

‘Young Rembrandts’ program boosts confidence, social skills in Ann Arbor schools

Posted Feb 07, 2020

Young Rembrandts Art Class in Ann Arbor

By [Dana Afana | dafana@mlive.com](mailto:dafana@mlive.com)

ANN ARBOR, MI -- An after-school program dedicated to step-by-step drawing aims to boost confidence and develop cognitive skills for kids.

Illinois-based [Young Rembrandts](#) has for seven years offered kids in Ann Arbor schools an opportunity to channel their inner artist in a small classroom with others ages 5 to 10. “I definitely think it’s a good thing for the kids. I was just overhearing the teacher in there, and I think he’s doing a great job with really encouraging language to kids,” said Erin Goldman, whose son Tyler Goldman was part of a Tuesday, Jan. 28 class.

“Tyler loves artwork so any time he has an opportunity to do art work, I’m glad to sign him up,” Goldman continued. “He’s really proud of the work that he’s done here.”

The drawing program focuses on a range of areas such as hand-eye coordination, cognitive development, spatial learning and critical thinking skills, said Casey Van Kampen, local franchise owner. It currently runs at Ann Arbor Open, Burns Park Elementary, Christian Montessori School of Ann Arbor, Dicken Elementary, King Elementary, Lawton Elementary, Thurston Elementary and Wines Elementary. The class drew a portrait of artist Faith Ringgold on Jan. 28.

“We do an art history lesson once per session. We not only learn about the artist, but the parts of her art,” Van Kampen said. “Instead of making two dots for the eyes and another dot for the nose, we’re looking at the shape of the eyes, where you place the eyes, the different expressions of the eyebrows. They talk about those kinds of fundamentals in a fun way that the kids can relate to.”

Weekly classes involve new drawings chosen by professional artists behind the Young Rembrandts curriculum, Van Kampen added.

“It is about art but it’s also kind of about organizing your thoughts. Just having some downtime and focusing on your art can allow your brain to accumulate what you’ve learned in the day,” Van Kampen said. “It has shown to have cognitive benefits as well as boosting kids’ confidence. Having something that they’re good at ... and say, ‘I did this, I can do this’ and it helps them, I believe, in everyday life.”

Instructor Joel Reynolds has been with Young Rembrandts for a year and all he ever wants to do is create art, he said.

“Working with kids is very fun because when you get excited about something and you show it to a kid, you’re like ‘look, this is a cool artist, this is a cool technique.’ They go ‘that is so cool.’ You feel like you shared a moment,” Reynolds said. “When a kid gets excited about it, they absorb it. You feel like you did something good. You feel like you helped that kid. It’s the kind of energy that keeps you motivated.”