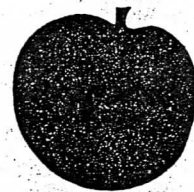


# CAMPING & EDUCATION

Our Town  
Section



## Vacation creativity

By SUSAN STRIKER

This summer in camp your child will have many significant experiences and participate in many activities that you will not share. When you ask, "What did you do at camp?" in all likelihood the answer will be "Nothing!" At summer's end, however, you will be presented with what many have called the ultimate \$1,500 ashtray. You may not be present for all those ballgames, mealtimes and campfires, but you will have many years to look at that ashtray! The art projects that your child makes throughout the summer will be the only tangible object that can be packed in a trunk and brought home. In fact, if you know how to look at children's art, you can learn a lot about a camp's philosophy just by looking at the projects that are sent home at the end of the summer. If your child comes home with a project identical to every other child's project, you can be very sure that the camp does not encourage individuality or self-expression. This is not a place that will help your child find him or herself, but rather one that views children as cogs in a wheel. When children's pictures look as if they really were made by children, it is a safe bet that the people who run the camp really like and respect kids. That alone can be enough to recommend the camp.

When children finish school for the year, they leave behind their old gym suits and last year's books, but they take their active minds to camp with them! Although we associate camp with fresh air and physical activity, children return from camp with much more added weight, sun tans and muscles. They are learning every minute they are at camp, perhaps even more than they do at school. The relaxed atmosphere at most camps and the increased opportunities for social interaction, can actually be more conducive to learning than the rigidity of many schools.

One of the reasons we send our children to camp is to broaden their horizons. Counselors and specialists provide exposure in areas that parents often cannot. Sports camps recruit professional athletes to share their skills with the campers, camp musicals—often a highlight of the summer—are organized by highly trained musicians, food is prepared by licensed dieticians and your child's health is

art. Camp art budgets, that could be devoted to paying the salary of someone who can help bolster a child's confidence in his or her own problem-solving skills, is often spent on purchasing molds. The "art" bunk is all too often a place where children spend their time pouring clay into adult-made molds, tracing or copying adult-made pictures and building adult-designed projects. Camp directors have told me that they believe that parents want to see "pretty" art projects of recognizable objects, so that is what they send home. In our society we all must live by certain rules, but we also must learn how to make our own rules. Camp can ideally be a place where children begin to learn about how to be independent. It should never be allowed to become a place to reinforce dependence by imposing unnecessary adult rules.

When selecting a camp for your child, ask to see art projects made the previous summer. If they are indistinguishable from each other and clearly adult-planned, make your objections known. Let the directors know that you value self-expression over decoration and individuality over assembly-line art. Camps are profit-making organizations that want very much to please you. Profit-minded camp directors will respond to your desires. Camps provide a "home away from home" for the summer, but there is no substitute for caring, interested, involved parents in seeing that children get off to a good start in life! ●

*Susan Striker, the author of the best selling series "The Anti-Coloring Books," is the founder and director of Young at Art Studios, where art and creativity are taught through her unique techniques. Ms. Striker has also written "Please Touch" (Simon and Schuster) which is a book for parents on how to raise a creative independent child. It will be out this fall.*