

Endless Boundless summer camp is an institute of imagination

By JOE ROBERTSON
The Kansas City Star



Eleven-year-old Holly Murfey listened to Audrey Lauber, both of Kansas City, last month during the Endless Boundless camp.

ALLISON LONG/Kansas City Star

Welcome to the world of the Glider-Stomper.

And the Strangulus Tuskus.

And the Sleece.

They live in a rainforest like none other.

These are the kinds of things that happen when three newly certified teachers, unable to find a job in the tight teaching market, decide to teach anyway. And when imaginations fly in an educational program they call Endless Boundless.

At the moment, a dozen Kansas City children are creating the veil of sounds for when they present their completed new world later this month.

A rising chorus of bird whistles emanates from the children while teacher Brooke Tuley records with a microphone. The scrapings and gnawings of insects join the sonic cloud, created by rubbing nail files. A pop from a cheek.

Behind them, a monolithic tree trunk made of papier mache and chicken wire stands at the center of their home for the summer — a round room in the Kansas City Young Audience’s building at St. Teresa’s Academy in Brookside.

The tree, explains teacher Tomomi Suenaga, is the living heart of their project. The children of various ages let their imaginations create a menagerie of jungle creatures whose lives are interwoven around this tree.

This is the complete learning experience Suenaga, Tuley and Audrey Lauber had in mind when the three job-searching friends began collaborating last fall.

They have children spending their summer Saturdays studying science, expressing it in three-dimensional art, and coloring it with murals, music, sound and dance.

“I like it that you can imagine all these things and turn it into stuff in a rain forest,” 11-year-old Holly Murfey said.

Like her Sleece — a plush, cotton-padded, cloud-like creature that looks huggable. But that’s part of its trick, she says, to look “cute” and scrunch up small, just before it pounces and devours like the predator it really is.

One thing 10-year-old Dean Dix has learned about Endless Boundless: “There aren’t many rules.”

So he can create his Strangulus Tuskus, a generally orange creature with a lethal set of fingers at the end of its elephantine nose.

“I can just be myself,” he says.

Not a surprising attitude, since that’s basically the formula that Lauber, Suenaga and Tuley used to create Endless Boundless.

The trio had met out in Kansas City’s music and arts scene and found themselves all in the same boat last fall — seeking teaching jobs.

Tuley might have actually kicked the thing in motion, spurred by her husband “to call Tomomi and Audrey up and make something happen,” she said. “We were tired of trying to find someone to let us teach. We wanted to just do it.”

By the spring, the teachers, while working day jobs, began pioneering their idea with the children of friends in Tuley's apartment.

They shaped a nature/art project and created the first line of creatures, including the Glider-Stomper with its head somewhat akin to a mosquito's, its graceful butterfly-like wings of crepe paper and its thick, rainbow-colored feet.

The work they were producing prompted Young Audiences to arrange a deal to give them work space for the summer.

Then they applied for, and won, a \$4,000 grant from the Charlotte Street Foundation.

They created a blog to chronicle and promote the project at <http://endlessboundlesskc.blogspot.com>, and they are focusing on a public show the last day of the summer session, Aug. 14.

"We're going to turn this whole space into a tiny rainforest," 15-year-old Alex Murfey said. "It's really cool."

They continue their labors, with green murals wet on the floor, paper and feathers scattered across tables, and others still working on the sounds. Crinkling paper. Drawing an eerie whine across a stretched guitar string.

It could be anything.

FIND OUT MORE

- The three teachers have created a blog to chronicle and promote the project at <http://endlessboundlesskc.blogspot.com>.

- They are focusing on a public show the last day of the summer session, Aug. 14. The camp is in the Community School of the Arts at 5601 Wyandotte St., in the Music and Arts Building on the campus of St. Teresa's Academy in Brookside.

To reach Joe Robertson, call 816-234-4789 or send e-mail to jrobertson@kcstar.com.

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Fourteen-year-old Aubrey Schimming of Kansas City worked on a papier-mâché plant last month during the Endless Boundless camp in Kansas City. Three teachers used a grant to launch the Saturday summer camp for students to combine multiple art forms into diversely creative projects. The camp not only reveals the artistic creativity of the students and teachers, but allows young educators to keep teaching the arts despite shrinking school budgets.

<http://www.kansascity.com/2010/08/03/2125515/endless-boundless-summer-camp.html#none#ixzz0wP7fMnis>