

Young actors present ‘Tempest’ in the arboretum



Rob Salas, portraying William Shakespeare, guides the audience and his young actors through their rendition of “The Tempest” in the Davis Shakespeare Camp final showcase Friday night at the UC Davis Arboretum. Wayne Tilcock/Enterprise photo

By [Anne Ternus-Bellamy](#), Davis Enterprise
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The goal, says Rob Salas, “is to plant the seed.”

Introduce children to the wit and humor and fun that can be found in the words of William Shakespeare and a few years down the line, when they are introduced to it again in a school setting, they’ll immediately get excited.

“Even if they only remember the words subconsciously, it will turn them on, rather than turn them off,” Salas said.

That’s why Salas and colleague Gia Battista are serving as head counselors of the Davis Shakespeare Camp, which has been taking place in the UC Davis Arboretum the past two weeks.

During those two weeks, the children participating — all ages 7 to 13 — have been absorbing the story of “The Tempest,” each of them learning two roles, designing their own costumes and making props. They also learned two dances — including an authentic Elizabethan dance — as well as an original song with lyrics drawn straight from the text of “The Tempest.”

They’ve done it all under the guidance of Salas and Battista, who are artistic directors of the Davis Shakespeare Ensemble, as well as other ensemble members. And they pulled it all together for a performance in the arboretum on Friday night.

For the adult ensemble members, it’s a chance to introduce children to the work they love in the same setting where they frequently perform — the Davis Shakespeare Ensemble partners with the arboretum for its performances.

“We love being in the arboretum,” Salas said.

So, clearly, did the children, who gathered daily in the gazebo to practice under the watch of their energetic counselors, who helped make Shakespeare’s words come alive for their young charges.

“One of the ways to make Shakespeare universal is through music and dance,” Salas said. “And when you explain the words, they get it.”

“Then it becomes more like figuring out a puzzle than something inaccessible,” he added.

While Friday night’s performance marked the end of camp for these children, there was no time to rest for the adults: On Monday, Salas, Battista and the rest of the counselors will start all over again, with a new batch of kids for another two-week camp.

This is the ensemble’s second year of Davis Shakespeare Camp in the arboretum, Salas said. Last year, they intentionally started out small in order to work out kinks and tweak the format.

“It’s worked out really well,” he said.

This year, organizers almost tripled the number of kids enrolled and filled up not one but two camp sessions fairly quickly. The second camp also will feature acting workshops, theater games, crafts, songs and dances, all culminating in a performance.

Another tempest is about to blow through the arboretum.

To learn more about the camps, or the Davis Shakespeare Ensemble, email davis.shakespeare@gmail.com or call (530) 802-0998.

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