

Molding young artists

Home-schoolers learn to express themselves

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DANVILLE — Abigail Colbert, 15, draped her little lizard made from self-hardening clay over a bowl to dry. Her sister Alexandria, 17, carefully molded a braided piece of soft clay along the edge of the small bowl she had fashioned.

These girls are the oldest of eight children in the family, and seven are currently being home schooled by their mother. They are also among the 15 home-schooled students, ages 5 through 17, enrolled in the Danville Art League's seven-week art class, which runs through Feb. 22. Nine of these students took the introductory class offered last fall.

"I've been home schooled since kindergarten," Alexandria said, "and I've only learned about art from books up until now. I am really enjoying the hands-on experience that I'm getting in this class, and I especially like working with clay."

Carol Garver, who retired after teaching art in the Danville public schools for 25 years, is the volunteer instructor for the classes. She has three assistants: artist Kem Wiggins, retired teacher Trudy Wyatt and 17-year-old Paul Groth, who is a home-schooled student.

"We're exploring a variety of art media in this class," Garver said. "We've already done watercolor, and I plan to do an easy-cut block print with them. We'll also work with colored pencils, charcoal, and oil pastels."

She said many of the students are interested in painting self-portraits, so a class session will be devoted to learning that technique.

"I feel privileged to be trusted with these children who have been taught only by their mothers up until now," Garver said. "All these students are used to being in the same classroom as their brothers and sisters, so putting all ages together works well for us. The older children help the younger ones."

Garver said the classes were started in response to parents' requests for children's classes.

"We've had teens show up at our adult classes," she said. "Last summer the art

league sponsored a class for all children that ended up with 30 students, so we set up tents on the lawn to accommodate everybody.

"There's really a lot of interest in art classes for children, especially since many of the elementary schools have discontinued their art programs."

Garver said there were many art league members who volunteered to help with the class. "They do it because they love art and they love kids," she said. "They find this experience very rewarding."

Karen Scott of Westville has three children in the class: Lauren, 15, Patrick, 13, and Rachel, 11. Patrick was fashioning



Molly Smith, 9, works on sculpting an angel during a art class at the Danville Art League. Matt Huber / Commercial-News

a motorcycle out of clay to resemble his new dirt bike.

"My kids are really enjoying this class," Scott said, "and it's nice that the art league provides all the supplies that they need. I've heard a lot of positive comments from other parents about this class."

Nelle Smith, 11, along with her sister Molly, 9, have been home-schooled for three years now. Nelle was making a clay face of a man with a mustache. "It's supposed to be my Dad," she explained. "He had to grow a mustache because he plays Otto Frank in the 'Diary of Anne Frank' play."

A little girl was making an angel holding a baby for her clay figure, and she planned to give it to her mother. Another child enjoyed stretching the clay into the shape of a long snake.

Garver taught the students some techniques for bonding pieces of clay together. She first placed her hands together, showing how easily she could take them apart. Then she interlocked her fingers. "Now see how hard it is to pull my hands apart," she said. "That's what bonding is."

She explained that it's smarter to pull out things like ears on a clay figure rather than to bond on a separate piece of clay to make the ear. "When the clay hardens, it shrinks," Garver said, "and your cat's ears could fall off if they are not bonded properly."

Garver passed around a variety of books with cat pictures.

"I suggest that you make a cat out of your clay," she said, "but you don't have to. It's important that your cat can balance itself, regardless of the position that you put him in."

Hannah Lawson, 12, comes all the way from Hoopeston to attend the class in Danville. "It's the first time that I've really worked with clay," Hannah said, "and I'm having a lot of fun with it."

Garver and her assistants work intently throughout the two-hour class, moving among the students and giving them individual attention.

Several of the younger children were making bowls with the help of Wyatt. Aria Borchert and Addie Wright, both age 5, were

working on tiny clay bowls with the help of Wyatt. "If you're not happy with your pot," Wyatt told them, "then you can just wad it up and start over again."

There's also an art appreciation component to all of Garver's classes. "We put up all of the children's work so we can all enjoy it," she said. The art students also area required to clean up their work area before they leave for the day.

FYI

The Danville Art League plans to offer after-school classes for elementary school children and also another summer art camp for kids. Cost of the current art class is \$50 for seven sessions, with reduced rates for additional children from the same family.

For further information, call the art league at 442-9264 or Trudy Wyatt at 443-3721.