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Toys turn to treasures at Riverdale senior center

by Maria Clark
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On a recent Tuesday, five students gathered around a worktable at Riverdale Senior Services to create wallets, pins and notebooks out of playing cards.

The class was the first in a four-part series based on creating art out of games and crafts played mostly during childhood.

Tricia Riebesehl, 35, the new artist in residence at Riverdale Senior Services, explained that the workshops play with the idea of nostalgia.

Ms. Riebesehl is the first artist-in-residence at the senior center.

Working at the center is a big change for Ms. Riebesehl, who has taught fine arts and ceramics at De Witt Clinton High School since 2002.

For one, the class sizes are a lot smaller. At the center she will work with 10 students at the most.

Ms. Riebesehl also looked forward to working “with a whole new generation of people.”

“Their life experience adds to what they do,” she said. “They are full of memories and they love to talk about their experiences.”

For the next two months she will divide her time between teaching teenagers and the elderly.

RSS students will get to explore the use of clay to create game sets of their own in the Tuesday, April 27 class. The workshops will also explore the sculptural construction of toys and create paintings based on classic board games.

Her own art will play a role in the work she will do with the students in the workshops, she explained.

During a recent interview, Ms. Riebesehl demonstrated some of her artwork. She was recreating the human form from cut-out shapes she had made from classic board games like Candy Land and Chutes and Ladders. On the table next to her was Connect Four, which she intended to use as a frame for miniature drawings she had created on strips of paper. The final workshop will give students the opportunity to paint and collage on the old game boards.

It’s a return to childhood in a way, she explained.

“I was interested in the idea of nostalgia and the idea of regression,” she said. “I thought it would be interesting to get their perspective on the game playing.”

Working in conjunction with the Bronx Council on the Arts, Ms. Riebesehl will be at the center through June.

“It’s the first kind of art class where participants will get to work with an artist. This gives the art classes another dimension,” said Assistant Director and Program Coordinator, Sandy Brass. “It’s a great way for them to broaden their horizons.”

Students who are interested in participating must register well in advance, by calling the center at 718-884-5900. The next workshops will take place on April 27, May 25 and June 14. ■