



THE DIGITAL

DIVIDE

By Evie Cuffaro and Kate Muldoon

Kotlinski's Creations

Teacher stays positive despite challenges of online learning

It's 8:30am, and the first bell rings. New digital art teacher Kelly Kotlinski sits in her classroom, alone. She stares at her computer screen, looking at student's icons on a google meet. She doesn't see their smiling faces, and she doesn't hear their voices.

This is Kotlinski's first year teaching at Monarch, and her first year teaching high school. With the added challenge of teaching virtually, this year has been different than any other.

As a student, it can be a daunting task to be unmute and talk in front of the whole class, especially when they haven't had the chance to meet their classmates in person. Her biggest challenge has been getting her students to engage in class.

"That's definitely been hard just because I feel like I'm teaching by myself," Kotlinski said. "When no one's answering me it's just kind of lonely. Getting to know my students and getting them to

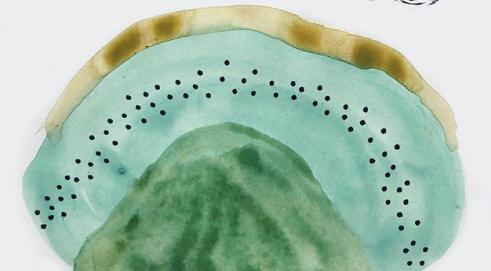
engage is really difficult."

But not every student hides behind their screen. Over the past few months, she has made some meaningful connections with her students online.

"I've definitely made some connections last quarter," she said. "I feel like I've made some really nice relationships in those classes. I had one student who logged on everyday, he was in first period. And he would just chat with me for 10 minutes before class started and he had his camera on. It was so nice. I feel like when I see him in person now I'll be able to say hi and I'll know him," she said.

Through it all, Kotlinski has stayed positive and has hope for the future.

"My ideal learning situation would be to have everyone back in the classroom so we could be working together, inspiring each other, you know, bouncing ideas off each other. I want a classroom that's really comfortable where people can talk and express themselves," she said.



Ms. Kotlinski worked as an artist for eight years prior to teaching and is still creating art currently. "I try to make time during my week in the evenings to make art and update my website and Instagram. I love being outside. I go hiking. I just get a lot of inspiration for my artwork from being outside," she said.