



Young Rembrandts teaching art as a skill



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CHAPEL HILL — Art isn't just an inherent talent. Just like any other skill, it can be taught.

Several schools in the Chapel Hill-Carrboro and Durham Public Schools systems are participating in an after-school program that is teaching students the basics of drawing.

Victoria Pridgen teaches art through the Young Rembrandts program to the budding artists by combining shapes to create a finished product that the students can be proud of.

"When my daughter was 3, I saw online that you could teach kids to draw," Pridgen said. "It's teaching children a skill, that just from shapes, you can draw anything."

"Any child can do anything if they are given instruction," she said.

Pridgen said that she had her own frustrations learning to draw as a young adult, mainly people saying that only those born with artistic talent can draw or being expected to draw a nude with no formal instruction on how to successfully go about doing it.

Just beginning with the CHCCS district, Pridgen has been working with DPS for about a year and a half.

The students are taught to follow along as an instructor draws each piece of an image on a whiteboard. They are encouraged to draw images they normally wouldn't draw and on a much larger scale.

Kerry Moore is the administrator in charge of the Scroggs Elementary after-school program. Sitting in on one of the classes Moore explained that the class teaches more than how to draw.

"We wanted to enhance the fine motor skills, self-esteem and focus, those skills they need to be successful in school," Moore said. "I see students who are usually active in class very focused and they're feeling great about their amount of success. There's no frustration."

Moore said that the program is targeted for children in kindergarten through second grade. The course is offered free of charge to the students at Scroggs, Moore said, adding that "we wanted to offer it and allow all students to have access to it."

"We want them to know that this is our gift to you," said Moore. "We want to give our students exposure to the arts, exposure to sports, expose them to as much as possible."

By learning to draw by combining shapes and drawing big, Pridgen said, the students learn spatial skills, attention to detail, handwriting readiness, discipline and learn a better understanding of time on task, all skills that will serve them as they mature and grow.

The students start out by drawing the shapes for the drawing with an eraser to help them better understand the size of the picture and where it needs to be positioned on the page. Then they follow the instructor and draw piece by piece.

Along with drawing, the students will also learn art history and draw from different significant pieces of art including American Gothic.

Mia Derebail is a first grader at Mary Scroggs and in the Young Rembrandts art class. Putting the finishing touches on a karate student she had just finished drawing, she enjoys the class.

"I love to color, too," she said as she colored. "I like that it's fun and it helps you learn how to draw things."

Kesar Lamba is a second-grader in the class who, through a shy smile, said he enjoys the class because "it's fun" and because "we can make pictures."



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Mary Scroggs Elementary first grader Grace Hartsell, right, works on coloring her drawing of a karate kid on Thursday, January 23, 2014. The Young Rembrandts teach twice a week and the program has proven to help develop spatial reasoning and fine motor skills.



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(From left) Mary Scroggs Elementary School first-graders Kesar Lamba, Ryder Smull and Nicolas Washington learn how to draw from Robin Pipkins on Thursday, January 23, 2014. Pipkins is a part of the Young Rembrandts, an art program that teaches children afterschool.