When the Sun Comes Up, Be Creative

Raw Art Works Creates Coloring Book, Art Prompts for Area Youth

by Joey Phoenix
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Creative North Shore

When shelter-in-place orders took effect earlier this month, Lynn-based Raw Art Works wasted no time coming up with ideas to support the creative youth during this difficult moment. In a matter of days, RAW introduced a number of virtual programs and exciting new projects that would help give Lynn youth not just hope, but something to do when they were stuck at home – including a brand new coloring book series called When the Sun Comes Up, Be Creative, currently available as a PDF on their website. You can also download Vol. 2 of When the Sun Comes Up, Be Creative – HERE.
“We have a pretty passionate team at RAW who want to be effective, and overnight, our approach to have a direct effect on kids needed to be altered,” said Jason Cruz, Art Therapist and Clinical Supervisor for RAW.

“It was an idea based on how we were going to continue to engage and connect with our kids,” Laura Smith, Expressive Arts Therapist with RAW, added. “So we started reaching out to our incredibly creative staff and youth leadership teams for ideas.”

The creative staff at RAW include teaching artists and expressive arts therapists from different backgrounds and also a youth leadership group led by Laura and Jason called RAW Chiefs, who can be the outward-facing unit of RAW who have a direct connection to the Lynn community.

“We wanted to do something to distract people,” Jason said, “but also something where kids can sit calmly and make art while also being present with each other.”

Within the first week of the crisis, the various departments at RAW came together to respond. They felt it was essential to come up with a number of things including daily art prompts and activities to be featured on their website and social media platforms. These dailies also feature short instructional videos teaching viewers how to do various art projects. Second, RAW developed a Facing Forward Weekly Challenge with weekly art challenges that kids can do at home. Last week they were invited to do a selfie challenge, and this week, the subject is hands.
The third project is Jason and Laura’s coloring book collaboration, and Volume 2 is available for download here.

The coloring book, in particular, is an invitation to people who are struggling with creativity to have a non-judgmental launchpad for inspiration, and while those using the book don’t necessarily have to follow the prompts in the pages, it just might spark new thoughts.

“It gives you a place to start,” Laura said. “People are feeling a lot of things right now, and words are one way to express them, but we do need space and time to just be with ourselves, and to also find those connections.”

“In this environment, because you’re being told you can’t go outside because you don’t want to hurt anybody and you don’t want to get hurt. You kind of get stifled,” Jason said.
“So, to be able to lay down color with whatever you have, gives you a cathartic experience, to put colors on a page could be freeing when you actually can’t find the words.”

Throughout history, whenever there has been some sort of collective difficulty, whether it’s the loss of someone significant, challenging political climates, or a pandemic, artists have always known just what to do and say. People in the creative fields tend to choose it not because they are afraid of things going badly, but because many of them have used art as a way to overcome difficulties, and they want to share that with as many people as possible.

“That’s one of the main reasons that a lot of us are in this work,” Laura said. “We do believe in the strength of creativity to help us move through things in the world that are more challenging, and do that with meaning and integrity while continuing to connect to who we are as individuals.

“It’s also really important to do that with an intention of supporting the community, and that’s a parallel with what we’re being called to do as humanity right now: to take care of ourselves so that we can take care of other people,” she added.

The *When the Sun Comes Up, Be Creative* Coloring Book is available on the Raw Art Works website but is also being distributed to Grab and Go Lunch locations (with crayons until supplies run out) around Lynn.*

*Editors Note: There are MANY ways to support Raw Art Works’ programming in downtown Lynn right now. For starters, you can donate directly. But also, if you wanted to help them distribute the coloring books to area youth and have thoughts about how that could happen, send me a message at joeyphoenix@creativecollectivema.com