



Growing Deeper Through Partnerships

Article and Photos by SARAH GRELLA

To achieve the remarkable success of reaching over one-half million young Texans per year, the Texas Wildlife Association nurtures and relies heavily on countless partnerships, both personal and professional. In North Texas, more than half of all TWA field investigation days are made possible through the successful partnership with Imagination Fort Worth.

Imagination Fort Worth is an independent non-profit organization that creates curriculum and educational programs that seek to enhance students' engagement in history, science, math and language through the creative integration of art, dance, music and theater. Since its establishment in 1989, Imagination Fort Worth has, reached more than 5 million Texas students through their free programing in Tarrant County.

Two years ago, the enthusiasm and creativity of Imagination Fort Worth and TWA came together with the common mission of exposing students to new outdoor experiences in the hope of creating a brighter future across Texas. TWA had recently created a program to educate students within the Trinity River watershed about water ecology and stewardship in their local communities. Around the same time, a monument of Major Ripley Allen Arnold, the founder of Fort Worth, was erected on the banks of the Trinity River just north of downtown at Panther Island Pavilion. This provided a prime opportunity to expand TWA's Trinity River Program by educating students about the modern day river by first starting with its historic past.

Through their expertise in integrating science, history and art, Imagination

Fort Worth developed a lesson about the importance of the geographical location of Fort Worth and its relationship to the Trinity River. They further integrated arts into this activity through a theatrical performance by local actress and story teller Sheran Keyton. For this lesson, Keyton appears in costume and persona as a time-traveling black American from the 1800s. She imparts the integrated history of Fort Worth and the Trinity River, fully engaging students and leaving younger participants believing that she might have actually traveled through time to teach them.

The successful partnership between Imagination Fort Worth and TWA did not stop at the Trinity River's banks. As they continued to develop an understanding of each other's needs and goals, collaborations for field investigation days



Adaptation Artistry student creations are displayed in the classroom. Pulling from their newly acquired ecological experience and knowledge, students are provided crafting materials to create their own species of bird that is physically adapted to its imaginary environment.





Students from the Applied Learning Academy (Fort Worth ISD) are about to begin a field investigation day on the Dixon Water Foundation's Bear Creek Ranch.



Fort Worth performing artist Sheran Keyton teaches about the founding of Fort Worth through song and storytelling.

expanded to local ranches. These land ecology and stewardship field days focus on bobwhite quail, as they are an important indicator species for native Texas rangeland health. Students explore the life history, anatomy/physiology and adaptations of the quail in their native environment on the Dixon Water Foundation's Bear Creek Ranch, 20 miles west of Fort Worth.

Following the field investigation day, Imagination Fort Worth and TWA further engage students using Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's (W.I.L.D.) lesson—Adaptation Artistry. Pulling from their newly acquired ecological experience and knowledge while activating their creativity through art exploration, students are provided crafting materials to create their own species of bird that is physically adapted to its imaginary environment and completed with a descriptive scientific name.

Aside from providing the pivotal creation and implementation of arts integrated lessons in the classroom, Imagination Fort Worth has made it possible for students to attend these outdoor field investigation days. Although the programs we have partnered to create are cost free, many school districts do not have the transportation budget to allow students to participate. Imagination Fort Worth has removed this cost barrier through their partnership with FWISD, providing free programming for their students over the past 25 years. In response to the years of programming, buses for all Imagination Fort Worth programs are provided as an in-kind donation from the FWISD Visual and Performing Arts Department.

Without these crucial contributions we would not have the explosive success we continue to experience through our invaluable partnership with Imagination Fort Worth. For the past two years and continuing into a third, this partnership has grown to serve around 1,200 students per year, providing each with a novel experience and knowledge of their local watershed, rangeland and community, all while encouraging students to creatively apply their knowledge.

As TWA's partnership with Imagination Fort Worth continues to grow, we are exploring the development of new arts integrated lesson plans in order to reach a broader spectrum of young Texans. Despite these field investigation days, we acknowledge that not every student will grow up to work in natural resources or as an artist, but we are confident they will grow up to be active community members. Through its partnership with Imagination Fort Worth, TWA aspires to develop a multi-faceted emotional connection between Texas youth and their ecological community.

If you would like to engage in this successful partnership, please reach out to us at (800) 839-9453. Your passion has a place in making our impact stronger. 🌱

