

And now for something completely different:



Illustrator helps kids learn while they colour

By RITA POLIAKOV
Staff Reporter

Yehuda Lang may be 30, but he can appreciate a good colouring book.

Lang, a graduate of the Ontario College of Art and Design (OCAD), is the creator of the Super Dooper Most Amazingest colouring book series. The books teach kids about Jewish holidays while they colour, read and play games.

"I always wanted to make a book... I wanted to make the holidays accessible to kids in a fun way," said Lang, who made the series through his graphic design company, 8th Avenue Creative.

"I thought I could do a good job with it and really make the story come alive with vibrant illustrations."

Lang's colouring books have taken children through holidays such as Purim, Chanukah and Pesach, as well as through the Hebrew alphabet.

Lang illustrates and writes the series. While he perfected his writing in college, Lang always had a knack for illustration.

"I was always an artist. That was always my thing," he said. "When I was very little, I was just drawing a lot. All the time."

Eventually, Lang went to OCAD, where he majored in advertising and graduated three years ago.

"I knew I had to go to OCAD... I knew I had to do something with art. I'm also a graphic designer,

About a year ago, he started working on the colouring book series with his wife, Ester, who helped with marketing and sales.

"I always talked about it, I always wanted to do it. To actually get it going, it was both of us. [I said] 'We'll give it a shot, hit or miss, we'll see what happens,'" he said.

So far, the series just may be a hit. The colouring books are being used by various schools, including the Chabad Romano Hebrew School in Maple, Ont., and are now on sale at two Indigo locations in Toronto, at Yonge Street and Eglinton Avenue and at Yorkdale shopping centre, as well as in select Judaica and grocery stores in Canada and the United States.

When he's working on a colouring book, Lang starts by researching the holiday.

"You know the story, but you want to know it perfectly," he said, adding that he then makes a storyboard for each page.

"There's obviously a lot of rewriting and re-drawing... It's a tricky thing, it's not like math homework," he said, adding that every detail, from word choice to the shape of a character's nose or eyes, is crucial. "There are a lot of decisions... The look of the characters, the language you use. It has to be accessible."

The Super Dooper Most Amazingest colouring books have more dialogue than most, which means that it's important to hit the right tone with the narrative, Lang said.

"Sometimes, when I'm first writing, it's kind of

While viewing one of Lang's storyboards, an author told him to draw characters according to "what you want the kid to see."

"[The author] was saying, 'Make your characters



Yehuda Lang, 30, uses his colouring book series to teach children about Jewish holidays.

look brave.' Kids relate through the characters... you always have to be portraying what you want the kid to see. If he sees the kid that's wimpy, he's going to relate that to himself," he said.

While Lang is careful to stay true to the history of each holiday, his goal is to make something that kids can relate to.

"[The books are] very friendly, very lively, very whimsical," he said.

Because his audience is young, Lang is sometimes forced to tinker with the details of each holiday. In the Chanukah book, he made one of the Maccabees a child in order to get his readers more involved.

"When the kid reads the books, [they] become the character. I try to bring the kids into it to internalize the character," he said.

Lang decided to make colouring books rather than storybooks because he wanted to engage his audience, he said.

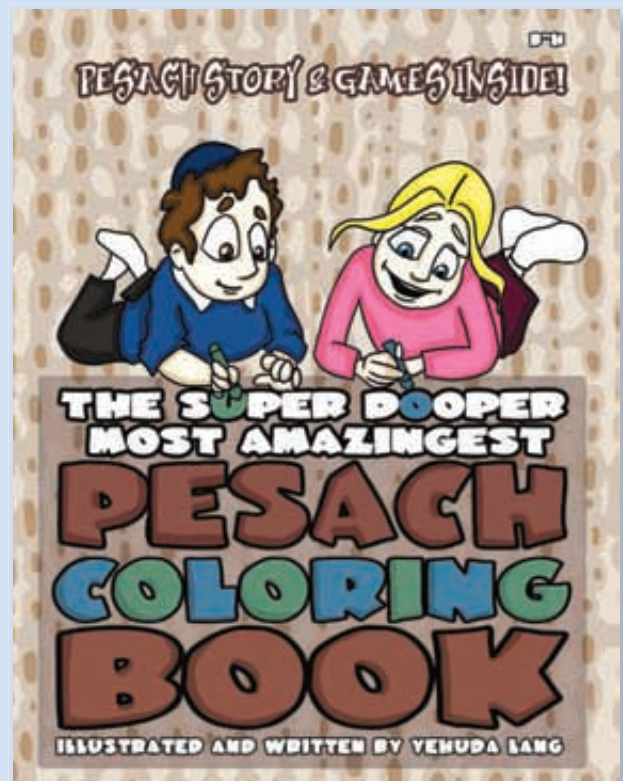
"When you're actually colouring in the stories, it's more involvement. The kid takes part [in the story]," he said. "There's more games [in the books]. A lot of the times, kids go right to the games."

For Lang, his two-year-old son is his most important critic.

"He actually loves [it]. He reads [the series] more as a book. He colours, but that's what's special about these books. Most colouring books [have] one line per page. This really reads as a book," he said.

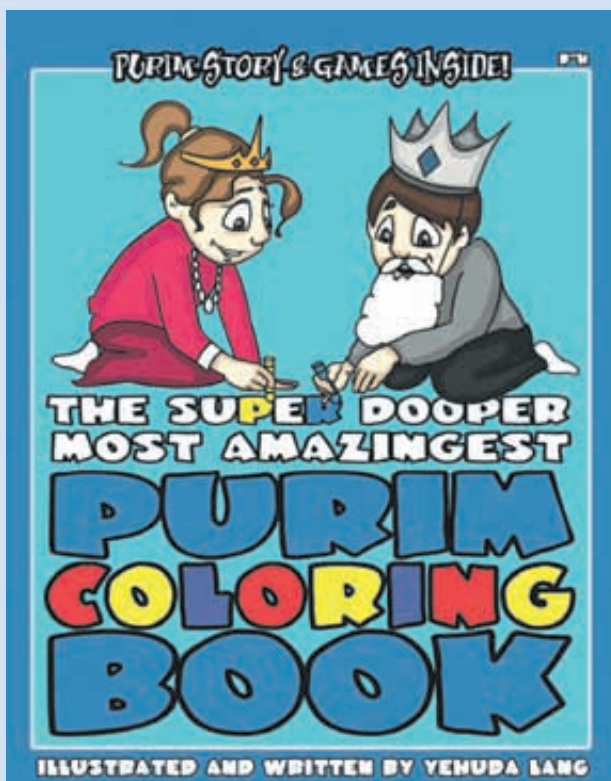
Lang was drawn to colouring books because of his connection with children, he said.

"I think I'm good with kids. I generally have that... attachment. I've always played with kids. I feel like I can get down to their level, it's a smooth transition," he said.



illustrator and web designer," he said, adding that learning about advertising helped him improve his writing and to communicate effectively.

"I was always doing jobs as an illustrator. I wanted to do my own projects," he said.



stiff, it's not smooth. Sometimes, when you write it, it kind of flows," he said, explaining that it helps to talk out what he's about to write first.

"If I'm trying to think too hard, chances are it's not good."