



# JRB ART AT THE ELMS

Pasco Arts District

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## THE THEORY OF HOPE

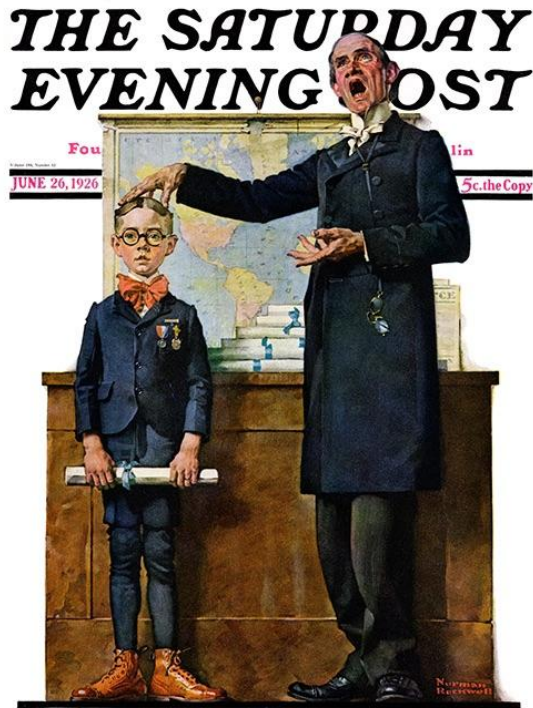
By Joy Reed Belt

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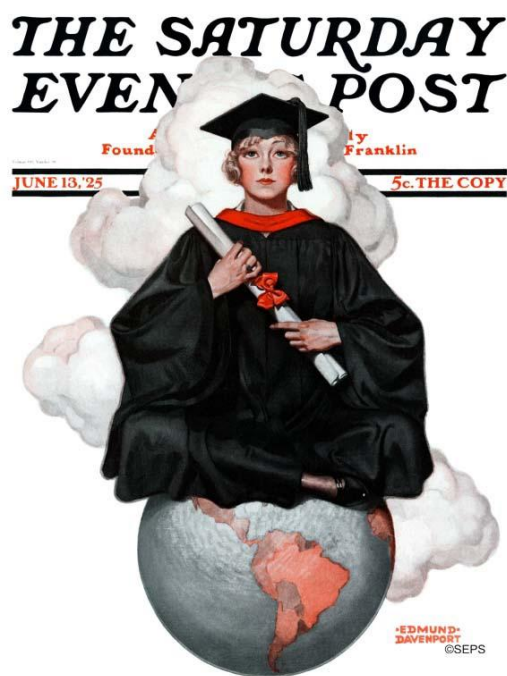


New Yorker Magazine Cover from August 2020

School was a big deal at my house when I was growing up. Our annual household calendar was organized around the opening and closing of school and all its related events. Every August my Mother took me shopping for new clothes including, one year, a coveted "poodle" skirt. I remember how special our annual "ladies' lunch" of avocado stuffed with chicken salad made me feel. But most of all I remember our conversations. Mother talked to me about the wonderful opportunity I had to learn. She told me that learning how to learn was one of the most powerful tools in the world. When I expressed my real concerns about the upcoming year, whether having to take a class with a teacher I had heard was mean, or not getting into a coveted class or club, Mother would reframe those fears into opportunities. Even when I insisted that since I was no good in math I just knew I was going to fail algebra, my Mother would identify the subjects in which I excelled and persuade me to give math another chance. After all these years. I can still hear my Mother's voice teaching me the theory of hope.



First in His Class  
by Norman Rockwell  
June 6, 1926  
(The Saturday Evening Post)



Beginning SAM IN THE SUBURBS—By P.G.Wodehouse

Graduate on Top of the World  
by Edmond Davenport  
June 13, 1925  
(The Saturday Evening Post)

Of course, the Norman Rockwell era school days that I remember are gone forever. This fall our schools, students and parents are being tested in in every way. The challenge is how to keep students, teachers, and the larger community safe as we gather to learn. One of the most important debates in the country is how can schools, our institutions of learning, continue as principal learning environments. The three basic ways of "going to school" that have emerged this fall are: Virtual, In-Person, or a combination of Virtual and In-Person. I am associated with Harding Charter Fine Arts Integrated High School, which has offered two options: Virtual and In-Person. I heard this morning that about half the student body selected the Virtual option and half selected the In-Person option. Harding occupies a huge building so distancing and safety precautions are possible. But I wonder if that 50/50 selection split reflects the difficulty of making that decision, or the impact of anxiety about any decision.



A student with his mother logging on to a virtual classroom (The New York Times)

Everyone I know is concerned about something. The economy, the political environment, and/or school starting. The valid educational concerns are multi-faceted: the availability of technology to all students, the lack of social interaction, the fear of sickness and death, the concern that meaningful achievement won't be possible, the concern that kids can't experience the arts or play sports, the ability of working parents to be home and to guide children in the learning process. When we are all so anxiety focused how can we give our students hope?

Which comes first opportunity or hope? Do we hope and therefore create opportunities? Or, are we able to identify opportunities because we hope? I'm not sure it matters. Both hope and opportunity are important. This year, amid all the challenges, there are still opportunities. There is still hope. We do have to be careful. We do have to protect ourselves and others. But, if we seize every chance and tool within our reach to let our students know that they, as individuals, still have opportunities, we will be teaching them the theory of hope. It may be the most important thing they learn this year.

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