



Mary Margaret Fernandez leads a storytime at The Grove. Wednesday's session will highlight African American History Month with the book "Let the Children March." THE GROVE

'Connect with history'

This month's Storytime at the Grove touches on civil rights

Amanda Sieradzki
Council on Culture & Arts

When describing a house museum, historian Mary Margaret Fernandez wants to sweep away any preconceived notions of a stuffy, cobwebbed exhibition where children are asked to speak in hushed tones. When young visitors come by The Grove Museum, the first place she takes them is to the wall where former resident Roy Jr. — Gov. LeRoy Collins' son — scribbled on the wall complaining about his homework.

"Every generation of owners has had children in this home, whether it's their own sons and daughters or nieces and nephews," says Fernandez. "There's always been kids here and I hope there will always be kids here. I want to provide a venue for children to learn and really connect with history."

As program coordinator at the museum, Fernandez enjoys how her many responsibilities create new ventures. She's most passionate about her

If you go

What: Storytime at the Grove: "Let the Children March"

When: 10 a.m. Wednesday, Feb. 14 (and 10 a.m. on the second Wednesday of each month)

Where: The Grove Museum, 902 North Monroe St.

Cost: Free admission

Contact: For more information, call 850-577-0228 or visit <http://thegrovemuseum.com/>.

work with K-12 students as she guides them through Florida history. They brighten her every day with lightbulb moments as she witnesses many young visitors asking insightful questions about some of the toughest topics in history.

She feels fortunate to be able to tell Governor Collins' story in particular regarding his contributions to the civil rights movement, which inspired her choice of the book for February's Storytime at

the Grove event on Wednesday, Feb. 14.

"I think children can handle so much more than adults give them credit for," says Fernandez, who will be reading "Let The Children March" by Monica Clark-Robinson. "They are really able to look these topics in history in the eye and understand them."

For Fernandez, history runs in the family as she followed in the footsteps of her art historian father and stepmother. Her father was dedicated to exposing Fernandez and her siblings to travel and museums, "inspiring a love of art and beauty." The Louvre in Paris tops her list of remarkable trips as she likens seeing the art she'd learned about in classrooms to "meeting a celebrity."

Fernandez holds bachelor's degrees in art history and literature from Florida State University and concentrated her master's degree at Rutgers University on the 18th- and 19th-century women artists of colonial Latin America. Her interest in that time period peaked at FSU in Dr. Paul Neal's class,

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Storytime

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and continues to be a point of interest as she has cultivated her career and belief that “art is the picture book of history.”

“I was completely overcome that it was such an unknown and new territory that there were more questions that couldn’t be answered than could,” said Fernandez, who enjoys the work of Miguel Cabrera and his “Casta” paintings. “They’re all really interesting and show the diversity of the colonial period.”

She strongly believes that you “get the arts community you work for,” and thus makes strides in all her involvements to put frameworks in place so that Tallahassee’s community can thrive. She began a chapter of the Tallahassee Emerging Museum Professionals and serves on the board of the Tallahassee Trust for Historic Preservation. Motivated particularly by the work women have historically accomplished in preservation efforts, Fernandez aspires to continue that legacy, and sees every museum visitor as a top priority.

“When you are a professor in a university classroom the students who are sitting in your room have already been reached,” states Fernandez. “When you’re working in a museum with a man or woman or child,

this may be the first time in their lives they’ve encountered this piece of history, so in that moment there’s a lot of pressure to reach out to them and to make a difference. You may inspire a lifelong love of history, or you may have found someone who wants to volunteer or go out into the community and chart their own course.”

Storytime at the Grove gives Fernandez the unique opportunity to relate the history of the house to broader topics. Consulting with librarians at the State Library of Florida and Leon County Public Library, she makes book selections and researches crafts and activities for the event.

For native plant month, Fernandez led children on an exploration of the gardens, while another month celebrated artists as former resident Reinette Long Hunt hosted art classes in the home during the Great Depression.

She always begins the morning with a rendition of “Where the Orange Blossoms Grow,”— a song that Florida schoolteachers in the 1940s would have students sing—allowing children to insert their own lyrics about what they like to do in Florida during the song’s chorus. The reading portion of the morning is where Fernandez hopes to capture imaginations, though breaking down concepts can be a challenge. She will often place herself in the

mindset of her young visitors in order to make the history and stories accessible to them.

“It requires an ability to listen,” says Fernandez. “We deal with fairly significant topics at this museum and some difficult times in U.S. history, be it the Great Depression, civil rights, or slavery, so understanding the life experience and the perspective of our visitors is essential.”

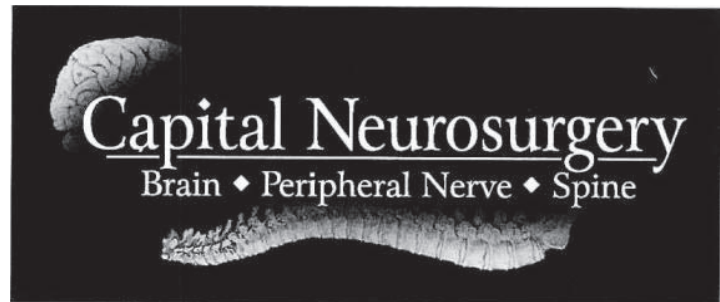
For February’s Storytime at the Grove, Fernandez’s book selection and craft relate back to Governor Collins’ career

and his involvement with the civil rights movement contextualized by the plantation origins of the home. Highlighting African American History Month with the book “Let the Children March,” she hopes attendees will engage in thoughtful conversations around our rights and what it takes to make a difference in the face of injustice.

“When we talk about Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr., and Governor Collins, I think it’s important to emphasize that they were not super-

heroes,” says Fernandez. “They were normal people, just like the children or anyone else who comes into the museum. It doesn’t take a larger than life figure to stand up for what’s right or be involved in the community. Anyone is capable of that.”

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area’s umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).



Capital Neurosurgery regrets to announce the closing of our practice secondary to the relocation of Dr. Ann M. Carr, FAANS. Dr. Carr is relocating to Sacred Heart Neurosurgical group in Pensacola starting March 18th. Please contact our office at (850) 878-7574 for questions or requests to send records to another physician.

We have enjoyed serving the Tallahassee area.