

## Young Rembrandts Make Their Mark

Drawing on the benefits of art

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MASTERPIECE: Young Maya's sailboat glides by against a beautiful sunset. (Tim Gebhart/The Epoch Times)

I watched Jon Lemerond, an instructor in the southern Wisconsin Young Rembrandts program, teach a class and felt a little envious, wishing I had something like this when I was growing up.

Jon drew a couple of circles, lines, and shapes on a large sheet of paper—marks that eventually became a giraffe. While drawing, he wove in what seemed to be life-lessons along with the instruction.

“Whoops, here we go!” Jon exclaimed when he made the snout on his giraffe too big. He erased and fixed it.

James Cayo, program director of the southern Wisconsin Young Rembrandts program, leaned over to me and whispered: “He did that on purpose to show it’s OK to go back and correct our mistakes. That’s how we learn.” I was impressed.

Cayo said that in the Young Rembrandts program, they endeavor to keep things exciting and the children engaged. The little girl next to me pushed back her chair to stand up and draw, leaning forward in excitement. All of her attention was focused on the next step in making her giraffe.

The giraffes the children drew were impressive: some yellow, some purple with blue and red dots. Each giraffe had its own personality.

Lee Zhuan, a parent who had been taking her children to Young Rembrandts, beamed proudly at her 6-year-old daughter and said: “Every time she is so excited to see her drawing get hung up. It is like a masterpiece to her.”

The children were eager to bring home the sailboats they had drawn the week before and that were prominently displayed on the wall. They were delighted to replace the drawings with their giraffes.

## The Program's Vision



**EXCITING EDUCATION:** The Young Rembrandts program uses positive reinforcement and effort-driven rewards to foster a rich and engaging learning environment. ( Tim Gebhart/The Epoch Times)

The Young Rembrandts program was founded in 1988 by Bette Fetter. According to the program's website, Fetter's vision for the program was "to raise generations that value the power, the passion, and the significance of art."

Fetter used a very structured method of drawing. Although the children are acquiring basic drawing techniques, they are actually using the same kind of core skills that are utilized in math and science. It is Fetter's belief that all children can draw and that it does not require a particular talent that one either has or does not have.

The program pushes the students to develop their spatial reasoning and fine motor skills, order and sequencing abilities, visualization, self-discipline, and confidence.

In the modern curriculum of public schools, math, science, and reading make up the bulk of children's education. Children, at a young age, acquire their knowledge and world-views through hands-on experience and engaging the world directly.

However, in order to keep children's math and reading skills at a competitive level, they are often denied the experiences that help them develop social and learning skills needed to interact with the world.

"As children learn how to draw new objects, they reinforce connections in their brains and train their minds to be more perceptive to the details of the visual world. Students strengthen their visual vocabulary by viewing objects and breaking them down into identifiable shapes," according to the Young Rembrandts website.

Providing technical and step-by-step instructions is a major part of the Young Rembrandts program. "The goal is to give the children an 'I can do' mentality," Cayo said.

Cayo reached in his folder and pulled out a [picture](#) of a tugboat. “At the end of the class, the kids will have finished drawing this.”

The tugboat drawing seemed complex—quite a feat for a 6-year-old to draw. “That’s the [beauty](#) of it,” exclaimed Cayo. “They go from thinking they can’t do it to being able to do it.”

## Benefits of the Arts



FOUNDATION IN ART: Art programs in schools throughout the United States have always been viewed as an extracurricular activity. Studies indicate improved test scores in math and science and an improved quality of life for students engaged in the arts. ( Tim Gebhart/The Epoch Times)

Studies have shown that visual [art](#) helps develop and reinforce connections in the [brain](#), particularly the frontal cortex, which is the part of the brain associated with movement, emotion, and thinking, according to neuroscientist Kelly Lambert, Ph.D. It is the part of the brain that deals with the “effort-driven [rewards](#) circuit.”

“A well-engaged ‘effort-driven rewards circuit’ helps us effectively meet emotional challenges,” wrote Cathy Malchiodi, Ph.D., LPCC, LPAT in the healing arts, in a blog.

The arts have been proven to help children’s social skills and their confidence. In the Young Rembrandts program, children are in an environment where they aren’t graded, and the outcome of their work is most often something they are proud of. It is an accomplishment they can see.

According to Alex Michalos, Ph.D., and head researcher at the University of Northern British Columbia, “People who engage in the arts on a weekly basis enjoy a stronger sense of community, feel better emotionally, and experience a higher quality of life than those who do not.”

“The Young Rembrandts program helps children develop skills that will help them in all facets of their lives,” Cayo remarked.

“My kids just love it,” one woman remarked. “My son would rather come here than go to basketball, so here we are. They just like it.”

Young Rembrandts [classes](#) are held throughout the United States and have expanded to parts of Canada and the Middle East. The program partners with pre-schools, elementary schools, and community centers, enriching the students’ experiences in the arts.

*To learn more about Young Rembrandts, or locate a Young Rembrandts class near you, visit their website at [www.Youngrembrandts.com](http://www.Youngrembrandts.com).*