

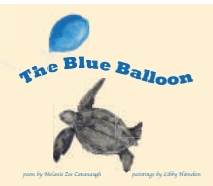


Into the Deep

KIDS BOOK SHEDS LIGHT ON ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Author and marine scientist Melanie Cavanaugh uses an unlikely character to draw attention to environmental issues in her book, **The Blue Balloon** (\$19.95, Green Anemone Press). The book describes the journey of a blue balloon that is released from a birthday party, makes its way to the

ocean and attracts a leatherback sea turtle who mistakes the balloon for food. With whimsical illustrations by Libby Heineken, the book contains a deeper moral, about protecting ocean communities. "We have a responsibility to teach [children] better and show everyone that there are different options to party favors besides balloons," Heineken says. * BY FALLON MAYER



If You Build It: Hemming Park continues to unveil improvements to its public space with Imagination Playground, an interactive playground comprised of a large set of building blocks. The blocks are made of a lightweight foam, soft to the touch but firm enough to build structures and shapes. Unlike traditional playgrounds, the mobile set (which was first unveiled in late March) allows children to create a play space of their own. "Until we really understand how people are using the park, it's best to keep [additions] as fluid and flexible as possible," says Keith Marks, marketing and community outreach director. Similar playground sets are currently in use in museums, hospitals and parks in Manhattan, Boston and Chicago. * BY COURTNEE JAMES

EYE ON THE PRIZE

LOCAL PROS OFFER TIPS TO KEEP KIDS ENGAGED, EVEN IN SUMMER BY CHRISTINA BOYLE CUSH

Spring fever and summer sirens challenge students to stay academically minded at the end of a long school year. Here's advice from two local education pros to keep your little Einsteins interested in learning and studying through that last bell and over summer vacation

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLERS

Create a reward system. "Come up with one that's not hard for you to maintain," says Edward C. Taylor, a licensed psychologist based in Ponte Vedra Beach and Mandarin with a specialty in child and adolescent education. "You don't just motivate with material goods. Most kids would be happy playing with friends." Or treat kids to fun-time with you, so parents or caregivers aren't just taskmasters.

Maximize down time. "Encourage kids to constructively use their quiet moments at home," Taylor suggests. You want your kids to say, "I have free time, so what can I

do that's exciting?" Taylor says that kids will learn how to structure time while developing their creativity and organizational skills. For starters, dump out the Lego basket and tell them to freestyle build. Or you can provide a basket of art materials for an hour each day and tell your child to go nuts.

Get them hooked on books. Some kids don't like reading for pleasure, says Taylor. But, he adds, "Audio books are great. Your kid can listen to information and vocabulary in an audio story that may be more interesting and easier for them to absorb than reading paper books."

MIDDLE SCHOOLERS

Take a field trip. "We know that our girls are tired of being in class by the spring, so we incorporate a lot of activities to keep them engaged," says Renee McQueen, executive director of PACE Center for Girls, Jacksonville. McQueen recommends setting up an appointment with your legislative representatives in Tallahassee to learn

