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Kids nurture knack for numbers at annual See Math Camp

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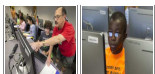
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Stuart Villanueva/ The Eagle

Instructor Philip Yasskin helps Haden Bayer with a computer animation during a mathematics camp on the Texas A&M Campus Friday, July 11, 2014. (Eagle Photo/ Stuart Villanueva)



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Posted: Sunday, July 13, 2014 12:00 am

By **CAITLIN PERRONE** caitlin.perrone@theeagle.com | [0 comments](#)

Claire McAdams, 10, bit her lip while she placed the drawing she created on Friday, a green and blue object with four multicolored legs sticking out in different directions, on top of a setup of three mirrors.

"If you put it at the centerpoint and you turn it, it makes cool pictures," she said while she demonstrated how her drawing created different reflections. "Mine's very simple, because I like it that way. You have to do four corners and they can't be symmetrical."

McAdams is one of 37 students from local area schools who have been learning how to write and crack codes, build kaleidoscopes and design computer animations at a two-week camp at Texas A&M University. The sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders just finished their first week of the 2014 See Math Camp, a summer camp organized and taught by Texas A&M associate professor Philip Yasskin and instructional assistant professor David Manuel.

The students spend four hours a day learning cryptology and playing with shapes, working with mirrors and studying extended problem solving. The camp is a summer educational enrichment program geared for students who are gifted in mathematics and science, and it allows them to build upon activities that they may have learned in school. Between 75 and 200 applicants usually apply each year, but only 45 to 60 are selected.

The children moved between three classrooms in the Blocker building on the Texas A&M campus on Friday afternoon, playing with mirrors, working on their animations in the computer lab and listening to Manuel teach abstract algebra that will give them the tools to solve Rubik's Cubes.

"I tell the kids they're not necessarily going to become 35-second expert solvers, but they'll have the mathematical tools to be able to come up with solutions themselves," Manuel said.

In the computer lab, 11-year-old Audrey Vestal typed out computer code in the program Maple 18, a technical computing software.

"I've always been a computer person in my family," she said while she worked on plotting the tongue of a frog to make it hit a fly.

At the end of the two-week camp, the top animations will win prizes, and the top winner will take home a copy of Maple 18, Yasskin said.

Later in the afternoon, McAdams moved to the computer lab to work on writing code that would create the Big Ben

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clock with a blue bird flying past, but grabbed a senior counselor for help.

"My Big Ben doesn't look anything like the actual Big Ben," she huffed to counselor Don Van Huyck. He sat down next to her and walked her through adding a face on her clock.

Yasskin and Manuel created the camp back in 2002, and now many of the students who went through the camp have returned as junior and senior counselors.

Parth Sarin attended the camp in 2006, and the 3-D animation he created of Pac-Man won him a top prize. He will be a freshman at A&M Consolidated High School in the fall, and plans to continue doing more with math, a topic that makes his face light up.

"I started learning about how to really gain a higher understanding of mathematical concepts, and when I had this insight, math was a tool and I could do so much more with it," he said.

One of Yasskin's children attended the See Math Camp the first year it was started in 2002, and all three of Manuel's children have attended. One even served as a camp counselor this year.

Aside from the camp, Yasskin also leads the TAMU Math Circle, which provides enrichment activities for students that are gifted in math and sciences. As of now, students in grades five through eight are served, though he expects to expand the circle to grades nine and 10 in the fall. During the school semesters, the TAMU Math Circle meets Saturday afternoons on Texas A&M campus in the Blocker building. Those interested can visit mathcircle.tamu.edu for more information.

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