

Introducing Art to Young Minds, Through the Adventures of Harrison and his Magical Hat!

Our next Picasso, Rembrandt, Monet, Banksy or Warhol could be sliding through the cracks of an education system that has endured increasing costs and funding cutbacks. Over the years we have witnessed the disappearance of art, music, and other cultural based programs from our school systems.

One Grandmother, and her passion for art, has resulted in the creation of a unique and exciting online, interactive children's book series. It invites young readers into the world of art and creative exploration. That Toronto Grandmother is Melanie Beth Unger, and she and her creative team are thrilled to announce the official launch of 'Harrison's Hat'.

The series, geared for children 2 to 7, is designed to explore some of the world's greatest works of art through the imaginative eyes of young Harrison Hutchinson. Harrison doesn't just love paintings, he bounces right into them. His magical adventures, within the world of art, gives young readers a window into that world, while mixing in some valuable life lessons.

Harrison's Hat books are available online and can be purchased individually or 12 books for the price of 10. You can sample 'Harrison's Hat' free, by clicking on the Origin Story. "It explains how Harrison got his magical hat and demonstrates how the interactive features work," explains Melanie. "We eventually hope to offer the books in other languages as we expand the series globally."

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"I was inspired to write 'Harrison's Hat' when my first grandchild, Harrison, started to speak," Melanie explained. "Harrison expressed himself beautifully, loved colours and was drawn to anything related to the arts." She adds, "Children are becoming increasingly devoid of cultural exposure. However, young minds are like sponges, they can absorb everything. Exposing children to the arts leaves a lasting impression. My mother was an absolute lover of the arts, she made sure I had exposure to as much culture and art as possible, and that was fortunate for me. I wanted to open this world up to my grandchildren as well. Then I thought, why not children around the world?"

She continues, "I feel that living your life without any culture is a terrible waste. Art is beautiful, it surrounds us. It's wonderful to have an understanding of art - from the great old masters to modern day painters. I firmly believe it broadens your outlook and makes a difference in your life."

Melanie went into working in radio, where her creative talents shined through broadcast programming and writing. She then went into working with a group that wrote for children's books and programming for television. It was then that Melanie came up with the idea and wrote a couple of scripts on 'Harrison's Hat'.

Through working on a screenplay together, Melanie met award winning writer, actor, director and fellow Torontonians, Brian Kennington and shared with him her vision of Harrison and he was totally on board. As luck would have it, Brian also had experience in teaching drama and writing plays for children. Melanie and Brian began creating 'Harrison's Hat'.

Melanie was then introduced to the graphic design and creative talents of Joanne Irvine. Joanne started her career in writing and design as a reporter/photographer and eventually started her own weekly newspaper and bi-weekly feature magazine. Always up to date on the latest technology, she has a vast understanding of the online world.

The arrival of Covid-19 had a huge impact on live theatre, production and the entertainment field. However, it opened up an opportunity for the creation of 'Harrison's Hat'. "I thought 'Harrison's Hat' was going to be a hard cover series," Melanie explained. "Because of Covid-19 we developed it into an online series. Through Joanne's experience, we could add voices, sounds, music and other surprises. It would make the books come alive."

Brian explains. "Not only can you read the online books, you can listen to them. The interactive elements allow children to flip pages and push arrows for sound - they love being able to do this." The fun continues at the conclusion of each story, where children are offered activity pages.

Melanie and Brian see a story in every painting they view. "Sometimes a painting gives us the story, while others require our imagination, and allows for inclusion of a life lesson," says Brian.

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Joanne says, "I love creating the world Harrison plays in. I read the stories, and see the adventures in my mind. Working with art makes it easy and fun for me to make the words come alive for young minds. My Granddaughter, who just turned 3, loves 'Harrison's Hat'. Her excited reactions to the stories, turning the pages and hearing the sounds, is why I know children will love the books." She adds, "Like Melanie, I have been exposed to music, and cultural activities, thanks to my family. I couldn't imagine growing up without these influences."

The 'Harrison's Hat' team are also gifting the books to children's hospitals. "We want to make sure children's hospitals have free access, so they can share in the magic," says Melanie.

In addition to the online books, our website offers an artist showcase for all ages and a family friendly social media Hangout geared to the art community

The website features an online artist showcase for all ages. It's a place for artists to upload a copy of their work for the world to view. It also offers an online social media 'Hangout', geared towards the art community and young people.

Keep an eye on harrisonshat.com and follow the exciting adventures of 'Harrison's Hat'.