



Maddie Domning leads an art activity review with eager campers. PHOTOS BY AMANDA THOMPSON

# Practicing creativity



Campers focus on history, science and art making at the Tallahassee Museum.

## *Animal encounters shape art lessons at museum camp*

Amanda Karioth Thompson Council on Culture & Arts

“Where do you think you’d find charcoal?” asked Maddie Domning, summer camp teacher at the Tallahassee Museum. Several tiny hands popped up. One camper offered “a fire,” another added “a fire pit.” One impressive young camper answered, “a controlled burn.” As part of the review, the kindergarten — first grade campers shared their drawings made with charcoal.

Artwork subject matter ranged from portraits of turtles and a fearsome lynx to landscapes and an architectural rendering of the Bellevue house, a historic building at the Tallahassee Museum. This was just one of many engaging activities offered to kids during the week-long art camp.

Domning said, “we focus on history and science here, and this week’s camp interweaves art making. We center the artworks around nature and animals.” Though this is Domning’s first year as a summer camp teacher, she attended similar camps as a kid.

As a recent college graduate with a degree in special education, she understands that this multi-disciplinary approach gives campers a “unique chance to apply what they’ve learned. When they’re creating something, they have a different connection and understanding.”

The Tallahassee Museum offers a wide variety of camps, each with a different theme.

The art camp begins with an exploration of the museum’s animal exhibits, historic buildings and natural scenery. Each day campers participate in “animal encounters,” where they can observe animals in their

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**Lydia Ghio works on her charcoal drawing at the Tallahassee Museum's Art Camp.**

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## Camp

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natural habitats and look closely at their coloring, anatomy and movements.

"The animal encounters are led by biologists," explained Domning. "We focus on the science there and we let campers ask all the questions they want. Then we bring that back into our classroom to make art." Campers use creative exploration to synthesize and translate their new knowledge of science, ecology and history.

The alligator encounter was a big hit with Lydia Ghio. The 7-year-old Kate Sullivan student described the textures of an alligator as "smooth but bumpy. Not pointy or anything." She enjoyed this camp because "there's a lot of art and creativity. You can see animals and you can draw. That's the best part, to me."

In addition to drawing alligators, Lydia, like the other campers, can expertly expound on some of an alligator's key qualities. "They can't regulate their body temperature. They lay 80-90 eggs, that's a lot of babies. The temperature determines if it's mostly boys or mostly girls."

Kenneth Poole is also a summer camp teacher and he is impressed with the level of inquiry campers display. "It's clear a few of them have done their own research. It blows me away to hear the questions they ask. The material they're talking about is much higher than you'd expect."

Poole is currently an undergraduate student studying secondary music education. As an emerging arts educator, he knows the benefits of an integrated approach. "It's important to include the arts in any curriculum because it lets kids practice their creativity in ways that they don't usually."

"When I'm working with them, I try to do things that I wish I had been introduced to when I was younger," he shared. "I want them to experience as many different things as possible so they can be informed and make their own opinions."

"It's important to introduce experiences like this as early as possible so they understand diversity. When they encounter things they don't know about or understand, they'll be more open to experiencing it for themselves."

*Amanda Karioth Thompson is the Interim Executive 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)).*