

Art and science meet and make friends at summer camp

June 15, 2017 12:15 PM Faith Dawson
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During plant week at Kids in the Woods summer camp at A Studio in the Woods, Rashad Bean works on an art project inspired by nature with instructor Renee Anderson. (Photo by Ryan Rivet)

During Kids in the Woods summer camp, 18 school-age participants take a daily nature walk around 8 acres of bottomland forest in Lower Coast Algiers. They hike through the woods and on the levee. They examine trees and leaves and look for bugs and birds. Then, hopefully armed with fresh bursts of creative inspiration, they return to their home base at A Studio in the Woods and get to work on a myriad of art projects.

For 14 years, A Studio in the Woods has welcomed youngsters ages 7 to 11 for a monthlong camp that marries art with nature appreciation and environmental issues. Campers might build 3-D maps, bind their own nature journals or craft bug puppets.

“This camp uses art to allow them to play and interpret and be comfortable in the natural environment,” said Ama Rogan, managing director of A Studio in the Woods.

Laura Richens, curator of Carroll Gallery at Tulane University, and teaching artist Renee Anderson of KIDsmART New Orleans designed the curriculum, but faculty, postdocs and doctoral students from the Tulane Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology participate too, during plant week, bug week, water ecology week and more.

“The idea is that scientists collaborate with the artists to come up with a curriculum that is appropriate for the age and also uses the art to explore and understand the science,” Rogan said.

Plant study and insect identification hold their own against Xbox and Dora the Explorer. Rogan cites the time when an ornithologist used a mist net to capture a cowbird for tagging in front of amazed campers. Other times, children who were initially afraid of insects ended up being fascinated by them.

“The campers are into it,” Rogan reports. “When you’re in the presence of a wild animal, there’s a big wow factor.”

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