



During Woodville's open house event, proud students took pictures of their rocks to share with family and friends

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# SCHOOL OF ROCKS

Woodville's new garden celebrates individuality and community

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**T**here's a madness sweeping through Tallahassee and it seems no one is immune. It's infecting our parks, public spaces, businesses and even schools. Most recently, the contagion took hold at Woodville School and students, faculty, and staff have all succumbed to the outbreak. The agent responsible for the mania... painted rocks.

The Tallahassee Rocks movement began less than a year ago and has reached craze status. The family-friendly activity of painting rocks with colorful imagery and words of encouragement provides a low-commitment

creative outlet which contributes to its popularity. There's also a hide-and-seek component that offers a sense of adventure and serendipity as artists let go of their creations to be found later by others. The trend sparked an idea for Elizabeth Rudd.

As the Assistant Principal of Woodville, Rudd works to create a culture where everyone on campus is valued and encouraged to contribute. She predicted that rock painting would magnify the current camaraderie within the school and she enlisted Woodville's art teacher, Sally Ash, to spearhead the effort.

"Sally always does a beautiful job," said Rudd "and I knew that she could

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take this and run with it." Rudd's goal was to "recognize individuality. All the rocks are different just like we're different. Yet, when you put them all together, they make a collective whole."

Ash introduced the project at the beginning of the year and tied it to the school's character program based on the book "Jackie's Nine" by Sharon Robinson. The book identifies courage, determination, teamwork, persistence, integrity, citizenship, justice, commitment, and excellence as the values that baseball great Jackie Robinson lived by.

"Most of these are things we already teach every single day in art," explained Ash. "For instance, excellence doesn't mean you're the most talented, it means you focus and you try. Persistence is another. In art, you rarely get it the way you want it the first time. You keep fixing and re-doing or do it a different way. Courage to create is a big one. So many people are scared that their ideas aren't good enough but I encourage students to share themselves."

Through Woodville's painted rock project, students did just that and there was another beneficial side-effect. It allowed Ash to get to know some of the newcomers. When asked what kind of imagery she'd like to include on her rock, one newly enrolled student surprised Ash.

"She said 'I want to do a Nirvana rock.' I was like 'Nirvana? You're cool. I listened to that 20 years ago and I'm going to put it on as the music today.' So we listened to instrumental Nirvana while they painted rocks. How do you think that made her feel? Welcome, I hope. You gave me an idea and we're going to include you in this community right away. We've had a good relationship ever since that first day."

Inspired by '90s grunge bands, Star Wars, or sports, the painted rocks reflect the personalities and unique interests of each and every student, teacher, and staff member at Woodville. That equates to more than 600 rocks. They are artfully displayed in a dedicated location near the front office and were officially unveiled at the school's



open house event where parents and students could enjoy them.

Seventh-grader Daniel Best created an abstract design on his rock using red and dark blue paint because "those are my kind of colors." He enjoyed this project and all the assignments in art class because "it makes my mind stretch. I have a lot of fun and it makes me feel better as I do it."

John Reed is an eighth-grader and he especially liked working with new materials. "We used something called paint pens. They're like regular pens but they have paint inside instead of ink and the paint doesn't wash off."

Of the nine character traits the students are exploring, John said he identifies most with determination as evidenced by his rock painting experience. "I was going to paint an aircraft carrier but I messed up on the planes and I had to improvise. I kind of messed up on the submarines too and so I made them into little fishes instead."

Fifth-grader Taylor Smith painted a mermaid on her rock and when asked which of the nine qualities she identifies with she said "I'm really good at teamwork. I can brainstorm ideas in a group without arguing at all. Being part of a team is a lot more fun than working by yourself." This project was perfectly suited for Taylor because "we do a lot of teamwork in art and I love to paint."

Reflecting on the outcomes of the project, Ash feels she's accomplished the original goal and she shared an illustrative anecdote. "I was getting things ready for open house, sweeping up and straightening the rocks a little bit. Within the first three minutes, a paraprofessional and a Pre-K teacher came up with brooms of their own and an extra dustpan and just jumped right in. I didn't request help, that just happened. It shows how this project has really established more of a sense of community than we ever hoped for."

*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).*



Sally Ash points out John Reed's rock which he showed determination in creating.  
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