

SCHOOL & FAMILY

POETRY JAM

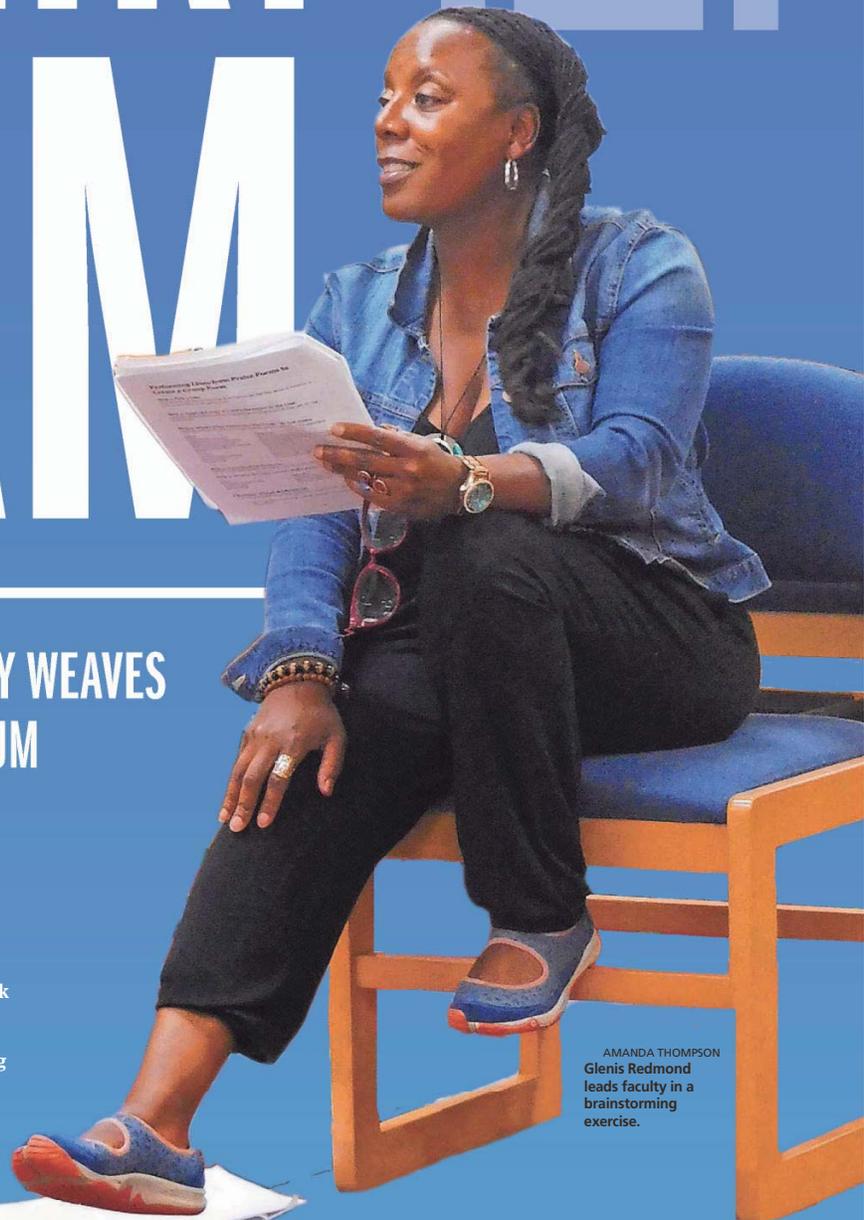
LOCAL

APALACHEE TAPESTRY WEAVES ART INTO CURRICULUM

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Students are settling into the new school year, but getting there requires a lot of preparation. Parents and kids gather supplies and pick out new clothes. Families rehearse the morning routine to make sure everything runs smoothly. Students fret over their class schedule and if they'll make new friends. For many, it's an exciting time, even if it comes with a dash of nerves.

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Glenis Redmond leads faculty in a brainstorming exercise.

Poetry

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It's no different for teachers and in the week before school, there's a flurry of activity for local educators. Aside from setting up their classrooms and gathering their own materials, teachers attend countless faculty meetings and training sessions, including those focused on integrating the arts across the curriculum.

For more than 15 years, teachers at Apalachee Tapestry Magnet School of the Arts (ATMSA) have committed to a campus-wide model of arts integration and the school has been recognized for their innovative practices. One such recognition comes from none other than the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C.

Tapestry and Opening Nights Performing Arts at Florida State University have been designated as Partners in Education by the Kennedy Center which provides free professional development in arts integration. To kick off the school year, Opening Nights brought nationally celebrated poet and teaching artist Glenis Redmond to ATMSA and she showed teachers how to take poetry off the page.

During a two-day session, faculty members learned how brainstorming can lead to poems layered with imagery and metaphor, then they practiced strategies for performing those poems.

"When you work with teachers, you expand your reach exponentially," Redmond said. "I have activities and exercises but it's not about that. It's about the journey and what happens on the journey. I want teachers to find out how this works for them and their students and where can they take it."

For more than two decades, Redmond has been a proponent of arts integration. "The arts saved my life and that's why I walk in the world as I do, as a champion of the arts." At a very young age, Redmond recognized the power of storytelling and, over the years, her conviction has deepened.

"When we tell our stories, personally and collectively, it brings the walls down. It allows you to walk in someone else's shoes. Art creates space that we need to move around in. Our world can get so tight in places and we need those margins so we can see others."

Expansion for empathy is an idea that first-year teacher Tiffany McClary Lockwood can get behind. "I love Glenis. To hear her poetry and to understand that you have to know yourself and honor these students for who they are and understand that they have a lineage is impactful."

A recent graduate of FAMU, Lockwood could barely contain her excitement to be teaching 4th grade at ATMSA. She said that though she is an extrovert and has theater experience, as a kid "I was one of those students who really dreaded poetry, literature, and writing, I was intimidated and I didn't raise my hand. My home had no books, no print rich environment, nothing. Experiencing how to integrate that into my classroom is an eye opener."

First-grade teacher Meghan Howell already has five years of classroom experience under her belt. She loves her students because "they're blossoming as readers but at the same time, they're blossoming as writers." In that regard, Redmond's workshop was especially helpful for Howell. "We are an arts magnet school, and I, myself am not an artist," acknowledged Howell. "Going to workshops like these gives me tools to be able to integrate the arts into my classroom."

Along with high-quality professional development, the support of strong administrators is critical to successful arts integration. Tapestry Principal Iris Wilson is a tireless champion for the creative development of her faculty and students. "The teachers understand that this is important. They've seen the impact first hand of how much better our children are doing, especially when seventy percent of our children made learning gains, the highest in the district. That's attributed to the fact that we integrate the arts."

Though the arts are infused from kindergarten to fifth-grade



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Glenis Redmond offers writing suggestions to faculty members.



classrooms, ATMSA also has an expert team of arts educators who teach a wide variety of arts specific courses including band, guitar, orchestra, dance, visual art, and theater. Wilson explained that the Tapestry model "brings together our art specialists and the classroom teachers and puts them on the same accord. It's art for art's sake as well as art for our children's sake."

It is for the world's sake that Redmond had committed herself to arts education. "I say everyone has poetry in them, you don't have to be a poet. Everyone has a story and let's tell our stories, whatever art form it is. Visual arts, dance, music, all of this tells us who we are collectively," Redmond said. "We cannot ignore that part of us and think that we can go forward. Listening to our students, listening to our children, is really powerful because they have a lot to say. They gain their voice through art. We must empower them to speak because that's where they gain their momentum."

Amanda Karioth Thompson is the Education and Exhibitions Director for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).