

‘Draw Like Rousseau’ teaches kids fundamental art skills

BY ANNE MARIE HUNTER *SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL* | MARCH 12, 2019 05:35 PM,



Cousins, Kashe (left) and Bentley Lynch, 8, both of Lee’s Summit, worked side-by-side during Saturday’s “Draw Like Rousseau” program held at the Lee’s Summit Library. **ANNE MARIE HUNTER** *SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL*

Dozens of flashy toucans, sneaky snakes and ferocious tigers roamed tropical rainforests during Lee’s Summit Library’s “Draw Like Rousseau” program the morning of March 9.

During this hour-long class, 20 young artists, ages 6 and up, learned to draw like Henri Rousseau and created their own version of his famous painting, “Tiger in a Tropical Storm.”

The free program, funded by the library, was presented by Young Rembrandts, a national franchise that brings drawing classes, taught by area artists, to schools, community centers and libraries. During these classes, students learn art techniques and vocabulary as they create an original artwork inspired by a master artist.

The program model is a step-by-step process that allows successful drawing experiences for students, whether or not they have art experience. The Kansas City branch of Young Rembrandts, which presented Saturday’s class, is owned by Sarah Hirtzel.

“Our curriculum is focused on drawing skills, which are the fundamental foundation of art,” said Hirtzel, a graphic designer who purchased the franchise in 2015, after a 26-year career at Hallmark.

Hirtzel also believes art itself is both fundamental and essential for a well-rounded education, and provides far-reaching benefits, especially in our current digital culture.

“Children need learn to express themselves visually,” she said. “Art teaches students everything from fine motor skills to creative problem solving. It’s part of whole-brain learning and essential to communication.”

She points out that in a digital age, kids are detaching from something important. “I envision that the more digital our world gets, the more important it is to use the tools we have — our hands. Art balances out the digital aspect of life today.”

Ann Rastorfer, of Lee’s Summit, brought her children Luke, 11, and Lorelei, 7, to Saturday’s program. She agrees with Hirtzel.

“Art has been so important to every civilization throughout all time, but it seems today we’re getting to the point where we don’t value it,” she said. “The thing that makes me sad is we run the risk of being consumers of art, rather than making our own art and music.

Saturday’s class was taught by Susan Staszko, one of 24 artists who teach Young Rembrandt classes across the Kansas City area. She has seen firsthand the transformation in students when they are given opportunities to creatively express themselves.

“Every class, I watch students go from thinking ‘I can’t draw’ to ‘I can draw, I really enjoy creating and what are we doing next?’ ” said Staszko, who has worked for Young Rembrandts since 2014.

Hirtzel is committed to bringing art to more students across the metro.

“I would like families and children to have this program available wherever they are, or whatever their backgrounds are,” she said. “Art is for everyone, not just for the talented, experienced or privileged. Everyone should have access to art.”



During the Lee's Summit Library's "Draw Like Rousseau" program, Bentley Lynch, 8, focused on his drawing. More than 20 students, ages 6 and up, participated in the one-hour class.**ANNE MARIE HUNTER***SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL*