

SMA Gifted and Talented Students Explore UT

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Students in Seashore Middle Academy's gifted and talented program, SEA (Seashore Enriched Academics), traveled to Austin to "Explore UT" on March 1. The event, held on the University of Texas campus, featured hundreds of sessions and hands-on activities for students of all ages.

"Since we're a college preparatory middle school, it's important not only to give our GT students different learning experiences on our campus but also to expose them to academic thought and experimentation beyond secondary school," language arts teacher Shannon Trial said.

To qualify for SEA, interested students completed a portfolio at the beginning of the year, complete with application materials, samples of their work, and letters of recommendation. If selected, students then participate in the program for one or more subjects, depending on their individual strengths and areas

of interests.

Eighth grader Al Stevens, for instance, participates in SEA in science and language arts. He aspires to design automotive exteriors or design levels for a game studio, and Explore UT expanded his knowledge of his field.

"I got to talk to game designers, and they helped me find software for making games, which I've since ordered," he said. "I saw robotic cars and talked to automotive engineering students about building small race cars. It was fun, entertaining, and useful," he said.

Al is already on his way, having built a robot programmed in PBasic that uses infrared to detect objects and avoid them. SEA students complete a six-weeks project in each of their SEA courses, and Al's robot has been his long-term science project. This six weeks, he plans to swap the infrared for a sonar object detection system.

SEA language arts student Rebecca Ortiz enjoyed the entire UT

experience. "It was really exciting getting to walk around the campus," she said. Her favorite programs featured Russian food and robotic dogs playing soccer.

Rebecca's ongoing SEA project, a story about a black-arts wizard named Loki, is already 8,000 words in length. "It was intended only to last one six weeks, but the story took on a life of its own and kept going."

Each six weeks, SEA students meet with their supervising teachers and map out an individual project. Sample topics range from Jared Cruz-Aedo's math research on the Fibonacci sequence to Sydney Bernal's poetry writing.

The individuality and flexibility of the SEA program is what makes it unique, according to SMA Principal Barbara Beeler. "This program allows us to capitalize on individual student interests and passions," she said, "and allows them the opportunity to grow intellectually."



Left: Al presents his SEA project, a robot named Kioko, to his science class. According to Stevens, Kioko is Japanese for "meets world with happiness."

Kelly and Sydney show off the slime they made in a "Science Safari" session at UT during the SEA field trip on March 1. Hands-on activities allowed the students to create a variety of items, such as the "thinking hat" Sydney made at one of the "Cultural Crossroads" booths.

