

Youth Enrichment Through Outdoor Artistic Expressions

by Rebecca Patterson-Markowitz



On June 3, 2015 seven students from the Patagonia Youth Enrichment Center participated in their first outing with the Seeds of Stewardship program. In an effort to provide innovative summer programming for the students of the Patagonia and Mountain Empire region, the ATA is offering outings with an emphasis on the creative arts outdoors. Part one of the series focused on the fundamentals of drawing.

Students gathered in the afternoon, after summer school, at the youth center for a lesson that covered form, values, proportion and perspective. This lesson was inspired by the classes offered at the Drawing Studio in Tucson, where I have been trained to teach Fundamentals in Drawing. One of the core principles is planning a solid map of the drawing on the page before getting caught up in the details. This is an important lesson for any kind of endeavor, and it was easy to draw a simple parallel to our expedition of the day. A hiker on the Arizona Trail couldn't start with details. They would first need to know that they were in Southern Arizona, then identify which passage of the trail they were going to be hiking, before planning which trailhead to go to, and figuring out the meanderings of the trail.



Students and leaders from the Patagonia Youth Enrichment Center prepare to hit the trail.



Anika depicts desert grass in fine detail.

The students practiced implementing all of the fundamentals in a series of sketches and drawings inside the center before taking the activity out on the trail. Parker, a recently graduated 7th grader said, looking at his creation after the first lesson, "This is the best thing I've ever drawn." When it seemed that everyone had grasped the fundamentals each student grabbed a sketchbook and some water and snacks.

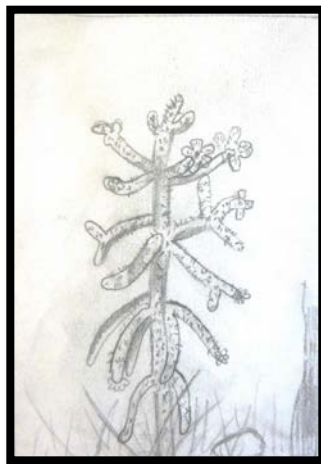
We began our hike at the Harshaw Road Trailhead, just a short drive away from the youth center's front door. The afternoon sun was strong but there was a

cooling breeze and plenty of shade. Only three of the students had heard of the Arizona Trail before the outing, so the map at the Harshaw Road Trailhead gave us the opportunity to look at Passage 3, which leads straight into the center of their town. It was also a good opportunity to introduce Leave No Trace ethics, which we decided should be abridged to “take nothing but your photos and drawings, and leave only your footprints.” We made our way up the slopes taking in the scraggly mesquites and oaks until we were ready to take a break and begin drawing. The students had each been given viewfinders, another artist’s tool to help them determine what they wanted to include and exclude in their frame. They settled in to the silence with their sketchbooks, pencils, and creativity.



Caitlin, age 14, delicately draws a buckthorn cholla.

Another emphasis of the lesson was that students should draw what they were actually seeing, and not what their mind’s idea of a tree or a mountain should be. This kind of drawing from observation insists that their eyes constantly return to the scene in front of them, instead of getting stuck on the page. This slow and consistent attention can create a kind of intimacy with the subject of the drawing. By the time we were ready to head back toward the van each student had produced a beautiful memento of the day. We arrived back to the youth center in the late afternoon sun, feeling the coolness of the approaching evening and lively with the excitement of the outing and the freedom of summer.



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