that can be explored. Studies continuously prove and disprove those that came before them. For every question that is answered, ten more questions arise. In the last chapter, studies and theories introduced represented innumerable years of work from scientists, philosophers, and psychologists around the world simply trying to define Creativity. Finding a definition seems to be the easy part once the challenge of uncovering where creativity comes from is presented. The first step to understanding creativity is being able to articulate what it actually is. After that task has been accomplished, it becomes even more important to discover where it comes from and what factors take it to its optimal level. In order to cultivate the Master Artists of the future, it is vital to identify what or who fostered such a phenomenally high level of creativity in the Master Artists of the past.

For some researchers, the answer is quite simple – high levels of creativity are biological and people are simply genetically inclined to excel. A study on twins by Niels G. Waller in 1993 showed 22 percent of the variance in creativity is due to genes. Psychologist Martin Reuter strongly believes that genes influencing neural transmission may be the key unlocking the secret to creativity.¹

Intellectual abilities are usually regarded a relevant factor for creativity, but not sufficient enough to explain high achievement. Kyung Hee Kim identified three

¹ Russ and Fiorelli, “Developmental Approaches to Creativity,” 240.
intellectual skills deemed particularly important to creativity: the synthetic ability to see problems in new ways outside of conventional thinking, the analytic ability to assess ideas worth pursuing versus those that aren’t, and the practical contextual ability to persuade others on the value of an idea. Conceptions of intelligence and wisdom certainly overlap with creativity, but as a whole their differences are widespread and one does not constitute the other. Creativity focuses less on the ability to analyze, and rather more on aesthetic taste, imagination, and intuitiveness.

Unlike biological and intellectual factors, personality’s influence on creativity has been widely identified as crucial to a person’s creative ability and process. The unique set of behaviors, feelings, thoughts, and motives that construct one’s personality are what distinguish us from one another and truly make us unique. Some psychologists argue that personality is consistent throughout our lives and determines how we interact with our environment and ourselves. Creativity involves not only ability, but also personality factors. Feist points out that personality places constraints on creativity. Although a person may have a high level of creativity, the inability to take a risk, to accept criticism, or the like, may cause that creativity to forever stay dormant. Research proves that personality can affect a person’s ability to realize his or her creative potential, that

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3 Rudowicz, “Creativity and Culture: A Two Way Interaction,” 278.

creative potential can in turn effect personality development, and that critical
developmental events can shape personality and in turn impact creativity maturation.\(^5\)

Personality involves everyday ways of feeling that are shaped by temperament
(which is biological and inherited) and character (traits acquired by environmental and
social interaction).\(^6\) Researchers have refined their collective focus to the genetic
influences on personality because of its extreme influence on creative achievement,
believing that highly creative people develop personality traits that are linked to genetic
dispositions.\(^7\) Feist’s Functional Model of the Creative Personality (Figure 4) illustrates
the concept that genetic elements influence brain characteristics, which in turn shape
personality and eventually effect creative thought and behavior.\(^8\)

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\(^5\) Rosa Aurora Chavez-Eakle, A. Jonathan Eakle, and Carlos Cruz-Fuentes, “The Multiple

\(^6\) Ibid., 76.

\(^7\) Feist, “The Function of Personality in Creativity: The Nature and Nurture of the Creative
Personality,” 116.

\(^8\) Ibid., 114-115.
Psychological theories similar to the Functional Model of the Creative Personality give way to beliefs that creative ability is also a direct result of mental disorders such as psychoticism and bipolar disorder. Hans J. Eysenck has extensive research and theory linking psychoticism and creativity, even stating that male and female artists had significantly higher psychoticism scores than their male and female non-artist counterparts. Arnold Ludwig studied more than 1,000 eminent persons in 18 different professions and claims to have discovered that artists were more likely to suffer from

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psychopathology than any other profession. Eysenck and Ludwig’s theories are extremely controversial and extensive research has found the opposite of their findings. In October 2012, Kevin Dutton published a book titled *The Wisdom of Psychopaths: What Saints, Spies, and Serial Killers Can Teach Us About Success* in which he puts “creative artists” on the list of careers with the “lowest rates of psychopathy”, and instead lists professions such as lawyers, journalists, and salespersons as those with the highest rates. The issue with mental health research in connection to creativity is the exclusion of other factors contributing to the creativity and the ratio of creative persons with mental health issues in comparison to just non-creatives with the same issues. John Gowan describes the level of creative product to be a result of mental health combined with natural ability combined with stimulation. If creative ability were directly connected to mental health, people could strive to be depressed in order to amplify their creativity, but that attempt may prove futile. Some historic artists have been known to be mentally ill, but their creativity may not have been dependent on their illness, but rather amplified by it.

While psychopathology might not be necessary for high levels of creative achievement, intrinsic motivation—or *passion*—is a trait most creative researchers agree

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10 Gaut, “The Philosophy of Creativity,” 1036.


to be invaluable to creative product. Intrinsic motivation is seen as conducive to creativity and plays a high role in the creative process. “It is not enough to have unusually high levels of skill or a deep conceptual understanding.” Passion lives within the creative person and gives them a strong inclination to invest large amounts of time and energy into the corresponding activity. It motivates and provides meaning to tasks and life in general. This passion will also allow creativity to evolve into a habit, moving it out of something that is done at extraordinary times; instead, approaching all of life’s challenges with creative response.

Theories for high levels of creativity use biology, intellect, mental health, personality, and passion. But there still remains one factor that can coexist with them all, and is the only factor over which we have control: environment. Near the forefront of all theories regarding the influencers on creativity lies the quandary of nature versus nurture. Two children with equal innate ability in a specific creative field are raised in two completely different socio-economic systems, with differing parenting styles and educational pedagogies. Will one child’s creativity develop stronger due to her environmental influences? Are there factors that can be extremely detrimental to her creative abilities despite any attempts to foster it?

Trait and environmental theories about creativity have long been debated and often fall under three categories: creativity stemming from personality and genetic

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predispositions, creativity as a result of the environment (especially parenting), and creativity that eventually comes with age and various stages of life. Michael J. A. Howe argues that innate ability is not necessary for extraordinary levels of creative achievement and that “with sufficient energy and dedication on the parents' part, it is possible that it may not be all that difficult to produce a child prodigy.” This is supported by people such as Anne Roe who found that the capacity for endurance, concentration, and commitment to hard work was much more important than innate and intellectual abilities. Through this lens high achievement is more a function of tenacity than talent.

In contrast, Fernand Gobet and Guillermo Campitelli studied chess masters in 2007 and assessed the amount of hours it required to obtain grandmaster level. Some players were able to progress much faster with less practice, and they attributed that to an innate ability to creatively attack the game and master its nuances. Their research also showed that for some players, applying huge amounts of chess time still never led to gaining grandmaster skill level. Gobet and Campitelli used this to show that “hard work is simply not sufficient to make someone a chess master. What is true of chess is bound to be true of all kinds of great achievers, whether in the arts, [or] the sciences.”

The impact of environmental factors on creativity is highly complex yet significant. Intrapersonal factors (internal motivation, cognitive style, knowledge)

15 Gowan, Development of the Creative Individual, 9.


17 Ibid., 301.
undeniably shape a person’s creative potential, but intrapersonal factors (family, society, opportunity) can facilitate creative achievement beyond measure. Creativity can be encouraged and/or discouraged by environment based on the opportunities to engage in it, encouragement when the creative person opens themselves to the opportunity, and responses to the creative person when they think or behave creatively. As early as 1954, Carl Rogers specified conditions for creativity and the importance of creating an environment that encourages it by providing psychological safety and freedom, high internal motivation, and absence of external evaluation to allow creativity to flourish.

The above theories suggest the possibility of creating appropriate conditions for enhancing creativity. Sternberg’s Investment Theory proposes that creativity requires an assemblage of six distinct, but interconnected, resources: intellectual abilities, knowledge, styles of thinking, personality, motivation, and environment. Sternberg believes that creativity is not just one thing, but instead involves a system of things and how they work together, including the presence of environment influence. Identifying the environmental factors is crucial for parents, teachers, and community members who are invested in constructing circumstances that will best encourage creativity development for children and teens.

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In the context of stage actors, Jill Nemiro suggests eight social influences that serve to enhance creativity: collaboration with other artists, unity with audience, clear direction from the teacher, trust between artist and teacher, freedom for the artist to develop their own interpretation, lack of evaluation pressure, respect and recognition from others of one’s own talent, and challenge from the teacher that dares the creative person to think outside the boundaries.\textsuperscript{22} Specific to children, data has shown that environments that foster a child’s autonomy and self-confidence will in turn foster above average creativity. Csikszentmihalyi and Rahtunde found that home environments consisting of support and optimal challenge were essential to creative development. Families of teenagers that showed high levels of creative functioning consistently contained evidence of clarity of expectations, interest in what the child was doing, offering choices, commitment, and providing challenges.\textsuperscript{23}

Constructing the optimal environment for creativity can be purposeful, but can also be the result of life experiences and family dynamics that no reasonable person would predict and/or purposefully incite. A 1997 study set out to identify the “relations among influential factors in artists’ lives, the process of creativity, and themes in the resulting artwork by interviewing artists of varied backgrounds.” A common theme in the lives of each artist was that of living a double life. One artist’s work regularly reflected their troubles growing up biracial. Another artist expressed the hardship of knowing from

\textsuperscript{22} Nemiro, “Interpretive Artists: A Qualitative Exploration of the Creative Process of Actors,” 234.

\textsuperscript{23} Russ and Fiorelli, “Developmental Approaches to Creativity,” 233.
a young age that he was homosexual but needing to pretend to live a heterosexual lifestyle. A third artist mentioned he was a top student who lived a daytime academia persona, but at night was living with bikers and drinking alcohol in excess. And finally, a woman artist was confronted at a young age with sexism, as she was denied access to a drawing class that was only open to boys. Interestingly, her work reflects her desire for masculinity and is often interpreted as being created by a man. Despite the artists’ hardships, living lives of duplicity, their creative product was affected in a positive way and brought dimensions of creative themes that may not have otherwise been present.\textsuperscript{24}

   Usual transitions of life and crisis events of life may provide essential conditions for development and artistic development using cognitive and affective coping skills. Young artists often play out their hardships in their creative work or during the creative process, with emotional control and/or emotional discharge. Highly creative artists do not see the creative product as an opportunity to “vent”, but as a vehicle for the artist to confront life’s adversities and conquer them. The creative process allows the artist freedom to lose inhibitions, increase awareness of their ability, and increase their confidence through examination of their own development and journey.\textsuperscript{25}

   Nature based influences on creative persons provide the foundation for developing exceptional artists, which can then be built upon with environmental factors. While the community does not have the ability to dictate or change nature influences

\textsuperscript{24} Jones, “Influential Factors in Artists’ Lives and Themes in Their Artwork,” 225.

\textsuperscript{25} Rostan, “In the Spirit of Howard E. Gruber’s Gift: Case Studies of Two Young Artists’ Evolving Systems,” 58.
(biology, intellect, mental health, personality), environmental factors provide the opportunity to instigate high levels of creativity. Specific approaches and techniques that can be used by parents, teachers and community members to foster extraordinary creativity in children will be discussed later in this thesis. The Nature versus Nurture feud is not to be a feud at all, but rather an acknowledgement that many factors are at hand when distinguishing the influences on a person’s ability to produce creative product. Both, brain functions and environment, are relevant, but only one can be utilized by external forces to shape a person’s creative potential. Nature is the footing, but Nurture is the tool.
CHAPTER 3
WHAT DOES A CREATIVE CHILD LOOK LIKE?

In an ideal world, we would believe that all children in the world have the potential to become a Master Artists. As the Four C’s of Creativity model asserts, whether introductory, everyday, proficient, or masterful, all persons are operating on at least one level of creativity. Sit in an elementary school playground or watch an episode of “Kids Say The Darndest Things,” and it becomes evident that children’s creativity allows them to think outside the box in ways many adults can no longer achieve. But similar to how some people are born with bodies that make them a basketball coaches dream, certainly there are some children who can innately produce creative product beyond the ability of their peers. These children have talent—an innate ability or proclivity to learn in a particular domain—that allows them a greater probability of reaching Master Artist level.¹

Looking to identify talent and above average creativity is not reliant on identifying children who strictly live within the paradigms of a particular field. As we saw in Chapter 1, Basquiat proves that some master artists are not so easily identified when they are children due to their chosen style being outside of the traditions. Innovative style can positively and significantly predict a student’s creative potential.² Graham Wallas theorized, “for a truly creative product to be produced in most fields, the

knowledge base of the field must be mastered before old ideas can be integrated in new ways.” In relation to children, this puts them at an extreme disadvantage, for their potential to master a field in their youth is improbable. Using again the case of Basquiat, a child may display an abnormal level of creativity and have ideas that will in the future revolutionize their field, but until they can articulate their choices and how it varies from the paradigm, they are not effectively presenting innovation. Nonetheless, identifying these Basquiat-like children, as well those who display exceptional creativity traditionally, will maximize efforts in fostering future Master Artists.

Scientifically, this task is not overly difficult. Dozens of tests have been created over the years (albeit, some more reputable than others) specifically for the measurement of creativity and related cognitive functions. The Kirton Adaption–Innovation Inventory, by Michael Kirton in 1976 for measuring cognitive style; Creative Achievement Questionnaire, by Shelley Carson in 2005 to measure creative product; Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking, by Ellis Paul Torrance in 1960 to predict creative potential; The Temperament and Character Inventory, by C. Robert Cloninger in 1994 to inventory personality traits which can help identify creative characteristics; The Consensual Assessment Technique by Teresa Amabile to allow access to the creativity of products. Once tests have been completed, findings are often placed in tables that quantify the

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5 Chavez-Eakle, Eakle, and Cruz-Fuentes, “The Multiple Relations between Creativity and Personality,” 78.
results using terms such as variable standard, means, standard deviations, alphas, correlations, adaptive, and adjusted. This process of evaluation may be an effective process for trained psychologist, sociologists, and scientists, but for the average American parent or teacher, these tests and tables are a foreign language. No mistaking that the aforementioned tests are respectable and sufficiently accurate. In fact, if a school psychologist has the time and means, it may be worth administering these tests during elementary school age and notifying parents and teachers of those with high scores. Unfortunately, creative evaluation is not currently a priority in American schools and most parents will not have access to, or will simply not know about, these tools of measurement; therefore, other ways of discerning creative potential must be found.

Susan Rostan uses case studies to identify ways a highly creative child develops, which would be observable by those who work closely with them. The four indicators are the child’s eagerness to learn, the degree to which their learning is self-directed, the flexibility with which the medium and problems are addressed, and their skills in evaluating their own work. Using these development patterns, it may quickly become clear whether a child’s creative potential is high.

Following the last chapter, and this chapter’s previously mentioned evaluation tests, it is clear that personality traits are a helpful indicator for innate creative ability. Sternberg theorizes that creative ability largely comes not from innate ability, but through

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7 Rostan, “In the Spirit of Howard E. Gruber’s Gift: Case Studies of Two Young Artists’ Evolving Systems,” 45-60.
one’s attitude towards life. Children who are highly creative will respond to problems in fresh and novel ways, not in typical fashion or begrudgingly accepting the situation without challenge. A 1996 study lead by Colin Martindale presented evidence suggesting that highly creative individuals have a tendency to be physiologically overactive to stimulation. Kazimierz Dąbrowski developed a theory focused on richness in feelings, thoughts, vivid imagination, and moral/emotional sensitivity. “An increase in the intensity, frequency, and duration of these experiences is what he called overexcitability—and overreaction to internal and external stimuli.” Emotional, sensual, intellectual, imaginative, and psychomotor overexcitability are found to be patterns of creative giftedness and potential.

Identified by Guilford in 1968, two cognitive processes are important to creativity: divergent thinking and transformation abilities. Children who are able to think in non-traditional directions that generate new ideas are divergent thinkers, and have strong potential to bring innovation to their field later in life. Children who are able to take tasks presented, reorganize the information, and revise the old into new patterns are transformational thinkers and tend to be the creative minds who redefine paradigms. Other cognitive processes that are important indicators of creativity (but not indicators standing alone) are sensitivity to problems, task persistence, wide range of interests,

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9 Chavez-Eakle, Eakle, and Cruz-Fuentes, “The Multiple Relations between Creativity and Personality,” 79.
evaluative ability, and use of pretend play (using fantasy, make-believe, and symbolism.)\textsuperscript{10}

Specific behaviors indicative of someone who is highly creative are outlined by Min Basadur:

They prefer to start new things, discover new problems to be solve . . . . have difficulty in explaining themselves because sometimes their ideas are still fuzzy . . . . They become bored with work which requires applying routine procedures . . . . perceived to be somewhat unfocussed or even disruptive, as their behavior reflects more of an orientation to introducing (generating) a new problem and less of an orientation to defining, understanding, constructing, or formulating an existing problem.\textsuperscript{11}

Basadur’s behavior specifications are undeniably indicative of not just an artist, but an artist who looks to break the norms of their field and transform it in a way that incorporates them into the definition of what that field is.

The concept of fostering masterful levels of creativity is useful only if we can create a picture of what the journey looks like from early stages of potential into eminence. Motivational qualities, cognitive traits, and personality characteristics are the concepts that help us characterize the creative being. Determining a child’s capacity to excel creatively is subjective, to say the least, but identifying probable characteristics will help filter characteristics that are antonymous. The objective is not to encourage creativity in all children, but to stimulate and develop it in the lives of children who are potentially society’s next Master Artist.

\textsuperscript{10} Russ and Fiorelli, “Developmental Approaches to Creativity,” 236-237.

\textsuperscript{11} Basadur and Basadur, “Where Are the Generators?” 30.
PART II.

CHILDHOOD OF A MASTER ARTIST:
A CASE STUDY

Every child is an artist; the problem is staying an artist when you grow up

—Pablo Picasso
The novelty and originality of a particular object allows us to measure its creativity and to label it creative product. But creative products are only the beautiful flowers on a very big tree. They are undeniably eye-catching and delectable, but are the final showcase of a slow-moving intricate process by a living organism that took in resources in order to produce. The tree that budded such divine flora absorbed water, soil, and sun day after day for months in order to give life to flowers. Whether the tree is destined to produce magnolias, lilacs, or dogwood, it begins as a sapling, and must receive a certain type of attention, exist in optimal climates, and survive certain obstacles in order to reach full potential.

The Master Artist, like the tree, evolves from curious child to remarkable artisan whose creative product attracts minds and attentions of all who come in contact with them. The exceptionally creative person conducts a polished creative process leading to remarkable creative product. The creative person’s ability to produce creative product that transcends norms and remolds the standards, helps to define them as a Master Artist.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the *Four C Model of Creativity* asserts that the Master Artist dwells within the world of Big-C. They bring greatness to an art form in a way that has never been presented before, making their processes and products a part of the definition of the field. Master Artists are creative legends, not to be denied.

American artists have long been earning the right to be seen as creative legends. These are persons whose lifespans have transformed their artistic fields in unexpected
and irreversible ways, as well as impacted their communities in ways that are felt generations beyond their own. Katherine Dunham exemplifies this persona, having championed the world of dance with her unique perspective. Born in Chicago, Illinois, in 1909, she founded and directed the first self-supporting African-American dance company in history. The Katherine Dunham Dance Company introduced African and Caribbean dance and culture to American audiences, leading to much critical and popular acclaim, including a Kennedy Center Awards honor in 1983.¹ The dance company, originated as Ballet Nègre in 1930, the first African-American ballet company, performed at grand scale events such as the Chicago World Fair in 1934.² Created by its namesake, The Dunham Technique “blended African-based movement with ballet and modern dance to liberate the knees and pelvis, fundamentally changing American dance.”³ Her dance school in New York City trained hundreds of growing artists who in turn shaped the course of American Theatre. As an educator, Dunham aimed to present dance instruction that worked as much to shape the individual as their technique.

Encouraging an active positive community life in economically depressed communities such as East Saint Louis, she promoted cultural awareness and social skills among children and teens. Her studies in anthropology gave her deep passion to not only work with people of all ethnicities, but also to change communities through cultural awareness.


³ Aschenbrenner, Katherine Dunham: Dancing a Life, 1.
Jazz musician Ellis Marsalis Jr. not only impacted his community through his own jazz music, but also fathered the highly revered Marsalis Family, known as “The First Family of Jazz.” Born 1934 in New Orleans, LA, Marsalis became a pianist, composer, and educator and was honored in 2011 by The National Endowment for the Arts with the Jazz Master Award, the highest honor the United States bestows upon jazz musicians. Marsalis is credited with influencing the lives of eminent musicians such as Harry Connick Jr., and traveling the world teaching jazz music from Chicago and North Carolina to Switzerland and Bangkok. He and his wife Delores reared six sons, three of whom became internationally recognized musicians. Marsalis’ creativity allowed him to not just gain acclaim for himself, but to also train some of the most notable jazz musicians of this century, including his own children. Later in his life, Marsalis used his knowledge and fame to make public stances regarding arts education and the media’s unfair crime reports negatively impacting the images of the New Orleans black community.

Not all Master Artists pursue excellence or strive to change communities, rather some seem to accomplish it by sudden chance. Oscar Hijuelos, born 1951, wrote his first novel Our House in the Last World, at the age of 31 years old and subsequently won the Rome Prize, earning him a chance to study at the American Academy in Rome. Within 7

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5 Ibid., 1.

6 Ibid., 9.
years he had won the 1990 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for writing his second novel *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love*. The National Review wrote that this particular book "forces the Hispanic immigrant experience close to the center of our cultural consciousness, where it very much deserves to be." Born in Manhattan after his parents migrated from Cuba, Hijuelos tells a story in his novels that bring the Hispanic experience into the mainstream American experience. Writers today often credit Hijuelos for opening the door of New York publishing for Hispanics.

Similar to Hijuelos is innovative cinematographer James Wong Howe. Born Wong Tung Jim in 1899 in the Kwantung province of China, Howe moved to American when he was five years old. He never aimed to make a statement for the Chinese community, but rather to break into a field that always intrigued him, photography. Nicknamed “Low Key Howe” for his skill in making low-contrast photography, he was quickly recognized for his ability to be original and inventive on Hollywood movie sets, using techniques like hand-held cameras long before they became the norm. Nominated for 10 Academy Awards, shooting over 130 films, Howe is widely considered to be one

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of the most innovative and influential cinematographers of all time. Howe helped to define “the look” for Hollywood.\(^\text{11}\) But even though he tried to keep his birth name private, the studios did not. In order to capitalize on the growing popularity of the hot new Chinese cinematographer, originally listed as the racially ambiguous “James Howe,” Howe’s name was changed in the credits to “James Wong Howe.”\(^\text{12}\) Suddenly the man who was forced to marry his Caucasian wife in Paris due to anti-miscegenation laws was definitively labeled as the Chinese cinematographer, making a cultural impact he didn’t intend and could never have imagined.

Designer, sculptor, and architect Maya Lin, born 1959, uses her reverence for nature, and human relationship with natural environment to design sculpture, earthwork, memorials and buildings. A graduate of Yale University, Lin shot instantly into the public eye when at only 21 years old she won a design competition for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, beating thousands of other submissions. There was much controversy regarding her design due to its simplicity and Lin’s ethnicity, with Vietnam veterans and future presidential candidate Ross Perot calling her derogatory names referring to her Chinese heritage.\(^\text{13}\) Ultimately the design was built and Lin moved on to works such as the Woman’s Table at Yale University, celebrating the history of women on campus, the Civil Rights Memorial in Montgomery, Alabama, remembering people


\(^{12}\) Ibid., 334.

who died during the Civil Rights movement, and Wave Field at the University of Michigan. Lin has expressed her interests in the psychological effects that architecture can have on people, and strives to make work that moves people and forces them to look at their relationship to the world around them, her most passionate subject being nature. 

Born in 1917, painter Jacob Lawrence is the artist of the internationally known “Migration Series” which he created when he was only 23 years old. The series consists of sixty 18-inch by 12-inch panels numbered and sequenced by scene, each accompanied by descriptive text. Lawrence tells the story of the Great Migration in which tens of thousands of blacks from the South relocated to the North to look for more promising economic opportunities and to escape racism. The visual narrative brought attention to a movement unknown to many Americans. Within months of its completion, the “Migration Series” was endorsed by critic Alain Locke, presented by show dealer Edith Halpert, published by Fortune magazine, bid on by The Museum of Modern Art and The Philips Memorial Collection, and embarked on a two-year national tour. Lawrence spent the rest of his career continually making prolific works that told the narratives of the African-American community. He listened to people’s stories and paid close attention to ensure his paintings spoke their voices to the viewers.

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16 Ibid., 14.
17 Ibid., 25.
community and history combined with his creative genius and refined talent allowed him the opportunity to speak for people in a way that they would not have been able to speak for themselves.

Lin, Dunham, Marsalis, Lawrence, Hijuelos, and Howe perfectly represent the impact, influence, and sheer vibrancy that a Big-C Master Artist brings not only to their artistic field, but also to their communities. The foundation of this ability, as discussed in Chapter 2, is a major catalyst in the nature versus nurture debate for the creative person. The Master Artists formerly mentioned most certainly had biological, personality, and habitual characteristics within themselves that gave them a predisposition to becoming a Master Artist. Katherine Dunham claims to vividly remember the circumstances of her birth, including the ride home from the hospital.18 If this is fact, then we can only imagine how much of a resource that memory proved to be when creating her own dance technique based on her training as a ballerina and her travels overseas. Ellis Marsalis Jr.’s father Ellis Sr. said that Marsalis “was always musically inclined and was very dutiful in what he wanted to do,”19 two traits that would be invaluable for the soon-to-be Father of “The First Family of Jazz.” This thesis does not deny the necessity of predisposition to creative habits nor the need for innate inclination to or curiosity about their artistic field by creative persons. These are factors that are undeniably present in many, if not all, creative legends and cannot be produced by environmental factors, only encouraged. But

18 Veve A. Clark and Sara E. Johnson, eds., Kaiso!: Writings by and About Katherine Dunham (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 27.

19 Handy, Jazz Man's Journey: a Biography of Ellis Louis Marsalis, Jr., 3.
like the tree, the creative person’s predisposition is not enough. The seed of a magnolia tree has all the inherent components that will allow it to grow tall and produce beautiful brightly colored magnolia flowers. But the seed cannot grow on its own gumption and desire; it must receive water, soil, and sun. Nourishment and optimal conditions are required to reach its potential for greatness. In the same way that the tree needs outside nutrients to achieve excellence, this thesis argues that the Master Artist is incapable of reaching Big-C levels of creativity alone. Environmental influences must bring the experiences that will nourish their inherent abilities and potential for monumental creative product.

The formative years of the Master Artists’ lives are not identical. They are all American, but their life experiences vary greatly and they all approach their artistic field with assorted motivations. Instead of identifying artists whose lives are carbon copies, the objective is to identify similarities in areas of their lives providing the most environmental influence. Through patterns in the research discussed in Chapter 2, those areas are determined to be: Family (parents, siblings, homestead atmosphere, ethnic culture), Community (city culture, peers, creative opportunity, neighbors), and Education (creative teachers, mentors, Master Artists, and college). Environmental influences in these three areas will allow us to identify similarities in experiences that assisted the development of creativity in the young people who would grow to become Master Artists.

Influences, while effective, may be accidental and/or and/or undesirable (i.e., circumstances surrounding the death of a parent.) Still the objective remains to identify the environmental influences, whether based in negative or positive life circumstances.
Identifying negative circumstances will not be motivation to duplicate them, but rather to examine the circumstances or emotions surrounding that experience to provide context for later discussion.

Influences to be mentioned will also be experiences had by persons who do not hold exceptionally high levels of creativity, despite being exposed to factors that will be argued to have encouraged Master Artists. Predisposition and personality qualities play an important role in how a person receives and reacts to external stimuli, separating the future Big-C creators from everyday little-c creators.
CHAPTER 5
ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCES: FAMILY, COMMUNITY, & EDUCATION

Family. Dynamics between family members and the atmosphere of the home are influential environments that children are most exposed to during their formative years, especially prior to schooling. Everyday interactions with parents to sibling relationships to encouragement of creative habits all prove to be relevant to creative development. But all of our Master Artists family situations are unique in comparison to each other.

Oscar Hijuelos was the youngest of two boys, born to immigrant parents from Cuba who were considerably upper-class in Cuba but became what Hijuelos’ brother called “upper-class poor” during their life in Harlem in the 1930’s.¹ Maya Lin was also born to immigrant parents, but parents whom had built up their lives professionally, allowing Lin to spend her childhood in Athens, Ohio, in the 1960’s as middle class. Ellis Marsalis, Jr. grew up in New Orleans, Louisiana, on the top floor of a duplex in the 1930’s and 40’s with entrepreneurial parents who owned and operated a hotel called the Marsalis Mansion.² Jacob Lawrence was born the oldest child of married and soon-to-be separated parents who moved from place to place to survive. This resulted in Lawrence living in Atlantic City, NJ; Easton, PA; Philadelphia, PA; Harlem, New York and


² Handy, Jazz Man’s Journey: a Biography of Ellis Louis Marsalis, Jr., 2.
multiple foster homes all before the age of 14. Katherine Dunham was born multiracial; her mother was of Indian, French Canadian, English, and African ancestry and her father of Madagascan and West African ancestry. She spent her early years (1909-1913) in a suburb about 15 miles outside of Chicago, becoming devoted to her older brother of six years, Albert Dunham Jr. James Wong Howe is the only Master Artist not born in America, having moved to America when he was 5 years old, though he later received citizenship late in life after the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act.

Despite these differences, what patterns can be found in the home rearing of our Master Artists? Artistic parents? Dunham’s father and mother played musical instruments, and encouraged her to play the piano, although her love fell to dance. Lin’s family was packed with artists; her mother was a writer, her father was an artist and eventual Director of Fine Arts at Ohio University, and her brother became a poet. Lawrence’s mother was not formally an artist, but he attributes much of his creative

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3 Lawrence, Bunch, and Hutton Turner, Jacob Lawrence: The Migration Series, 13.


7 Joyce Aschenbrenner, Katherine Dunham: Dancing a Life, 13.

ability and knack for color to her efforts to create a beautiful home for the family in spite of economic realities.

We lived in a deep depression. Not only my mother, but the poor people in general. In order to add something to their lives, they decorated their tenements and their homes in all of these colors. I’ve been asked, is anybody in my family artistically inclined. I’ve always felt ashamed of my response and I always said no, not realizing that my artistic sensibility came from this ambiance. I did have influence, but I didn’t realize it was taking place. It’s only in retrospect that I realized that I was surrounded by art.\(^9\)

But for those artists whose parents were not creative creators, encouragement to explore their interests proved just as influential. A primary school age Marsalis became enthralled with the clarinet, and subsequently his mother went to the largest music store in town and purchased one for him. Soon after, she enrolled him into a school of music as a way to keeping her child cultured, not necessarily looking to produce a Master Artist son.\(^10\) English was a second language for Hijuelos. He was encouraged by his parents to speak English and as a family they would learn English together.\(^11\) It is here that his love for the language took root for him to become a writer. For all the artists, this support gave them an opportunity to develop creative interest and explore their craft, but also opened the door to self-confidence that allowed the young creators to explore their interests further.


\(^10\) Handy, *Jazz Man's Journey: a Biography of Ellis Louis Marsalis, Jr.*, 4-5.

siblings were also influential for creative development, at times just as much as parents. Lin describes her older brother as a motivator for her achievement, saying she “always tried to impress the older sibling. What does the older sibling do? Always try to humiliate the younger sibling. We had a very healthy sibling rivalry and fought a lot, and are best friends.” 12 At 12 years old Howe purchased a Kodak Brownie camera, having taken up an interest in photography. His father was superstitious about having pictures taken and opposed it, but Howe’s brothers and sisters joyfully supported him by agreeing to be his subjects in photography. The first photos developed had each child’s head cut off, as the camera lacked a viewfinder, but this was the beginning of Howe’s love of photography. 13

Sadly, four of the six artists did not have both parents in the home. Howe, 14 Dunham, 15 and Hijuelos 16 each had a parent die before their teenage years. Lawrence’s father was alive but separated from the family. 17 Marsalis’ parents were both active in his

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15 Aschenbrenner, Katherine Dunham: Dancing a Life, 7.


life, but his mother battled cancer for many years and eventually passed away when Marsalis was in his 30’s.\textsuperscript{18} The sudden passing of Hijuelos’ father brought emotions that inspired much of his writings, and was intimately discussed in his memoir \textit{Thoughts Without Cigarettes: A Memoir}.\textsuperscript{19} The death of Howe’s father prompted his move to Los Angeles, where he would get his first job working in a cameraroom.\textsuperscript{20} As the Depression grew worse, Lawrence’s mother lost her job. As the man of the household, Lawrence was called upon to support his family financially, resulting in him dropping out of school. His interest in art was peaking at this point, and dropping out of school allowed him more time to focus on painting and truly make it his passion.\textsuperscript{21}

Familial experiences relating to ethnicity strongly affect the young person’s understanding of who they are and help define the roads they choose to take in their creative process. Dunham came from a multi-racial background, and often heard prejudices expressed by her “nearly white” family towards her father’s mostly African family. This left deep scars on young Dunham and created the foundation for her interest in anthropology, which would lead to her serving as a “cultural broker for her dancers,

\textsuperscript{18} Hand\textit{y}, \textit{Jazz Man’s Journey: a Biography of Ellis Louis Marsalis}, Jr., 3.


\textsuperscript{21} Foxley Leach, \textit{I See You, I See Myself: The Young Life of Jacob Lawrence}, 35.
students, and people of different cultures.”²² Hijuelos’ relationship with being Cuban is one of push-and-pull. Raised in Harlem by parents who were beginner-level English speaking Cuban immigrants, his parents encouraged his assimilation into the American culture. Hijuelos moreover does not look “stereotypically Cuban” and has strong issues with people not believing he is sufficiently Cuban.²³ Each of Hijuelos’ books reflect this desire to define Cuban identity despite his belief that he is unconventionally Cuban. He rejects his culture at times, and yet allows it to inspire his writing.

Parents, siblings, homestead atmosphere, and ethnic culture have first round access to the mind of a young creator and provide intimate experiences that inspire and nourish the future Master Artist. When exploring the lives of certain Master Artists, it is clear that many of their environmental circumstances—low socioeconomic status or encounters with racism—did not prevent them from fostering their creativity, and this thesis postulates that in some cases, these environmental circumstances may have promoted creativity, provided inspiration and enhanced burgeoning Master Artists’ interested in the creative arts.

Community. When children are not at home with their families, they are out actively participating in their communities. Speaking to neighbors, joining community activities, and interacting with fellow youth are all opportunities for the environment of the surrounding community to encourage creative development. In its simplest form, the

²² Aschenbrenner, Katherine Dunham: Dancing a Life, 7-8.

community itself can provide inspiration. Lin’s creative product lies heavily in the relationship between humans and environment, an interest she attributes to growing up in “very hilly, very rural, beautiful” Southeastern Ohio.\textsuperscript{24} As a result, much of her work became about appreciating nature and being respectful of its purity. Marsalis was born and raised in the city of New Orleans, an area credited to be the birthplace of jazz music that grew out of such places as Congo Square and Lincoln Park. Louis Armstrong, another creative master from New Orleans, had already begun to make his mark in the music world prior to Marsalis’ birth.\textsuperscript{25} Hijuelos turned West Harlem into his own personal playground, meeting the likes of LSP addicts, Puerto Rican musicians, and stumbling upon comic books, all of which would end up in his writing.\textsuperscript{26} Dunham’s curiosity to explore the city of Chicago led her to sneaking away when her Aunt Lulu was at work to watch vaudeville shows and the Broadway Revue.\textsuperscript{27} Lawrence always attributed his artwork to experiencing the city of Harlem and its barefoot prophets, shell-shocked World War I veterans, street-corner Garveyites, and soapbox Communists.


\textsuperscript{25} Handy, \textit{Jazz Man's Journey: a Biography of Ellis Louis Marsalis, Jr.}, 2.


\textsuperscript{27} Aschenbrenner, \textit{Katherine Dunham: Dancing a Life }, 12.
Communities like Harlem came to represent color, shape, movement, design and more that awakened Lawrence’s creative desires and helped him to explore his talents.²⁸

Peer influence was a major motivator for someone like Marsalis who credits neighborhood kids Jack Forte and Alexander Dunbar for intriguing him with their ability to play alto saxophone. Forte had a band uniform of which Marsalis became envious, and Dunbar attended the very impressive Xavier University Junior School of Music.²⁹ Hijuelos spent much of his teenage years attending jam sessions with friends who were black and Latino jazz musicians. He himself began to play the guitar in bars. The theme of music is continuous throughout all of his books.³⁰

There are examples of Master Artists who, once their interest in the arts was piqued, an availability of opportunities to nourish their creativity and acknowledgment of their creative achievements was vital to their development as creatives. At 15 years old, Dunham’s African Methodist Episcopal church supported her proposal to host a “cabaret party” which would double as a fundraiser for the church and a chance for her to practice a new free-style modern dance she learned at school. Dunham’s “Blue Moon Café” was a modest success in which she served as the producer, director, and lead performer. A church member encouraged the program by providing Dunham with corseted dresses

²⁸ Lawrence, Bunch, and Hutton Turner, Jacob Lawrence: the Migration Series, 41.
²⁹ Handy, Jazz Man's Journey: a Biography of Ellis Louis Marsalis, Jr., 2.
from her personal trunk.\textsuperscript{31} At age 15, Howe was encouraged to participate in and became very successful in a career in boxing,\textsuperscript{32} which has been argued to have positive effects on creative development.\textsuperscript{33} Lawrence was a strong participant in creativity enriching community programs at such places as Utopia Children’s House, a community day-care program where classes for introduction to arts principles were offered. It is here that he would meet his eventual mentor Charles Alston, would start to explore museums such as the Museum of Modern Art, and become acquainted with Arthur Schomburg’s Negro Society for Historic Research that promoted numerous exhibitions of contemporary art by African Americans.\textsuperscript{34} Schomburg’s Collection was a library that became the research hub to Lawrence’s artwork, providing information that would help him create narrative cycles of Toussaint L’Ouverture, Fredrick Douglass, and Harriett Tubman.\textsuperscript{35}

Family environmental influences provide foundational creative stimulation, but community interactions nourish the creative mind in a particular way. The relationship between the young artist and his other immediate culture adds vibrancy to their creative understanding, while observing and interacting with peers motivates desire to delve into creative fields. Creative opportunity and encouragement from community members and

\textsuperscript{31} Aschenbrenner, \textit{Katherine Dunham: Dancing a Life}, 13.
\textsuperscript{32} Chang, Johnson, and Karlstrom, eds., \textit{Asian American Art, 1850-1970}, 333.
\textsuperscript{33} Dr. Milton CPsychol, “From Hogwarts to the Boxing Ring: Courage, Creativity and Psychological Well-Being” (lecture, Mercure Leicester City Hotel, Leicester, England, July 14, 2012).
\textsuperscript{34} Peter T. Nesbett, Michelle Dubois, and Patricia Hills, eds., \textit{Over the Line: the Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence} (Seattle, WA: Univ of Washington Press, 2001), 70.
\textsuperscript{35} Lawrence, Bunch, and Hutton Turner, \textit{Jacob Lawrence: the Migration Series}, 38.
neighbors supports creative exploration and promotes further possibilities for creative product.

Education. The creative learner’s educational environment can quickly squelch or ignite the fire growing inside of the future Master Artist. Early exposure to creative teaching allows the formative years to be spent in creative exploration as opposed to rigid limitations. Lawrence recalls at a young age expressing interest in a book about African masks, and the teacher immediately allowing him the opportunity to make his own papier-mâché versions. “I didn’t even realize it was art at the time,” he says. “I just did it because it was fun.” Dunham was an excellent athlete but unexpectedly suffered from arthritis in the knees. Due to the availability of art in her school, she was able to join dance and it became her fundamental means for expression. Unconventional courses brought Marsalis fascinating study as he took an English literature class that covered the works of artists like Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, James Weldon Johnson, Claude McKay, and Paul Lawrence Dunbar. He fell in love with the class and it brought him closer to the stories that he would eventually tell through his music. Lin’s interest in earth, architecture, and chemistry was supported by her teacher Miss McCallan. Lin enjoyed making explosives and Miss McCallan enjoyed her curiosity, so often times they would stay after school to blow up various objects (an activity that would be illegal in most schools today, but in the 1970’s was encouraging for Lin’s creative explorations.)

36 Foxley Leach, I See You, I See Myself: The Young Life of Jacob Lawrence, 20.
37 Aschenbrenner, Katherine Dunham: Dancing a Life, 13.
38 Handy, Jazz Man's Journey: a Biography of Ellis Louis Marsalis, Jr., 6.
Inspired by those who did it best, Hijuelos was energized by reading the works of nationally known artists, such as novelist Henry Roth who chronicled experiences of Jewish immigrants and short story writer Donald Barthelme.\(^{39}\) Howe looked up to camera masters such as Billy Bitzer, Charles Rosher, Johnny Seitz, and Arthur Miller.\(^{40}\) But from whom did they receive their one-on-one training? Almost all the Master Artists (except Maya Lin) mentioned a trained artist and mentor that guided them technically in the pursuit of learning their artistic craft, refining their creative process, and ultimately putting them on track towards Big-C levels of creativity. Dunham studied ballet with Vera Mirova, Mark Turbyfill, Ruth Page, and most closely Ludmilla Speranzeva.\(^{41}\) Marsalis received his first jazz lesson from Harold Battiste, who was then a senior at Xavier University but would eventually make a name for himself in the music industry. Battiste gave Marsalis his first formal jazz lesson, teaching him a C7 chord during a jam session in the band room. Marsalis would eventually move on to study piano privately with Geneva Handy Rhone.\(^{42}\) Hijuelos signed up for writing classes at City College of New York in a program that had prominent writers on faculty such as Joseph Heller, Donald Barthelme, Susan Sontag, William Burroughs, and Francine du Plessix Gray. Barthelme would eventually become his mentor and the driving force behind his creative

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\(^{41}\) Clark and Johnson, *Kaiso!: Writings by and About Katherine Dunham*, xvii.

maturation. Howe began his career as a cameraman working in the camera room, wiping off cameras and picking up scrap paper from the floor. After 6 months he earned his place as Alvin Wyckoff’s assistant, learning invaluable information and getting his first shot at hands-on experience. Lawrence’s mentor Charles Alston encouraged him “to see and express the geometric structures and patterns present in everyday life.” This teaching is undeniably present in all of Lawrence’s works including the *Migration Series*.

Relationships with these mentors and working artists also exposed the young creators to Master Artists of their time. Being constantly connected to Charles Alston afforded Lawrence the opportunity to regularly interact and build relationships with such creative legends as Alain Locke, Addison Bates, Langston Hughes, Ralph Ellison, Orson Wells, Claude McKay, and Romare Bearden. The impact that meeting and conversing with such creative minds would have on a creatively evolving young artist is invaluable. Howe’s assistantship to Wyckoff would eventually lead him to catching the attention of legendary film director Cecil B. DeMille and silent film actress Mary Miles Minter.

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Relationships with these two would afford him countless opportunities and connections, and eventually cause his career to skyrocket.

One valuable aspect of the presence of creative mentors is their effective ability to encourage creative progression and achievement. Marsalis’ private study with Jean Coston Maloney brought a breakthrough lesson in which she instructed him to “stop, hold your hands in the correct position, sit up at the piano, and start again” while he was playing a jazz piece. It was here that Marsalis connected the proper classical techniques of playing the instrument with playing jazz music.48 With the help of Charles Alston exposing him to various outlets, Lawrence had exhibited professionally 4 times by the time he was 20 years old.49 Dunham consulted mentor Ludmilla Speranzeva about opening her own school for black dancers. Speranzeva advised her to forgo ballet, and not only open her own dance company, but also to focus on modern dance and develop her own style. Subsequently, she developed the Dunham Technique, which earned her international recognition and is taught all over the world.50

Five of the six Master Artists received higher-level education in their artistic field. Maya Lin, Yale University, Bachelor of Arts and Master of Architecture; Oscar Hijuelos, City College of New York, Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts in Creative Writing; Katherine Dunham, Joliet Junior College and University of Chicago, Bachelor of Arts


49 Nesbett, Dubois, and Hills, eds., *Over the Line: the Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence*, 25.

and Master of Arts in Anthropology; Jacob Lawrence, American Artists School; Ellis Marsalis Jr., Bachelor of Arts in Music Education. Certainly there are Master Artists in history that never received a college degree, but the pattern is worth noting. They consistently received experiences in college that not only enhanced their creativity, but also allowed them the ability to master their artistic field in order to later shift the paradigms of that field.

During their time at university, future Master Artists began to make connections between their academic study and their creative explorations. Lin went to college originally as pre-med with goals to become a zoologist. Art is what she did everyday, but it had never occurred to her it would be a career. Realizing that zoology would not work, she discovered that architecture was the perfect combination of her loves of art and science.\footnote{Maya Lin Interview: Seeing the World Differently,” Academy of Art, http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/lin0int-1 (accessed February 18, 2013).} Dunham had a similar experience, realizing that she did not wish to be an anthropologist, but still loved the study of cultures. “I will not give up anthropology. Two of them come together in my own thoughts about form and function and dance anthropology. Meeting of arts and science. Very important to me.”\footnote{Katherine Dunham: National Visionary,” National Visionary Leadership Project, http://www.visionaryproject.org/dunhamkatherine/#2 (accessed February 18, 2013).}

College experience also allowed these developing Master Artists to expand their experiences through auxiliary programs. Hijuelos published his stories in the 1978 anthology\textit{ Best of Pushcart Press III}, which led to him receiving a series of small grants and giving him more free time to write. One scholarship gave him access to the
prestigious Breadloaf Writers Conference in Vermont. Dunham received a grant from the Julius Rosenwald Fund to study the dances of the West Indies, which would later serve as strong inspiration while creating her Dunham Technique.  

Whether it is through a teacher, mentor, Master Artist, or college experiences, educational influences serve as the training ground for a ripe and ready creative mind. Having been formed by their families, and encouraged by their communities, Master Artists receive definitive training from their academic experiences. The creative teacher provides the creative learner with an unconventional experience that allows their creative processes to evolve outside of constructs, while still learning the necessary tools to master their fields.

Through family, community, and education, we are able to shape the creative growth of future Master Artists. Each of these environmental structures holds strong influence over the formative years of a young creative mind, allowing them to either flourish or stalemate. Not every factor mentioned was present in the life of every Master Artist, but collectively these influences represent a snapshot of possible paths of development for an artistic creator. When family, community, educators and an embryonic creative mind meet, they collectively have the ability to make something great—a Big-C Master Artist.


PART III.

COMMUNITIES AND THE YOUNG ARTIST

There are two ways of being creative. One can sing and dance. Or one can create an environment in which singers and dancers flourish.

—Warren Bennis
CHAPTER 6

CONSTRUCTING IDEAL ENVIRONMENTS FOR FOSTERING CREATIVITY

American history contains the lives of hundreds of Master Artists. Once young children, they grew up to be adults that had world-renowned influences on various forms of artistry. They were born in places from the far Northwest to the Southeast. Some artists were born never knowing financial struggles, while some were forced to work jobs at young ages to help feed their families. They are men, women, transgender, homosexual, heterosexual, Baptist, Buddhist, Jewish, Atheist, African American, Chinese American, biracial, children of immigrants, college dropouts, and recipients of professional doctorate degrees. Despite their differences they all share one common thread—the ability to create historical creative masterpieces.

To guarantee the birth of new masterpieces, the American community must commit to providing environments where creativity and the Master Artist can flourish. Most children exude rambunctiousness and creative thoughts on a daily basis, but few contain the seed of a Master Artist, waiting to be bred for greatness. Creative habits can be supported and encouraged in a plethora of ways by those who knowingly (or unknowingly) come in contact with children showing potential for exemplary levels of creativity. Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi believes that inside each of us is a tendency to explore, be curious, and enjoy novelty and risk. But even this inherent desire will “wilt if it is not cultivated. If too few opportunities for curiosity are available, if too many obstacles are placed in the way of risk and exploration, the motivation to engage in
creative behavior is easily extinguished.”¹ There is no official formula for the proper way to nourish a highly creative child, but there are methods that have proven supportive or stifling to creative minds.

The familial space is most likely the first area children will express their interests in an artistic field, show signs of creative processes, and/or high level creative products (in relation to the norms of their age group.) Family members can quickly be the water or the gasoline to the creative fire burning inside of a curious child. It is vital that in these beginning stages, persons living within the same home as the child begin the nourishment process for their creative explorations. This support can begin simply with encouraging children to express themselves. By participating in verbal exchange and gaining comfort with the process, children will grow to access their feelings and integrate them into easily accessible memories that may be used during creative explorations.²

Several successful methods of support from parent to child that encourage creativity have been identified through psychological study: encouraging the child to explore numerous artistic fields to find the one they truly enjoy; providing an environment where the child feels comfortable to explore and express unconventional ideas; reinforcing and enjoying acts of everyday creativity; encouraging independence when overcoming tasks and challenges;³ allowing time for daydreaming and lounging;

¹ Richard Hickman, Why We Make Art: and Why It Is Taught, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Intellect Ltd, 2010), 119.

² Russ and Fiorelli, “Developmental Approaches to Creativity,” 245.

³ Ibid., 245.
encouraging curiosity and exploration;\textsuperscript{4} truthfully answering complicated questions presented by the child; and providing stimulating cultural, social, and motor experiences that will feed new and challenging facts to the child’s attention.\textsuperscript{5}

A study by Singer and Singer showed that parents of creative preschoolers showed more resourcefulness, were adventurous, used reasoning more than physical abuse, had reading time with the child, and provided a humorous atmosphere.\textsuperscript{6} It is important that the creative child’s explorations are supported from a young age and not belittled by persons closest to them. Even first failed attempts must be approached with sympathy and encouragement to try again. Not all moments of learning are moments for evaluation. “Creative response is stifled or blocked when evaluation occurs too quickly or too often.”\textsuperscript{7}

Child rearing that restricts internal freedom and insists on conformity severely hinders creative development.\textsuperscript{8} Children must be encouraged to explore inner impulses that will in turn support the critical development of their creative potential.\textsuperscript{9} The creative impulses of a child have the potential to evolve into a passion, which is vital to

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\textsuperscript{4} Russ and Fiorelli, “Developmental Approaches to Creativity,” 241.

\textsuperscript{5} Gowan, \textit{Development of the Creative Individual}, 74.

\textsuperscript{6} Russ and Fiorelli, “Developmental Approaches to Creativity,” 245.

\textsuperscript{7} Gowan, \textit{Development of the Creative Individual}, 78.

\textsuperscript{8} Rudowicz, “Creativity and Culture: A Two Way Interaction,” 283.

\textsuperscript{9} Chavez-Eakle, Eakle, and Cruz-Fuentes, “The Multiple Relations between Creativity and Personality,” 80.
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development of creativity and talent. Passion for the field and the joy of learning will prove valuable once the future Master Artist begins to be confronted with the challenges and negative realities of their field.\textsuperscript{10} Dancers quickly learn the demands that the field has on their bodies. Injuries, sore muscles, and a strict diet/workout regimen can be hard for the normal person to accept, but the dancers’ passion for their craft will force them to push through this physical demand.

Providing a home that fosters autonomy and self-confidence will ultimately foster creativity as well. Parents must find a way to provide support, but to also allow challenges. These optimal situations allow the child the comfort of taking on difficult creative explorations but, because of their passion for the field and confidence in the support of their family, they are not afraid to fail. When children having the confidence to move beyond comfort levels and into area yet to be explored, this represents the beginning of developing habits required to be a Master Artist.

Ultimately, a space that can provide time, material resources, and people with expertise will be the environment that not only successfully fosters the creativity of the young creative mind, but also increases their knowledge about a particular creative field and refines their talent. Educational institutions (whether it be grade school, post-secondary, or after school community programs) are most commonly the optimal place to access all three. But a major hurdle here is that creative development is not a high priority at most public education centers.

\textsuperscript{10} Russ and Fiorelli, “Developmental Approaches to Creativity,” 243.
While teachers overwhelmingly attest to valuing creativity and enjoying working with creative students, after further research that proves to be simply not true. Westby and Dawson’s study showed that for students whom teachers rated to have the highest levels of creativity, the same teacher indicated those students as their least favorite. While creative characteristics such as determination, individualism, and impulsiveness were valued, they didn’t fare as well in classroom settings as did the traits associated with lower levels of creativity like reliability, practicality, logical thinking, and steadiness. Students who rated highest as teacher favorites were conformists and unquestioning of norms, which is opposite to what is required for optimal creativity. “Teachers say they want creativity, but that is not the behavior that is rewarded.”  

Couple this issue with standardized testing which suppresses creativity and kills intrinsic motivation, the educational environment can be the beginning of the end for a young mind who has potential for Master Artist level creativity.

Developing creativity within educational environments requires the organization to focus on “how to provide creative and innovative practices that stimulate intelligence,” creating environments that are stimulating and supportive to learners’ enthusiasm, with teachers and mentors maintaining an openness towards creative behaviors and independent thinking. Creativity orientated pedagogy may not have priority over math and science in mainstream culture, but it can exist within the daily routine of the

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classroom when supported locally and by school systems. Fostering a generation of creative people can be done through the intersection of creative teaching, teaching for creativity, and creative learning. Creative teaching focuses on teacher practice, and implementing “imaginative, dynamic, and innovative approaches” which will in turn inspire children’s imagination. Here the objective is to find approaches that make learning more fun and enjoyable, allowing children to connect personally with the material. Teaching for creativity focuses on the learner and seeks “to be inventive in order to arouse curiosity and learning motivation.” In this portion mentors can identify creative abilities in individual children and provide opportunities for those abilities to be developed. Creative learning happens when “children learn by means such as questioning, inquiring, searching, manipulating, experimenting, and even aimless play.” Once again we see how vital it is for adults to provide children the space to explore and inquire.

Possibly one of the most common attempts to encourage creativity but has been revealed to be extremely counterproductive is the idea of reward. Products produced under no-reward conditions have proven to be more creative than those created under the reward condition. Excitement for the coming reward and/or anxiety regarding the evaluation process halts pure enjoyment of the task at hand and creative product is severely negatively affected. Those who participate in an activity not expecting a reward are better able to focus on the task at hand and have no pressures to prevent creative

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Intrinsic motivation is a major driving force during the creative process and “without high levels of intrinsic motivation, creative performance is highly unlikely.”\(^{15}\) Expectation of reward undermines internal desires to do the activity out of the pure joy of doing it. Eliminating task-contingent rewards from the learning space gives the young potential Master Artist freedom from burdened creative expressions and allows them to build a connection to their art that is not superficial. Maya Lin supports this idea by saying, “It’s much more about who you are and what you need to make, what you need to say for you. Whether someone’s going to look at it or not, you’re still going to do it.”\(^{16}\)

In communities, it is important that access to artistic opportunities is not solely in the school systems, but also melded into the framework of daily living. Communities such as these will provide access to hubs of creative expression ranging in all sizes and kinds, from museums and theaters, to concert venues and opera houses.\(^{17}\) It is here that young creative minds will gain appreciation for their art and begin processing where they want to go as artists. In these centers they will also have access to meeting potential mentors and crossing paths with current Master Artists. The Master Artists in Part II all had creative centers where they were able to bask in creativity outside of formal education institutions and their homes. As children and teens Jacob Lawrence regularly went to the Apollo Theater, Ellis Marsalis Jr. frequented Lincoln Park, Katherine


\(^{16}\) William T. Cartwright, Jr., \textit{Maya Lin: A Strong Clear Vision}, DVD, directed by Freida Lee Mock (Santa Monica, California: Sanders & Mock, 2003).

\(^{17}\) Hickman, \textit{Why We Make Art: and Why It Is Taught}, 45-46.
Dunham watched her uncle’s Off-Broadway show rehearsals, and Oscar Hijuelos had jam sessions in Harlem streets with his jazz musician friends.

Writer Paul Auster asked himself in *Burn This Book* why on earth anyone would become a writer, considering the loneliness and long nights alone with pen and paper. “The only answer I have ever been able to come up with is: because you have to, because you have no choice.”¹⁸ A Master Artist’s passion for their craft seems on the surface to be inborn and evolving since birth. And that is certainly true, but rearing choices made by their families, education pedagogies implemented by teachers and mentors, and centers of creative expression available in their communities are all factors that supported their intrinsic motivations to strive for creative excellence. These environmental influences inserted purpose into their passions, converting these young curious children into Master Artists in the making.

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CHAPTER 7

RECENTLY CONSTRUCTED: BUDDING MASTER ARTISTS

Through gaining a better understanding of what creativity actually is and analyzing the lives of Master Artists of the past, we have been able to thoroughly discuss and identify influential environmental factors on the lives of young children that activate their potential for creative excellence. These identifications allowed us to subsequently create a framework for how parents, teachers, mentors, and community members alike can approach the growth process of young creative children. But what do the children have to say? How do these young creative minds interpret their own experience and influences? Do they give credit to themselves or to their surroundings? And to what environmental influences do they give the most credit to their creative evolution?

Interviews with three young artists will give us insight into these questions. All three artists have presented creative product that proves them to be well on the road to becoming a Master Artist. They are in what the Complete Four C Model would define as the Pro-C stage, someone for whom “greatness is only an arms reach away.” All three artists are young but have ample creative accomplishments for their age to suggest that using enough hard work and productive experiences with their external resources, they will eventually reach the level of Big-C creativity. Developmental psychologist Howard Gardner states “it takes about a decade for people to master a domain and up to an additional decade for them to fashion work that is creative enough to alter that domain.”

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1 Hickman, *Why We Make Art: and Why It Is Taught*, 118.
**Writer** is a 27-year-old African American lesbian born and raised in Washington, D.C., who has no strict religious affiliations but believes in God. She has been featured in well-known literary magazines and online publications, has a feature role in an online series about gay life, and has performed in poetry tours taking her to cities such as Brooklyn, Chicago, Atlanta, Philadelphia, and Toronto. **Musician** is a 26-year-old African American straight male born and raised in Southeast D.C. and considers himself a Christian who is more spiritual than religious. He is a writer, arranger, composer, and musician who has been an Artist in Residence at the Strathmore in Bethesda, Maryland, was nominated for a Grammy, has given a TedTalk, and has received numerous awards recognizing his creative talents and impact on the community through arts. **Poet** is a 28-year-old Jewish straight male who also hails from Washington, D.C. He was recently a featured poet at the Limmud conference in London, England, as well as visiting artist at Lund University in Scania, Sweden, and the Keynote Speaker at a conference at University of Nebraska. He is the recipient of a grant from the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities, as well as several local and national poetry awards.

All three artists regularly perform in front of audiences ranging from intimate settings to venues of thousands. Interestingly, when asked whether they were introverted

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2 For the sake of anonymity due to the private nature of the information shared, all artists will be referred to by pseudo names.


or extroverted, all three artists described themselves as introverts. Gregory Feist found that “the personality of the creative artist suggests a person who is imaginative, open to new ideas, drives, neurotic, affectively labile, but for the most part, asocial, and at times even anti-social.” This is an important to note because parents, teachers, and mentors need not expect the most boisterous personality when identifying a creative child nor expect the child to approach them for creative inspiration. Many times the most creative persons are those whom expect no attention at all, let alone campaign for it.

Each artist was also able to identify areas in which they excel outside of their arts discipline, but chose not to follow that field due to their passion for their arts. Poet majored in Sociology in college and was the student commencement speaker at his graduation. Musician was originally a visual artist in high school and excelled at science. Writer excelled at math so much that during junior high she was bused to the local high school for math class, and by the time she reached high school she started at the highest-level math courses offered. Living within a government that focuses so heavily on encouraging students to excel and find careers in the math and sciences, each of these potential Master Artists could have been easily lost to that continuous initiative. Fortunately, their passion and their influences shifted them towards their artistic fields and developed their creativity there.

When discussing their childhoods, the artists mentioned varying circumstances in which they first came in contact with their art (music at home, reading poetry books, the eulogy after death of a cousin), but each gave virtually the same answer when asked if

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and how they were encouraged to be creative as children: “Yes,” followed by a list of persons, always mentioning their mother and father, and adding community members as well as mentors. Poet’s 6th grade teacher encouraged him to “express creatively” whether or not it fit within normal school standards and respected him as an individual, wanting to hear his voice. Musician stated “I had everyone pushing me. . . . It gave me a sense of purpose.” Each artist had a community of people not only encouraging, but providing examples, giving inspiration, and offering resources. As a result, by 15 years old Musician defined himself as an artist, Writer by 13, and Poet by 16.

Although they all were raised in Washington, D.C., the artists’ backgrounds vary greatly. Poet comes from an upper-middle class home to parents who are still married. Writer came from a middle class suburban background but was mostly raised by her mother while her father was in prison until she was 13. When she was 17, her mother died of complications from AIDS, and at 19 her father was murdered. Musician was raised in a lower class family that survived on welfare, his mother’s disability payments, child support from a mostly absent father, and Section 8 housing. Despite these differences, each artist is the middle child of three siblings, with brothers/sisters ranging two to four years older. When each artist was asked, “Did you feel safe growing up?” all gave affirmative answers, and said they had the freedom to explore their communities and creativity. This was supported by parents who had their own creative passions. Musician’s mother was a DJ and artist. Poet’s mother loved do-it-yourself projects and his father was a photographer in his free time. Writer’s parents were both into fashion, and her father was an avid reader. She described her home environment as “awesome and
supportive. . . . My mom has always been very honest with me. We have a very solid spiritual center.” Family history and economic status proved to have little significance for these artists as long as the persons in their lives made them feel safe and provided creative encouragement and example.

In regards to education, each artist graduated from high school and went on to study on the university level. All three artists were able to identify multiple mentors from as early as age 11 to the present day who went above and beyond to promote their creative success. When asked about teachers /mentors who positively affected their creativity, they mentioned various reasons why they were able to do that. Musician identifies teachers who weren’t “afraid to make tough decisions” in regards to holding him back for the 3rd grade, which he retrospectively identifies as crucial, and eventually “opening the window of curiosity.” Poet recognized the value in one teacher’s willingness to give creative control as extremely vital. Being on the student newspaper, he felt stifled but opened up once he was given license to write whatever he wanted. “To be encouraged to be free in that way was so important,” he said. Writer distinctly credits a teacher who put a non-classical novel, *Teacup Full of Roses*, into the class reading and says “that was the first time reading something that even looked like me.” Later two teachers exposed her to “dope poetry,” took her class to visit the college she would end up attending, and went with them to see Def Poetry Jam on Broadway. Each of the influential teachers seemed to live outside of convention and instead made decisions that were best for the child’s creative experience, allowing them to connect with the curriculum on a level of genuine interest.
Each artist was given a list of terms and asked which were vital for creativity. Of the fourteen terms, all 3 artists agreed that passion, imagination, and sense of self were vital. In the reverse, all three artists felt that genetic predisposition, tendency towards being overly emotional, and evaluation from others were not vital to creativity. Passion and sense of self are both traits mentioned in previous chapters that have been identified by psychologists as traits that have the ability to be encouraged. Knowing that young artists identify these to be vital to their own creative ability is important. Just as valuable is knowing that evaluation from others is collectively seen as not vital to creativity. While evaluation may be necessary for growth of talent, it is not preferred during growth of creativity.

“Why do you do it? Why do you do your art?” Musician responded “it’s just what I feel happy doing. It’s my contribution. Introducing people to different things. My whole mission is cultural acceptance and unification through music. . . . I just love it.” “Why do I write?” said Writer. “Because I’m not in control. I don't feel like I’m in control of my life. When I write, it’s because I’m being told to.” The artists are truly following the passions that live inside of them and are to them unexplainable. Their desire to create change through art is motivated by the joy they feel by creating or simply because it has become a part of their identity and existence. Living in a community that supports that desire and creates situations that will help it to evolve are what ultimately directs the passions into impactful creative product. When asked, “What has been vital to your creative growth?” each of the three artists responded that being surrounded by other artists whom they could teach and learn from is crucial. In these spaces, the artists can
evolve through collaboration. The community of artists supports each other with creative experiences, employment opportunities, and unexpected challenges.

The young Pro-C creative minds hold interesting perspectives on their creative beginnings and development up to their present 20-something years. They certainly have a long way to go until they reach the level of those creative legends mentioned in previous chapters, and are not guaranteed to ever reach the Big-C creative level. But their current state is one of potential and their perceptions of their creative abilities give insights into the effectiveness of certain environmental factors. Their thoughts are valuable to those who wish to take children to the Pro-C level before their 30’s, hopefully to become the next paradigm shifting Big-C artists soon after.
CONCLUSION

In 2000, Robert Paul Weiner reported that artists, writers, musicians, scientists, and business people were asked if creativity was highly valued in the USA and overwhelmingly the answer was “No.” Most people felt that organizations and corporations acted as if they preferred innovation, but their actions proved that they instead were content with “old safe solutions to any genuine creativity.”\(^1\) Society recognizes the beauty in innovation and novelty, but to implement such ideas take time, restructuring, resources, and often times, money. All things that most large entities do not feel they can afford to their communities for the sake of positive change when the status quo is sufficient and/or comfortable. Creativity is often seen as a luxury not necessary for survival, rather than the motivator to all that sustains life.

Art has the potential to make countless contributions to society and everyday people, such as promoting understanding of different cultures, fostering individuality and uniqueness amongst learners, developing an awareness of the spiritual dimension of life, and creating a sense of achievement and self-esteem.\(^2\) Slowly government and public officials are being confronted with the prominence and effectiveness of a creative class of people—those who work in career fields requiring exceptional levels of creativity. Former mayor of Seattle Paul Schell once said that success lies in “creating a place where

\(^1\) Rudowicz, “Creativity and Culture: A Two Way Interaction,” 280.

\(^2\) Hickman, Why We Make Art: and Why It Is Taught, 48.
the creative experience can flourish.\textsuperscript{3} He recognized the need for a city that appealed to creative people and not only high-tech companies. The creative person has the ability to bring their imagination to the community, ultimately contributing to a more healthy society.

According to Robert Sternberg’s Propulsion Theory of Creativity, creativity allows people to make contributions to society on multiple levels.\textsuperscript{4} Replication (solidify the current state of a field), redefinition (change perception of where a field is), forward incrementation (product that moves the field forward but doesn't change its direction), and advance forward incrementation (value of a product is not recognized because it’s ahead of its time) are all contribution types that accept current paradigms and attempt to extend them. Redirection (product that moves a field in a new but desirable direction), reconstruction/redirection (suggesting the field should move back to a previous point and diverge from there), and reinitiation (suggesting the field has reached an undesirable point and that people question their assumptions and "start over") reject current paradigms and attempt to replace them. Integration is a type of creativity contribution that merges disparate current paradigms.\textsuperscript{5}

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Historically, artists have used these exact levels to make major creative contributions to society, sometimes welcomed and sometimes not. Creativity allows us to be human, “enhancing our adaptation to the environment and circumstances allowing us to transform them.” Artists like Jacob Lawrence use their creativity to make art that speaks on behalf of their community, translating experiences and pain, and giving them meaning. Maya Lin carried a sense of responsibility and awareness in her public memorials, bringing mainstream attention and impact to the social and political questions of our times. Katherine Dunham made it a point for her dance companies to serve diverse artists and even refused to perform before segregated audiences, a stance that was controversial for that era. Novels such as Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* and Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* were so powerful that they had an effect on government policy. Sinclair’s novel led to the passage of the Meat Inspection Act and the creation of the Food and Drug Administration. Beecher Stowe turned thousands of white Americans into Abolitionists fighting against slavery. Creativity transforms what already exists and goes beyond what is thought to be possible. The creative contributions of Master Artists have proven to be so powerful that leaders and dictators have often seen

6 Chavez-Eakle, Eakle, and Cruz-Fuentes, “The Multiple Relations between Creativity and Personality,” 76.

7 Cartwright, Jr., *Maya Lin: A Strong Clear Vision*, DVD, directed by Freida Lee Mock (Santa Monica, California: Sanders & Mock, 2003).


them as a threat. Artists have been put under surveillance, censored, arrested, exiled, and even killed in order to keep them from expressing certain ideas that would motivate the minds of the masses and change pedagogies.\textsuperscript{10}

Master Artists of all fields regularly offer society art that confronts, invokes thought, and pleases in a variety of ways. Their creative explorations offer up information and let their audiences come up with their own conclusions on where they stand on any given particular theme. These contributions to society are not frivolous and ethereal, but are valuable and have the potential to prompt nationwide change. Families, schools, and community members must help children develop a variety of processes involved in creativity during childhood to increase the probability that they will make genuine creative contributions as adults.\textsuperscript{11}

Looking backwards in time we are easily able to assess the early years of Master Artists of the past, persons who have already proved to possess creative genius that allowed them to make major artistic and social impacts in America. Looking at the present day and forward, we have no way of knowing which children will grow to be Master Artists or whom will simply become little-c everyday creators. By implementing into the lives of young creative minds the factors that have proved influential towards developing creativity, we can hope to watch the “transformation from early gifts to

\textsuperscript{10} Toni Morrison, \textit{Burn This Book: Pen Writers Speak Out On the Power of the Word}, 1-2.

\textsuperscript{11} Russ and Fiorelli, “Developmental Approaches to Creativity,” 245.
creative production. Master Artists speak out against injustice and promote healthy societies, using art to make the Earth a better place for everyone. Now let us use this information as a guide for the community to plant a creative tree for all children.

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12 Rostan, “In the Spirit of Howard E. Gruber’s Gift: Case Studies of Two Young Artists’ Evolving Systems,” 45.
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