

Summer art league classes spur creativity

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DANVILLE — Within every child, an artist is waiting to be released. Just watch when they're handed a box of crayons and a sheet of paper or a mound of clay. They're not self-consciousness. That doesn't start until they reach their teens.

That's one reason Danville Art League invites 6- to 13-year-olds to the group's annual summer art classes. The second of two four-week sessions started Saturday. It filled as quickly as the first one did in June.

"High school students can join the adult classes, which we have all year," said Marsha Russell, league vice president and summer class instructor. "We evaluate them on an individual basis. Some are ready for more formal instruction as young as 13."

It's more informal in the children's classes.

The warm and supportive atmosphere encourages even the youngest, including one student whose feet didn't touch the floor when she sat at a table to paint.

Eileen Dunavan taught the first session of classes and stopped by to lend Russell a hand Saturday. Some of the students from Dunavan's class returned for the second round.

"I tell the students the most important thing they can bring to class is their imagination," Dunavan said.

She has the same philosophy when she teaches art at Holy Family during the school year.

Genesis Pelszynski, a fourth-grader at Holy Family, enjoys the classes.

"Every time I come here, I learn something new," she said. "Today, Marsha showed us how when you color shapes or



Eileen Dunavan, second from left, helps Marsha Russell, right, teach art to Danville Art League students Genesis Pelszynski, left, and Alissa Nixon, both of Danville.

objects in with solid color, they look closer. "

That instruction came in handy because the subject Russell chose was a landscape.

"We'll lightly draw the horizon and the main features, like mountains and roads," she said. "We'll paint those, let them dry and then come back with colored pencils for the details.

Although Russell prefers working with oils, she finds acrylic paints are good for young students. Cleanup is much easier, as is changing things in the painting.

"We're actually using acrylics like watercolors," the artist-as-instructor said as she poured paint onto palettes for her students. "Watercolors lift off the paper too easily. With acrylics, we can let them dry and then paint right over them if we don't like the result."

Russell knew the students would lean toward certain subjects for their paintings.

"Boys like trucks, cars and dinosaurs," she said. "And girls like flowers and pretty things."

True to form, 9-year-old TraVonte Phelps said he likes to draw dinosaurs, but added, "I stink at it."

Russell suggested, "How about if you start small, with a lizard? We can turn it into a dinosaur later. But first, draw some mountains. Sketch them real light so you can barely see them."

By the end of class, the students had completed their backgrounds. At the next session, they'll add the finishing touches and then move on to another work of art.

I want them to understand there is no right or wrong way — it all depends on what they see," Russell said. "We'll work with colored pencils, pastels and other media. I want them to see what they like and introduce them to something that may be new to them.

"Most important, I want them to be satisfied with their own creativity."

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