

Are You Feeding Your Child's Inner Artist?

When children start pre-school, it begins. They dabble with construction paper, finger paints, and glitter. They bring art work home nearly every day and we proudly plaster it across the refrigerator. But once most children start elementary school, the deluge of childhood masterpieces slows to a trickle, or in some cases, simply disappears. Thanks to shrinking budgets, many school systems have drastically reduced art instruction or eliminated it completely. So, if your child isn't taking art classes in school, how can you be sure their inner artist doesn't waste away?

Art teachers are quick to explain that art is more than just a fun outlet for students; it's an essential element of learning. According to the National PTA, art cultivates self-expression, imagination and creativity, as well as critical-thinking and problem-solving skills.

Jason Dobkin and Erika Gragg, co-creators of the new children's book "*Snobbles the Great: A Snooze Patch Story*," (Grabkin Creatives, LLC www.snobbles.com) credit their love of art as a driving impetus behind the book. Snobbles is a fruit-eating snake who is ridiculed by the other snakes in the Snooze Patch where they all live. While the story is sure to elicit giggles from both children and adults, the clever and unusual artwork will grab your attention from page one. Unlike many children's books, the story was inspired by the artwork, not the other way around.

"I was making little clay animals and Erika would place them in plants or other settings and photograph them," says Dobkin. "That's how Snobbles and the Snooze Patch came to life. We wanted to create a fantastical, new world for kids so we combined the normal aspects of children's books - drawings and a story - with painting, sculpture, photography, stage design, lighting, and cinematography to make a hyper-real experience. It's truly a children's book for the 21st century!"

Dobkin and Gragg hope parents will find ways to incorporate creativity into daily activities, especially when schools place such a strong emphasis on standardized testing. Some educators believe the tests stifle creativity because the questions focus on finding one correct answer instead of seeking various ways to solve problems. They fear this inhibits independent thinking and innovation—which can ultimately leave kids behind the curve when it comes to career opportunities in our globally competitive job market.

"If kids don't have the opportunity to be creative when they're young, it's not going to dawn on them to suddenly start thinking in new ways when they're older," says Gragg. "Kids who have artistic outlets are more likely to be successful adults because they see things differently. As business people, they'll be able to apply creative solutions and think beyond the basics."

While many parents want their children to excel in the basics, students who struggle with math, reading and science often benefit from artistic expression.

“There are children who don’t do well academically, but put them in a dance class or give them a paint brush and they connect with it,” says Gragg. “Suddenly, everything clicks. They start understanding math or English better because their brain has a new way to approach and interpret those subjects.”

Speaking of brainpower, according to Americans for the Arts, students who participate in three hours of arts, three days a week for at least one year are four times more likely to be recognized for academic achievement.

“We tend to think of creativity as something optional we can scale back as children grow up, but it’s much more valuable than that,” says Dobkin. “When a child transforms a blank piece of paper into a colorful drawing, learns a song on the piano or memorizes a scene from a play that’s an enormous confidence booster. And that confidence changes everything.”

Better grades, problem-solving skills and confidence. Sounds like some very strong incentive to make sure you encourage your child’s inner artist to come out and play on a very frequent basis.

About Jason Dobkin

Dobkin, a native of Long Beach, California, studied music at Wesleyan University. His musical abilities came in handy when Snobbles co-creator Erika Gragg was penning the lyrical, sing-song quality of the book’s storyline. Dobkin is a guitarist and is currently working on a new album with his band “Jason and the Rockernauts” in addition to a solo album of children’s songs. www.snobbles.com

About Erika Gragg

Gragg earned her Bachelor of Fine Art from Cornell University. She is a professional painter with a studio in Los Feliz, California. Her work has been featured in shows and exhibitions in New York, Los Angeles, Rome, and Brittany, France. Gragg credits her early educators for weaving artwork into the school curriculum. She says those learning experiences helped her earn good grades and stay interested in school.

To interview Jason Dobkin or to request a review copy of “*Snobbles the Great*,” contact Rachel Friedman at 727-443-7115, ext. 206 or e-mail rachel@newsandexperts.com. Please include your name, publication, and mailing address with your request.

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