

A Martial Artists Canvas

By Imy Rich

White belt=the beginning, a student, a blank canvas. The instructors and peers have the paint that will then become the martial artist. A white belt may be the 4 year old kinder kick student with a bit of a bully issue or the 60 year old mother and grandmother who is just trying to find something to occupy her time.

Yellow belt=your knowledge is rising like the sun. At this point the student becomes more knowledgeable, He or she will become a teacher to the white belts by showing them how to tie their belts, show respect to others, can become a first contact to new students. There is now a bit of color on the canvas, you can see a person with a uniform right dab in the center.

Green belt=your knowledge is growing like the grass. By this point the student has been attending classes for approximately a year. They have made a commitment to the art. Green belts may be called upon to lead stretching exercises. A green belt may be asked to assist white and yellow belts in learning new things. A green belt has the skills to protect him/herself in a fight. Green belts respect their family/classmates/friends/teachers. On the canvas you can see the person standing on solid ground.

Blue belt=your knowledge is as deep as the ocean. Blue belt is an exciting time. The instructors at this point can look at a blue belt and know if that person has the ability and the skill to become a black belt. Most people will drop out at this point if they are not ready for the hard work to come. The student that holds a blue belt will see their skills change during this phase, going from a beginner to a martial artist. The canvas now has background and sky (a past and a future).

Red belt=you now have the knowledge to draw blood. A red belt understands what it means to walk away from a fight. A red belt has the ability to take over class if needed. A student who has achieved this rank understands that martial arts are an art form and not just a way to become strong and tough. The canvas now has detail: flowers, trees, clouds, friends and family standing around the martial artist.

Black belt=everything. I often say that black belt is when you really begin to learn. As a black belt you are expected to teach class when needed. Whether or not you are teaching, students will ask you questions, if you do not know the answers, you will need to find the answers. In order to answer a question from a lower rank, you need to learn it for yourself, which may require that you ask your instructor or take a class elsewhere in order to find the appropriate answer. Students will ask you why you do this technique this way instead of that way. Since you learned it this way, it may not

occur to you that there was even a “that” way. Having lower ranking students asking you about your martial art requires you to keep up with your training. You must continue to learn and not forget the basics that you were taught years ago, otherwise your credibility as an instructor will be questioned. The canvas now has been framed and hung onto a wall, but now you have in front of you several other canvases in many shapes and sizes, representing your students, your school, and their growth.

You will notice that each student progresses at his or her own pace. A kinder kicker will take a year or longer to get to yellow belt, whereas it would take an adult 3 months. Some students will progress through the ranks quickly and then they are held back, either voluntarily or because one of the instructors decided that the student is not quite at that level. We see this often at red belt and green belt. At green belt we expect our students to show power, remember all of the forms and techniques, have respect, and have good stances, and if they don't show all of the above that student may be held back 1 or 2 tests. At red belt we expect our students to be able to demonstrate everything that they have learned up until that point, plus be able to teach it to others. We expect a future black belt to be able to take over class at any point. There is so much to learn before you test for black belt, you must be able to show your peers that you have creativity and skill.

At this point in my martial arts career I have seen my “wall” fill with many canvases. Many never finish, those that are complete are beautiful in their own way. Each canvas is unique. Some students strengths lie in forms, others in step sparring, others are really great teachers. I thought that my canvas was finished, I have discovered that there is much detail yet to be filled in, so as I continue to learn my canvas changes.