

# 'Every child is an artist with a gift'

Xu Wenwen

While many teachers worry about students sleeping in their classes, art teacher Rebecca Tilley is only concerned about how to get students pack up and leave the room at the end of the lesson.

Tilley is from Adelaide, Australia. She says a sense of humor, patience and creative teaching skills are her secrets to keeping students interested.

"I believe in student-centered learning and seeing myself as more of a guide," says Tilley, who has been a teacher for 13 years.

She currently works at Hangzhou International School, a campus belonging to Shanghai Community International School, in neighboring Zhejiang Province. Earlier this month, she was singled out as the Star Teacher of November — the school's first art teacher and the first from the Hangzhou campus to win the award.

In her class, painting may be combined with listening to music, and when it comes to the "boring" part, Tilley tries different ways to inspire students.

For example, Tilley will ask children to pretend they are famous artists who meet in a

cafe. The students are then asked to imagine what artists will talk about with each other. She also takes them around workshops to help students understand the meaning of artists' work.

"I believe every child is an artist with a gift, and I am very fortunate to have the joy of encouraging students to acknowledge and enhance this gift," Tilley says.

To encourage them to create their own artwork, Tilley puts in a lot of time after school hours to have their works framed and hung in the school. She also runs arts and crafts clubs, maintains an art blog, creates videos for the front office and writes articles for a newsletter.

Tilley has traveled and taught in several countries and she is keen to experience new cultures, meet fascinating people and learn new things, which she says helps her "teach internationally."

She says she has learned a great deal when she volunteered to teach adults with difficulties in London, UK.

"This experience taught me how to break down difficult tasks into small simple steps," Tilley says. "This skill has really helped me in Hangzhou campus with the students who don't speak English



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and the wide levels of ability in one class."

From Australia to China, the art teacher is also interested in helping those less fortunate than others.

It is known that throwing away perfectly good clothes is a dilemma almost every expatriate has faced.

However, there is another option: give unwanted items to people in need. Shanghai-based River of Hearts offers people the chance.

Founded in 2004, River of

Hearts organizes collections among expatriates and donates the used clothing and toys to needy people around China. Every three to four months, international schools hold sorting parties where volunteers come together and sort out the items that have been donated.

Tilley learned about River of Hearts in a Shanghai-based English magazine last year and decided to help.

Since last May, she has initiated an annual donation at her school.

She has helped collect a significant number of items that will be sent to provinces such as Anhui, Heilongjiang and Qinghai.

Now Tilley plans to have her students come to Shanghai to help with ROH's sorting parties throughout the year.

Next March, she will be going with the students of Habitat for Humanity, a nonprofit housing organization building affordable housing in partnership with people in need, to build houses in Udonthani, Thailand.

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