

Kids' Planet... with Thorne Nature Experience



ART, MUSIC, AND NATURE



by Dr. Oakleigh Thorne, II

In my last article I wrote about how science is cool. Now I'd like to write about art and music. I will also touch on how these interrelate with nature. I strongly believe that it is extremely important for young kids to have a chance to study and practice both art and music, because this helps develop creativity and imagination in each child. Yet these are the classes that usually get cut if there is a school budget crunch!

Kids should be given art materials such as color pencils, crayons, watercolor paints, clay, and blank paper. I stress blank paper because it gives children the freedom to draw any shape or size that comes into their heads. I dislike standard coloring books because they immediately limit this freedom. It doesn't matter if the proportions of what children draw or paint are distorted. In fact, I feel that is often the real charm of kids' art.

For example, in a former article on imagination, I included as the graphic a crayon picture of a hummingbird that was given to me by a little girl to whom I had just shown a real hummingbird with a bright red throat. She was able to hold

the tiny bird in her hand before it flew away. This had so impressed her that she drew a huge bright red hummingbird that dominated the whole picture. It was the way she imagined it. I still have that drawing on my office wall!

The picture above was given to me by a little boy right after I showed him a real Red-winged Blackbird that we had caught at our Federal Bird Banding Station at the Thorne Nature Experience headquarters. He even noticed that the red in the wing had a yellow border and he clearly showed that in his drawing.

I remember in the 1950s and 1960s when the Boulder Valley School District put on an annual show of children's art at the University of Colorado Museum. I would always come out of that show smiling and happy because creativity and imagination were everywhere!

As far as music is concerned, the more variety to which children are exposed the better. For very young

kids, various percussion instruments are always fun. They love to beat upon them, which develops their sense of rhythm. It's great if they can experiment with a keyboard, piano, recorder, or small xylophone...anything that produces musical tones. It is also good for children to learn to sing. If you can sing a musical tone to a child and they can reproduce the same note, even if an octave higher, then that shows they already have some musical ability.

Nature is full of music and art. I used to teach a course in nature photography at New Vista High School in Boulder. It was surprising to me, even in winter, the amazing variety of images my students were able to capture with their cameras. We would put on a show for the whole school every quarter. I taught them to "move in close" and discover some of the smallest items, like a tiny flower or a bug.

In the spring is a very good time to hear nature's music. It is a time when the birds

are singing the most. Chorus frogs are sounding off and maybe even a coyote is howling. Our Thorne office is at Sombrero Marsh, and I will often tell a group of school children to stand quietly, close their eyes, and notice what they can hear. With your eyes closed, your sense of hearing becomes much sharper.

I hope that art, music, and nature become important to you in your life. I feel very lucky to have enjoyed all of these.

Dr. Thorne is founder and honorary president of Thorne Nature Experience (formerly Thorne Ecological Institute) in Boulder. For 63 years they have helped "connect youth to nature!" For information about their programs for kids, check their website at www.thornenature.org or please email info@thornenature.org or call (303) 499-3647, ext. 100.



Artwork by James Manning.

