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As I sift through thousands of images and writings from my twenty five years of research, I am overwhelmed and in awe of the beautiful children and adults who trusted me enough to share their most sacred self. This handout is intended to provide a quick overview of my findings and to illustrate patterns in artwork that can be addressed including destructive behaviors, poor academic achievement and even illness. Awareness is always the first step; every person brings something different to the table which enables us to use these paintings as a road map in understanding personality, developing relationships and monitoring emotional well-being. We can guide our children to healthy positive thinking by being aware, non-judgmental, loving and sometimes a little out of the box. Above all, trust your own intuition; you are here today because of your deep empathy, compassion and love.

*We cannot change what has happened to us;
we can only change our response to those happenings.*

Below are a few examples illustrating how the colors we paint reveal our emotions and thoughts and why and how they are connected to our behaviors and well-being.

Concern: The consistent use of a particular color.



The above paintings were made by a fifth grade student during a four-week art journaling class on self worth and positive thinking. The student was known by peers and teachers to often interrupt conversations and physically put himself in front of others in an attempt to gain attention. Upon examining the student's work, I noticed that every painting in his journal was red, which when used exclusively, often indicates a focus on the self and a possible lack of consideration for others. The back and gray indicate fears and doubts. When these two colors are used together as a pattern of painting, it indicates fear and doubts about oneself. If these emotions not addressed, they often lead to self harm.

Suggested response: In order to broaden the student's awareness of the feelings of others, I made him my assistant and he was required to help the class by getting supplies and then cleaning up. Before long, the student's behavior began to change and he produced the work displayed below.



This is the student's last painting completed for the class. The red is still present, faint and painted first, but the green on top indicates that care and empathy for others has become a primary concern for the student. Although the text at the bottom suggests that the student is not yet comfortable with his emerging compassion, the shift away from selfishness cannot be ignored.

Concerns: The consistent lack of using a particular color.

During a six-week art journaling class, I noticed that a young man of 18 who stood 6'7" never used blue in any of his paintings. So I gave the class the assignment to paint with a color they didn't like or never used. A few minutes into his very blue painting, he stormed out of the room. When I found him sitting outside on the porch, he was crying. He talked about his regrets being in a gang and the things he was made to do. Being an emotional member of a gang was unsafe. Allowing himself to feel and respond to his emotions was a brand new experience for him to explore.

Suggested response: Ask the student to paint with colors they don't like. This is often an area of their personality they need to explore in order to understand what that emotion does for them when it's working in the positive. Painting with colors you don't like or use often will reveal fears and doubts that you can have a conversation around. In this boy's case, painting with blue brought an awareness of and a connection to his emotions in addition to a discovery of his underlying values.

Concerns: The frequent use of green and black.



This first painting is from a 5th grade boy who was bullied and teased about being a suck up! He hides both emotionally and physically (under his desk) and is becoming less and less involved in classroom activities. He has and has difficulty making friends.

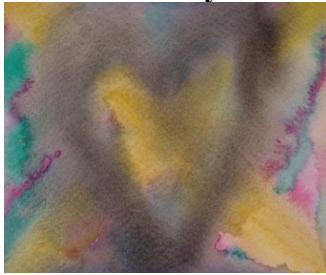
The second painting is from an 8th grade boy who is outwardly inappropriate both physically and verbally.

I've noticed this pattern a lot lately (mostly in boys) and I feel that it has the most potential to be harmful if not addressed. Green indicates deep care for others, the darker the green greater level of caring a person has for other human beings. I often see a lot of green areas in paintings done by teachers and healthcare providers. The black-gray murkiness painted over the green indicates all the fear and doubts the painter has about his caring for others. I see this pattern show up as either shyness or aggression and inappropriateness. In girls it tends to show up as loneliness and fear of relationships.

These behaviors are designed to hide the fact they care very deeply for others and they are embarrassed about their sensitivity. This personality over time will test other to prove to themselves that they are not liked or loved. If not addressed their behaviors and thoughts of harming others gets stronger. I worked with a student who had a pattern of painting with green and black, who continually tried to push her brother who was in a wheel chair, down the stairs. In her young brain she loved her mother who, in her mind, love her brother more.

Suggested response: With this particular personality, try to catch the individual performing acts of kindness. Praise them out of earshot of others. Embarrassment creates more fear. Invite this personality to plan a secret exciting event for the entire class. This honors the behavior of being kind while creating the emotions of love and compassion from others. Over time they will recreate these acts of kindness to evoke their need to validate love from others.

Concerns: Murky Paintings



In this first painting, a young girl was painting blue around her yellow heart when two of her friends informed her that another girl didn't like her. As they were talking, she dipped her brush in black paint and watched as it spread over her painting.

The second painting comes from a 5th grade boy whose dad is in jail and whose older brother died in a drug-related car crash. The boy is convinced that his life is going to turn out the same way, dead or in jail.

The third painting is from a 3-year-old girl. This child violently acts out and bites other children in the face.

Murky painting indicate confusion and fear, while the other colors in the painting can be clues to pinpointing the confusion such as conflicts in thinking and feeling (orange and blue). I often see children painting with all the colors and then painting on top with brown or black. The confusion can come from any number of life situations. This type of personality typically processes slowly and differently than most. They have a very hard time learning and may present themselves as having learning disabilities. Often times, they are just full!

Suggested response: When I see paintings like these, my first response to a verbal communicator is "Wow, you seem to have a lot going on. You look a bit full." This seems to gently open the door for more communication during which I can ask about possible fears and thoughts. By examining the other colors beneath the murk you will be able to identify the source of their confusion and monitor any shifts of clarity with further art journaling assignments. Art journaling each morning provides a safe dumping ground for home issues which then makes room for learning. The third painting, from the little girl, required working with the girl's mother as well as the child. The mother is very young and this little girl is one of three. All three children have different fathers and mom is now pregnant with her fourth child and engaged to a different man. I find the mother's painting very telling with a clear direction from which to work. However, in a preschool or daycare setting, I would suggest having the

child paint the minute you see or feel the child's frustration building. The sheer act of painting will lessen the child's feelings of frustration because it provides them with a vehicle for communicating non-verbally.



This painting, by the mother, clearly shows that all the emotions and energy are focused on her not her children. We will see a huge shift in both paintings when mom learns new skills and becomes more aware of how her emotions drive her actions and what that impact has on the emotional safety of her children.

Concern: Resiliency



These painting are from two boys with similar life situations. The first painting is from the same boy whose father is in jail. Most of his paintings look this way. The second painting is by a boy who was removed from his house by police due to domestic violence and addictions issues with his parent. He was separated from his brother and is now adopted into another family. The second boy consistently paints clear pictures. He is very present in his everyday activities which are indicated by the use of red. His emotional sensitivity is reflected in the use of blue and his thinking about his emotions is indicated by the use of orange. This boy is clearly more resilient. How do we know if our children are really okay or if they are just holding everything in?

Suggested resiliency test: Ask the students to think about something that makes them scared and let them paint for 5 to 10 minutes depending on the age of the students. Have them journal any thoughts or feelings on a separate piece of paper. For very young students, you can skip this step. Next, ask them to think about what makes them happy and have them paint a new painting. The children who can't or won't move to the next assignment need more attention and processing time. Let them continue with their painting and suggest they outline their work with a pen or marker. This type of line work is a form of meditation that helps with the healing process. Have them journal as much as they can while outlining.



This painting is from the boy that painted the green and black painting earlier. He

didn't want to stop painting the subject of what made him scared; he worked on it for an hour and a half. He is also the boy who hides, physically and emotionally, which shows up in this painting as the brown surrounding the red.

Concerns: Labels such as, ADHD, OCD, ED, NLD, dyslexic, Autistic, learning differences etc.

When I was growing up we used labels such as stupid, lazy, Special Ed, and my favorite, not living up to your potential. Today we are more sophisticated with our diagnoses and vocabulary, but the damage is the same. From a very early age, our children are feeling broken as they go to doctors, specialist and meetings at school. The parents get worried and frustrated which often looks like anger. The teachers get overwhelmed with the huge responsibilities of classroom management and academic success. By attaching these labels, not only does the child feel broken but it also allows for excuses and the vocabulary from others, keeps that illusion alive. One amazing young boy I work with sums it up so beautifully, "The doctors don't really know what's wrong with me, but I get sent to the *"not teacher"*."

Suggested Response: Many times children introduce themselves to me as their label, "I'm ADD."

My response is always, "Oh you're that kind of brilliant, what do you do with it?"

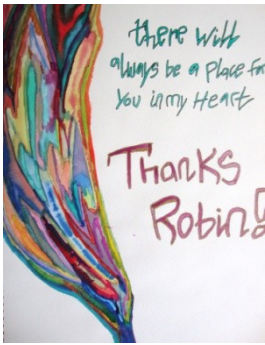
These are just a few examples of what some labels look like, but the idea of turning what others perceive to be a negative into a positive is transforming!



This painting is from a young man who learned how to use Intuitive Art journaling as a way to remain sober and deal with anger, anxiety, and ADHD. This particular day he was dealing with a heated issue with his roommate. He wanted to pummel his roommate but chose to paint first. You can see and feel all the emotions he was carrying. The line work that you see outlining all the shapes and colors is part of the meditative process. This took him a full day to create.



This second painting came the next day before he confronted his roommate. You can see by the red and orange that he was now thinking – specifically, thinking about how he was going to respond. His emotions are less intense and his anxiety was more in check (indicated by the tightness of the line work). The conversation went well; the boys resolved the issue and they remain good friends.



This is from a boy labeled with ADHD whose teachers and doctor begged the parents to try meds. I called him a puppy due to his bouncing around everywhere and both his vocabulary and his actions were often if not always inappropriate. He's so smart and so funny and quite the athlete. He was just failing in academics. What we found is that when he had his journal with him and was allowed to paint and do line work in his classes, he could sit for hours and participate in the classroom discussions at the same time. He became a straight A student and went on to a regular high school, without needing medications. He's still struggles with being inappropriate but he has been demonstrating the ability to self regulate more often and gauge his audience.



Autism and OCD (obsession compulsive disorder). This was created by an absolutely brilliant and creative young man with the best and oddest sense of humor (most of the time it was over my head). During the day, he washed his hands so many times that they would bleed. However, when he was in the art room painting and doing line work, he never washed his hands.



NLD (Non verbal learning disorder). When they told me that this young girl didn't talk much or express or understand her emotions, I wondered if we were talking about the same child. Once she was honored in her ability to communicate so deeply and gracefully in her artwork, she began to open up and talk quite clearly about how she felt. As a result she was able to nail an interview at a prestigious art high school which she passionately convinced her parents into letting her go.

There is so much more to learn and I have appreciated your openness and willingness to use the Robin Wimbiscus Method to explore new ways to communicate. If you would like to learn more, PLEASE

contact me. If you are worried or concerned about someone, or yourself, you can send me a clear photo of their free flowing watercolor painting and we can talk. I'm available for workshops, classroom mentoring and coaching..... Anything...just let me know!

We have to believe we can make a difference.

Contact: Robin Wimbiscus robinwimbiscus@gmail.com