


WELL AWARE

People used to be afraid to talk about mental health. Today, we understand that we all have mental health, just as we all have physical health. Sometimes we have mental health problems, just as we sometimes have physical health problems. For example, do you ever feel stressed, anxious, sad, distracted, angry, confused, hopeless, or frustrated? We all feel these emotions from time to time. Some of us might, at some point in our lives, have other mental health issues. Or we might know family members and friends who are dealing with mental illness.

There are many ways to deal with mental health problems. Sometimes people need the help of experts. But there are lots of things we all can do. We can talk about mental health. We can recognize how mental health affects us – at school, at home, with our friends, in the community. We can learn what we can do to be mentally well. We can empathize with people who are struggling with mental illness.

That's why Pearson developed this series of books called Well Aware. Through these stories and information texts, you'll learn about how a variety of people have dealt with mental health. You'll be able to talk with your teacher and your classmates about what you read. You will be able to think about how these stories and ideas might apply in your own life.

This is an excerpt from one of the books in the series that will get you talking and thinking about mental well-being. We hope you enjoy the reading and have some great conversations. We hope you will become more Well Aware.



Canadian Mental
Health Association
Mental health for all

PROUD SUPPORTER OF
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ART WORKS

Kevin Sylvester and Laura Carlin

Guillaume Côté



Famous PEOPLE Players
Black Light Theatre

Measha Brueggergosman

Marty Chan



Nina Matsumoto



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For teaching ideas related to this book, see the Teacher's Resource.

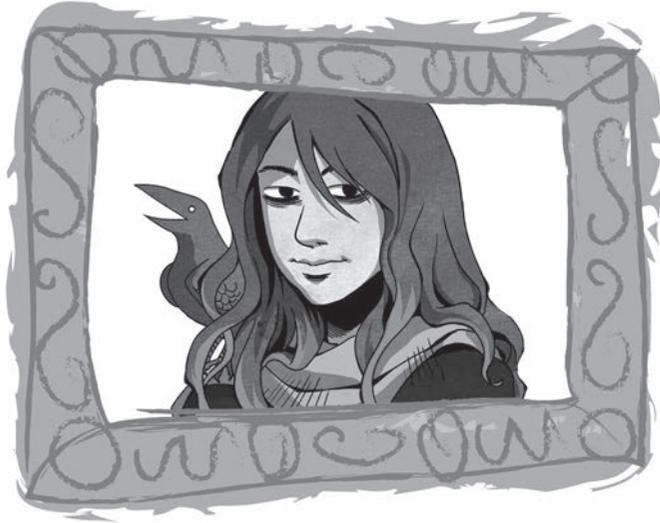
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ART WORKS



Kevin Sylvester and Laura Carlin

Nina Matsumoto



CONFIDENCE AND HARD WORK

Nina Matsumoto is a comic book artist and Internet sensation. She draws official comics for The Simpsons, has her own manga series, and has done numerous comic books and illustrations that are seen all over the world. Chances are you've come across her work on your computer screen or on a T-shirt.

Nina draws all the time, and always has. Success didn't happen overnight, and there were times she felt discouraged. But she stuck with it and all her work meant she was ready when an unexpected break came her way.

She describes herself as shy, and likes to let her drawings speak for her. (That's her self-portrait on this page.)

Nina agreed to talk to us from her home in Vancouver.



Q: Did you always draw?

NM: Yes. I always wanted to do something artistic, especially anything where I would draw to a story, so I kept bouncing around from doing novel illustration, to animation, to comic strips. I tried everything.

And in school I was pretty shy, but even people who didn't really know me knew me as the person who would draw all the time.

Q: So did drawing help you get over your shyness?

NM: I think drawing definitely did help me make friends. It was a good icebreaker. People would go, "Hey, you're a really good artist, can you draw something for me?" or "Let's draw together." Things like that. And that definitely helped me connect with people.

Q: Which artists inspired you?

NM: I was born in Canada, but we have relatives in Japan. They would always send me Japanese comic books. And I was really, really into those.

So when I was younger, I would make my own stories and my own comic books, starring the characters from those Japanese comic books. Then I started to write my own storybooks. I would staple

the pages together and bring them to school, and my classmates liked reading them.

Q: So you had support from school?

NM: I did, but I know that not everyone does. There are a lot of people who grew up drawing comics, and they had teachers who would discourage that kind of style because it's not "real art."

But, fortunately, my teacher understood that comic book art can be art too, and she was super supportive. She would take my workbook to teacher meetings to show other art teachers that there's a lot involved in comic book art. She was also showing them that there is a market for comic art out there. You can make a living by doing it.

Q: Did you ever have a point where you weren't making a living, or weren't drawing as well as you'd like?

NM: Right before I was discovered online, I was about to quit. I thought, maybe comics aren't my thing. Not because I was getting rejected by companies. Honestly, I wasn't even trying that hard because I was pretty much my own worst enemy at that point. I wouldn't submit my work to companies because I just didn't think I was good enough. So I was defeating myself and I thought, well, I probably need a second career option.

That's why I like to tell people the story of how I got discovered. If I had given up completely, I never would have become a comic book artist.



Binzuru, a character from the manga series *Yokaiden*, created by Nina Matsumoto

Q: Tell us that story.

NM: I'd been laid off from a retail job, and I knew I needed money. I had a small fan base online, because I used to do a web comic back then, but it wasn't going to make me enough money to live on.

So I was getting ready to go back and find a non-art job to pay the bills. But I decided, for the heck of it, to take two months and just draw whatever I wanted.

Q: Kind of like a “goodbye” to life as a full-time artist?

NM: Yes. One of the things I always wanted to do was to pay tribute to my favourite show of all time, *The Simpsons*. So I drew this picture of *The Simpsons* cast, in my style, which is like a manga style. And then I posted the illustration online and went to bed. I woke up the next morning and it was just everywhere on the Internet. It had gone viral.

I didn't know it at the time, but Bongo Comics (*The Simpsons'* publisher) was actually looking for someone who could draw *The Simpsons* in a manga style! One of the people working there printed out my picture, put it up in a cubicle, and then the art director passed by and saw it and said, “Oh, who is that artist?”

He contacted me and said, “Do you want to draw this story for us?” And that was my very first art job

ever—and my first time having my art published anywhere. It was pretty much a perfect job for me, because I love *The Simpsons* and manga. I got to put them together. And then the art director also saw that I could draw in the standard *Simpsons* style as well, so I got regular *Simpsons* work.

Q: Some people might say you got a lucky break.

NM: I definitely consider myself super lucky. But luck isn't enough. If I hadn't built up a gallery of artwork for them to look at, especially a gallery of comic books, I probably wouldn't have gotten the job.

Q: What advice do you have for kids who want to be artists?

NM: I think one of the biggest obstacles that artists face is not believing in themselves. I'm always worried that I'm not that good. But if you want to be a successful artist, you have to be a successful failure, in a way.

Successful failures try and fail over and over again, but learn from each attempt until they end up with success. A complete failure would just fail and then give up, and not learn anything.

So you've got to learn to embrace failure and be good at it—be good at failing and just fail as many times as it takes until you are successful.

Guillaume Côté



SPEAKING WITHOUT WORDS

In a popular video, a young man is standing alone in a dark space. He begins to dance. He leaps. He sways gracefully. He stands stock still, in control of each muscle. Then he flies in the air and does a tremendous leg kick.

It's an almost impossible move, done so gracefully that it takes your breath away. It shows the sheer joy of movement, the incredible beauty that is possible with nothing more than the human body.

The dancer is Guillaume Côté, principal dancer with the National Ballet of Canada. He says dance is a way to express joy and to connect with others. Through dance, we can all be beautiful in our own way.

We talked to Guillaume between rehearsals at the National Ballet centre in Toronto.



Q: Did you always want to be a dancer?

GC: Yes, absolutely. For me, dance is like breathing. I've been dancing since I was three. I just can't see my life without it. It's how I speak. It's how I express myself the most freely. Dance is probably one of the happiest things you can do.

Q: Did you ever come across people who didn't think a boy should be dancing ballet?

GC: I grew up in Lac St. Jean, in northern Quebec, and it was a hockey town. Dance was not the first choice for boys. But I think the idea that boys shouldn't like dancing is fading away, because people are noticing how incredible dance is, and how fulfilling life can be with dance. It's also a really phenomenal way to keep in shape.

Dance is what I love, but really the idea is to do whatever you love. One of the great things for young people today is that, maybe thanks to the Internet, they can find their passion anywhere.

If you don't like hockey, don't let people tell you that you have to like hockey. That's brainwashing you. If doing papier-mâché is what makes you

happy, then let that be your pursuit and your passion, and do it.

Q: You've called your body your "instrument" for your art. What do you mean?

GC: With dance, everything we present on stage has to do with our own body, our own physicality, so we live within our instrument. We can't put it away like a violin or a piano.

But there are also risks. If we break an ankle, we are on the sidelines for six to eight weeks. So we have to take care of ourselves. We have to treat our bodies well, exercise, eat right, sleep right. Dance isn't a job. It's not something you do, it's something you live.

Q: And, unlike many other arts, there's no physical "piece of art" that you create.

GC: Exactly. We *are* our paintings, we *are* our songs, we *are* our music. And each performance is different, in the moment, shaped by the people we are with—both the people on stage and the audience. And that's what is so special about dance. It's here and now. It's always different—new and fresh.

Q: Does your idea of "instrument" also include the mind?

GC: Yes, you need physical health but also mental strength. Not everyone has the physique to be a

professional ballet dancer—and then it also takes a lot of focus and discipline to be successful.

Being a great dancer isn't easy. It takes years of hard work and training. You need to have everything working together. Passion isn't always enough.

And I must also say that you can't do it alone. You need a great support system—great parents, great teachers, great dance classes in order to make it to the National Ballet of Canada.

Q: What can you say through dance that you maybe can't say with any other art form?

GC: I think there's actually so much that dance can say. Dance is about human relationships. There's such a beautiful unspoken connection between dancing, breathing, moving human beings.

Dance is also a universal language. I've danced all over the world—from Russia to South America to China—places where I don't understand the language but I'm always so welcome.

I've worked with so many really wonderful people and we don't even speak the same language. I've danced with partners where we couldn't communicate other than through sign language. But we'd still have such strong connections.

Everything makes sense in that moment of dancing. We may never have spoken to each other,

but it doesn't matter. It's kind of magical. Dance breaks down barriers.

Q: What advice would you give to someone who wants to be a professional dancer?

GC: My best advice is to dance. Dance all the time. Whatever type of dance you like—hip hop, tap, classical ballet—just keep getting better.

But, of course, not everyone can be a professional. Performing is a whole different ball game. Not everyone is a performer, and not everyone should be a performer. But everyone should be a dancer at heart, and I think everyone really is, to be honest.

Q: Everyone?

GC: Of course! Dance is such a beautiful way of communicating with other people. It's such a nice way of making friends. But it's also good for you. You can sit in front of a computer for as many hours as you like, but nothing will give you the joy that getting out there and dancing for yourself can give you. Dance, movement, being inside your body, your instrument, allows you to awaken the part of your brain that is not so analytical. You discover how you move in space, in time with music—and that you can be beautiful in your own way. It's just a matter of getting rid of the self-consciousness. Life is so much better when you dance.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

1. Many of the artists in this book talk about how their art allows them to say things they may not be able to say in other ways. How have you used art to express yourself in your own way? How did it help you?
2. For these artists, becoming successful was not always easy. Which of their qualities and strategies do you think could help you achieve one of your key goals? Why?
3. Writer Marty Chan talks about how humour has helped him deal with some of his challenges. Do you think humour can be good for your mental health? How and why?
4. We may all have times when we feel we are not “good enough” or that we have to be perfect. How can these feelings affect our mental health? What messages can you find in these artists' experiences to help deal with these feelings?
5. The authors decided to provide interviews rather than articles about these artists. Why do you think they made this decision? Would you have preferred articles rather than interviews? Why or why not?