

Odyssey Science Camp Inspires Young Learners to Imagine the Possibilities in STEM

by Megan Weiser
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EDWARDSVILLE - From investigating forensic evidence and building, coding and battling robots to getting an up-close look at incredible birds of prey like owls and hawks, students attending the Southern Illinois University Edwardsville STEM Center's Odyssey Science Camp are becoming enthralled with the possibilities of a future in STEM.

Odyssey Science Camp has a long history of engaging young learners entering grades 2-7 through hands-on activities and thrilling STEM experiences, in order to inspire and ignite a passion for continued exploration. The SIUE STEM Center's 2019 camp, held July 15-26, transformed participants into explorers, voyagers, math movers and shakers, super sleuths, and geared up robot experts.

"It's important for kids to experience the many components of STEM to help them decide what they may like best when they get older," said camp director Elizabeth Knierim. "Engaging kids in science at a young age helps them develop a natural passion. At camp, they get to learn and investigate and then apply concepts. We offer opportunities that are different from their school experience."

The Super Sleuths group learned "crime" investigation techniques like collecting evidence, fingerprinting and handwriting analysis. Campers in the Geared Up section built and programmed robots, which then competed in a tug of war contest.

"I've been coming since Odyssey 1," said seventh grade student Laura Slater, of Glen Carbon. "This year, I'm working with robots. I love camp, because we're not just in the classroom watching someone teach all day. We get to play games and build things. It's great!"

"This is my first year attending, and I'm glad I came, because I like math and science," said fifth grade student Katie Hellrung, of Troy. "Today, we're working on chromatography and analyzing black ink."

Younger students in the Explorers class dissected owl pellets. Then, they enjoyed a special visit from Treehouse Wildlife Center Education Coordinator Jeff Capps, Buddy the Screech Owl, Aspen the Kestrel and Cirrus the Red-tailed Hawk.

"I wanted to come to camp, because my brother really liked when he went, and I like science a lot," said third-grade student Grant Johnson, of Edwardsville. "I've dissected owl pellets. We made a ping pong ball launcher using Bernoulli's Equation, and we learned about other birds. I knew if you touched a bird the mother wouldn't take care of it, but I didn't know they could imprint you."

Odyssey Science Camp also offered participants two recreational periods daily with options of swimming, board games and nature walks.

The Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Center for STEM Research, Education and Outreach comprises an independent group of researchers and educators, innovating ways to engage students and the public in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). Within the SIUE Graduate School, the Center brings together research faculty, graduate students and practitioners to conduct education research. The Center contributes educational expertise to SIUE undergraduate classes and provides professional development for K-12 teachers. The Center boasts a significant library of equipment and resources, which are available for loan at no cost to campus and regional instructors. For more information, visit <https://www.siue.edu/stem/about.shtml> or contact STEM Center Director Sharon Locke at (618) 650-3065 or stemcenter@siue.edu.