

Young Rembrandts franchise teaches art, brain skills



RAPID CITY (AP) – Kids in the Young Rembrandts program who spend their afternoons drawing take away much more than carefully colored pictures. They're building brain skills.

Young Rembrandts is a children's art program that teaches more than 40,000 students each week through franchises in 31 states and four Canadian provinces. A franchise recently reopened in Rapid City, Black Hawk and Spearfish. New owner JoHannah Hatley began offering sessions in the Black Hills in October. In 2020, she hopes to expand Young Rembrandts across South Dakota, the Rapid City Journal reported.

Young Rembrandts focuses on cognitive development through drawing. The company believes children learning art skills is linked to future strong academic performance and personal

achievement. Young Rembrandts has ranked in Entrepreneur Magazine's Top 500 franchises for seven consecutive years.

All Young Rembrandts franchises use curriculum, developed by corporate headquarters, that's based on research about how the brain learns. Young Rembrandts engages both the analytic and creative learner so everyone participating can gain new skills and be successful. The program is geared for kids from kindergarten through fifth grade.

Hatley is a painter, jewelry designer and the mother of five. She's passionate about Young Rembrandts because she has seen the program's results in her daughter, a fourth-grader who's been in the program since kindergarten.

"I can see the skills she's carried along the way," Hatley said. "It's an after-school program that's worth (kids') time. It's something they wouldn't have had a chance for or thought they could do."

Hatley and her eight staff members take the program into 15 public and private elementary schools in Rapid City, Black Hawk and Spearfish, where they teach about 180 kids in hour-long after-school sessions. Students master basic skills like holding crayons and pencils properly, coloring inside the lines, drawing basic shapes, and techniques for coloring with markers, then build on those with Young Rembrandts' step-by-step process.

"I draw step one, then the kids draw it. Then we'll go to the next part. I draw a little ahead and they follow me," Hatley said. "They have to pay attention. They can't let their minds wander or they're going to get lost in the process. I really feel like it gives them a little more edge to pay attention to teachers in school. They know if they're not paying attention, they're going to miss something. They catch on to that really quickly."

"The kindergarteners and first-graders especially are so proud of what they end up drawing because they would have never expected to be able to do that," she said.

Music is often touted for its ability to help students, particularly with math skills and analytical thinking. Drawing instills its own unique skill set that serves students in the classroom and beyond. It hones students' hand-eye coordination, and the younger they start drawing, the better their coordination gets, Hatley said. The step-by-step process develops the cognitive part of the brain and essential functions like decision-making. Students learn what's coming next, what to expect, and what they can do. As they draw, students learn spatial reasoning, which is related to problem-solving abilities.

"(The curriculum) starts out easier and we progressively get a little more difficult, and we can really see their changes along the way. It's fun," Hatley said. "I feel like it develops their imagination. We offer things that normally a kid wouldn't think to draw, like a pharaoh. We have a lesson plan and talk about the history of the pharaoh. Most kids didn't know what a pharaoh was."

Students are taught artistic concepts and terms such as portrait, landscape, proportion and mirror imaging. They also learn about artists and art history.

“That’s really fun. We talk about artists. I show kids their art and we do a piece in the style of that artist. It throws the kids off, but they like the end result because now they’re trying something completely different,” Hatley said.

In each lesson, children learn a new technique and complete a drawing. After each lesson, kids get a take-home challenge. “I’ll say, ‘Use what I just taught you and draw your mom and dad a picture.’ They’ll bring back pictures and show me what they’ve done,” Hatley said.

For kids who can’t or don’t want to participate in team activities such as sports, Young Rembrandts aids with social skills.

“They’re making friends in class that maybe they wouldn’t have known in school otherwise,” Hatley said. “They have some place to relax and enjoy what they’re doing.”