

Create your own Picasso: A Youth Program

By Crystal Vaughan

Pablo Picasso said, “Everything you can imagine is real” (Goodreads, 2023). Picasso is best known for his abstract paintings, which is “art that does not attempt to represent an accurate depiction of a visual reality but instead uses shapes, colours, forms and gestural marks to achieve its effect” (Britain, n.d., para. 1). Whether one argues that Picasso’s abstract paintings are good or bad art, they just *are*, and reflect what Picasso was feeling or thinking or perceiving at the time of creation. This art program invites youth into the library to explore painting without directive. There are no rules on what participants can paint except that it comes from their imagination and emotion. Moreover, because participants are not expected to create accurate depictions, there is no expectation that they must create “good” art, which takes pressure away from the creative process.

Benefits

The primary purpose of this program is to engage youth in a creative activity that will use their imagination. The Search Institute’s “40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents” (2006), suggests that teenagers should engage in creative activities because it is important for healthy development. This is partly because art can help teenagers express their emotions in a healthy way, and it can also be relaxing and relieve stress (Paraphrase from OpenAI’s ChatGPT AI language model, personal communication, February 12, 2023). Additionally, creating art can contribute to a teenagers’ sense of personal identity, specifically their self-esteem and personal

power, which are also part of the Search Institute's list of developmental assets (2006). Art can increase teenagers' self-esteem because it can help them learn more about themselves and their skills, as well as boost their confidence and support their personal growth (Paraphrase from OpenAI's ChatGPT AI language model, personal communication, February 12, 2023). Creating art can also increase a teenager's sense of personal power because their creation is something they have control over (Search Institute, 2006)—perhaps at a time of life when they don't have very much control over anything else.

Youth programs, such as this, are also important for the healthy development of teenagers because they provide opportunities for teens to meet new people, make new friends (Search Institute, 2006; Paraphrase from OpenAI's ChatGPT AI language model, personal communication, February 12, 2023), be themselves in a supportive environment, and maybe step outside of their comfort zone, all of which will teach them new skills and broaden their interests. It also gives youth a constructive use of their free time while letting them know that the community and library values them (Search Institute, 2006).

The secondary purpose of this program is simply to let youth know that they are welcome in the library. They are welcome to take up space and use library resources to create a painting or drawing that is only limited by their imagination (and whatever resources the library can source), which is something they may not be able to do at home or at school. Many teenagers may not have the resources to paint at home because they don't have the support of their adults, and/or because art supplies can be expensive. Having teenagers attend this program in the library will hopefully encourage them to return to library, borrow from the library's collections, and use the library's other services or programs.

How to

If you would like to try this art program in your library, we recommend choosing a two-to-three-hour block of time on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon, or at another time when youth frequent your library. We also recommend that one staff member and two youth volunteers manage this program. The staff member will need to be present during the event to attend to issues or questions and supervise the participants. The youth volunteers will be required to assist the staff member to set up the art supplies and clean up after. The two youth volunteers will also seed the event by painting with the participants. This will result in making the youth participants feel more comfortable and less self-conscious about participating, especially if attendance is lower than expected (Brown, 2023). You may wish to publicize this program through social media channels such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. You could also advertise the event on a board or poster in the youth section of the library, and on a board or poster by the circulation desk.

Supplies

This program will require the use of your library's activity room. Multiple tables will need to be butted together to create a large table for participants to sit around. Another table should be used to hold a selection of art supplies. Chairs will also be required for participant seating. If your library does not already have them, you will need to source the following supplies, most or all of which will be available at your local dollar store:

- Acrylic paint in a variety of colours
- Bowls to hold water
- Clear glue
- Markers
- Paintbrushes in a variety of sizes
- Paint palettes

- Drawing Paper
- Foam shapes
- Framed canvas (small to medium)
- Glitter glue in a variety of different colours
- Sponges cut into various shapes and sizes
- Paper towel
- Pencils
- Plastic tablecloths
- Soap

While publicizing the event, your library could also ask patrons for donations of art materials.

And, of course, we also recommend that you provide youth participants with beverages and snacks.

References

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