

TLHLife



School of Arts and Sciences students use their new knowledge of basketry techniques during a class exercise focused on traditional crafts and service learning. HEATHER LIGHT

Crafts and kindness

Students' civic-minded creations benefit others

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Rory Strickland is a third-grader at the School of Arts and Sciences at The Centre and she's a fan of the "Little House on the Prairie" series.

Written by Laura Ingalls Wilder, the books chronicle a pioneer family in the late 1800s. They are loving, resourceful, cooperative and hard-working. Without access to modern conveniences, they make things by hand and often rely on one another to overcome life's challenges. They accept help from neighbors when necessary and provide support to community members in need.

This appeals to Rory's creative and civic-mindedness, especially as she explores a special art unit focused on traditional crafts and service learning. Rory and her classmates are studying utilitarian artforms including basketry, soap making, felting, crocheting and weaving.

"I like the feeling that I'm from a long time ago,"

she said. "We learned about American history and this is what people used to do. Back then, kids would help their parents with the stuff around the house by making things like this."

Designed by art teacher Heather Light, the lessons serve as a vehicle for students to work with their hands and hearts by understanding the value of service to their community. In donating some of their work to charity, student learn that, through creating, they can show kindness to others.

This is a lesson Rory has already internalized. She said, "I love helping people. It makes me feel above and beyond good. If you don't help people, to me, you're not human."

In the development of this unit, Light drew upon her own background and interest in traditional arts. With an overarching classroom theme of kindness and community, the service learning component was an obvious extension. By combining learning goals and community service, Light hopes to enhance both student growth and the common good. "I want to build that intrinsic motivation to love and care for other people," she said.

One of the most popular class activities was knitting hats and second-grader Jewel Fernandez

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Third-grader Rory Strickland focuses while working on an art project in class.

AMANDA THOMPSON



Art teacher Heather Light doles out yarn and community spirit during class. AMANDA THOMPSON

Crafts

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proved to be prolific. She and other art students often took materials home so they could continue their work. The finished hats will be donated to children going through cancer treatment. Jewel said “some people’s hair falls out so we made hats so they could be happy. It feels good and it’s fun. It’s nice if you help people when they’re sick.”

Fourth-grader Izrael Castro gravitated towards the felted soap project. “You get a piece of wool,” he explained, “and you spread it over the soap. Then you get another piece of wool and you cross it over the first one. You do that about five times. Then you put a little water and you start massaging it so the wool can merge together. It sticks on the soap and it helps to get the dirt off when you use it.”

Izrael could think of many potential beneficiaries of his felted soaps, including those experiencing homelessness. He feels it’s important “to treat others as though they’re your family. It makes me feel really good give away things I made myself.”

That’s an outcome Light is capitalizing on. She said “creating something, no matter what it is, it’s a way for

any child to feel successful. They’ve created something that wasn’t there before. If they’re motivated and focused and their heart is in it, that’s where you’re going to get the product and the process coming together. It becomes meaningful for them. Giving them a tie into service learning; that serves as motivation as well.”

Light received an Arts Education Grant from the Council on Culture & Arts. With the grant funds supplied by Kia of Tallahassee, she was able to take two continuing education courses to refresh her own knowledge of traditional art forms.

She also purchased wool for the felted soap and reeds and bases for basketry. She supplemented those materials with yarn and crochet hooks donated by The Sharing Tree. This collaborative sourcing approach reinforced the goals of these lessons.

“It hones the idea that we’re all connected; we’re all in this together,” Light said of the unit. “People matter, your feelings matter, what you do for people, how you treat them, it all matters. Hopefully, that’s going to be infused in everything they do here. Art is such an easy way to infuse that and be able to create for others.”

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).