



Marcia Meale looks on while Conley students add hair to the little girl sculpture.  
AMANDA THOMPSON

Students team up on sculpture to celebrate school's 10th anniversary

# IT TAKES A CLASSROOM

**Amanda Karioth Thompson** Council on Culture & Arts

Conley Elementary school will be marking its 10th anniversary next year and a monumental celebration is planned. All 850 students, kindergarten-fifth grade, have participated in the creation of a special sculpture. The piece depicts a little girl which will be installed next to the existing sculpture of a little boy who will now have a reading companion.

Both sculpture projects were initiated by Dr. Marcia Meale who has taught art at Conley from day one. The original sculpture has been in place for eight years and was created by three generations of the Cooley family, celebrated local artists. Meale wanted to expand on their work and emphasize the inclusive and collaborative philosophy of the school.

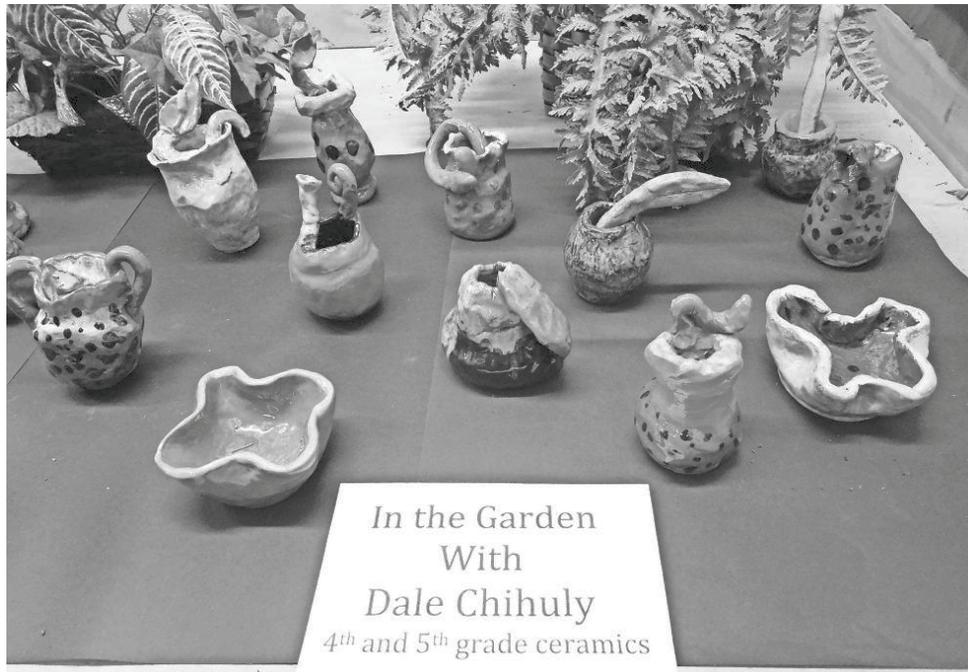
"The idea is to work with a sculptor and have the kids do some of the work," said Meale who received an Arts Education Grant from the Council on Culture & Arts for the project. With the grant funds supplied by Kia of Tallahassee, she was able to supplement other fundraising efforts and buy clay and pay local sculptor Matthew Filiault to get the process started.

Filiault built an armature to provide internal structural support for the sculpture and the students had the opportunity to add clay to the basic form. "Then the



Matthew Filiault was the main sculptor and he also led classroom demonstrations for the students. MARCIA MEALE

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Students explored different styles of sculpture as part of the 3D unit. AMANDA THOMPSON

## Sculpture

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sculptor worked on it and it came back to me. I checked it over and did the finishing work with the help of another local artist. Then I drove it to the foundry, south of Atlanta," Meale explained.

The piece was then cast in bronze but first it went through an elaborate mold making process which Conley art students also learned about. "It goes from clay to a mold, to wax, to another mold, to metal," Meale said. "I'm trying to get the idea across that we see the positive, negative, positive, negative, positive," a complex and relatively abstract idea for elementary aged students.

"This process has made that concept more concrete for them. I think they get the positive negative thing because I hold up a leg and I hold up the mold for the leg. One of the kindergartners said 'it's like a stocking because it's empty.' I'm happy as long as they get the idea that the clay isn't the final piece. It goes away and it takes very skilled craftsmen to finish the sculpture. Without the foundry, it would not be as beautiful as it's going to be or as long-lasting."

Meale also wants her students to understand the possible career opportunities and real-world applications for mold-making and sculpture knowledge. "We live in Florida and places like Disney, Sea World, and all the different theme parks have a need for sculptors. These skills and this casting method is used a lot here."

Meale's fifth-grade students got the message and have internalized the cooperative aspect of the project. Logan Hosmer said that her art teacher "wants us all to have a part in making this sculpture to show it doesn't take just one person, it takes a bunch to make something like this. You can't do everything by yourself."

Logan's classmate Taylor Jones agreed and added "I want the sculpture to be good so we're working on it together and people are adding their own little bit to it."

"I thought it was really important that the kids have an investment in it," said Meale. "They can come back to the school as adults and they'll know they helped through the whole sculpture process. To me that's the really the important thing."

When imagining what it might be like to revisit the sculpture as an adult, fifth-grader Tiffany Zheng said



Conley's existing sculpture of a little boy will now have a reading companion. AMANDA THOMPSON

"it makes me feel like a lot of time has passed in my life and sometimes you miss it a little bit. You'll remember how you made the sculpture and how you were. Those are happy memories of helping my friends and them helping me too. It brings you back."

Though this sculpture will always be special for these students, it will also be part of Meale's legacy. This marks her last full year in the classroom and she will soon retire after more than 30 years of teaching art. In that time, she has shared her love of the creative process with thousands of students and she hopes they use their lessons in art to connect to others.

"It's really important to me that they understand sometimes we make pretty pictures just to make pretty pictures or to express a feeling but other times it's about understanding the sense of working together as a community."

*Amanda Karioth Thompson is the Assistant Director for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture ([www.tallahasseearts.org](http://www.tallahasseearts.org)).*