

## BRAIN FOOD FOR SUMMER

HOW TO KEEP YOUR KID'S MIND FROM GOING TO POT DURING THE OFF SEASON. BY AMY NANCE

**If ever there is a time when your child may descend into excess and anarchy, it is summer.** Only a hop, skip and a jump from a happily still-in-school May and the cheerful, just-liberated-from-it early June, July presents parents and grandparents with the enervating dilemma of being as clever as their kid's teachers without the benefit of lesson plans, institutionalized naptime or a cafeteria. July is when the beach is too hot, when the days are longer than seems necessary or wise, when there are no more routine play dates, because everybody's on vacation. July is when camp is no longer a principled opportunity for your kid but the only way you can think to get some downtime. July is when you've run out of ideas or energy or both.

So why not give your kid's brain—and yours—a break? Doesn't summer exist precisely to entice us away from the office and into bathing suits, ice cream shops, animated films and malls? Aren't we supposed to loll for hours in the pool, let the kids run from backyard to backyard, spend countless hours on the Interstate or in line at Busch Gardens? Some may argue that summer is exactly the time to regress a little, but an article on CNN.com from last July asserts the opposite. "According to a new report from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, brain drain during the first five years of school

can hurt kids later on, in high school and college. The report also said that all children lost some skills over the summer, especially in math." A Johns Hopkins University study found that on average, kids fall 2.6 months behind in math skills, and in the fall, they have to be re-taught. "Summer brain drain," the widely-accepted condition your kid might find himself in this July, is a phrase worth Googling, if only for the piles of suggestions you'll get to relieve it: find your child a pen pal (reinforces writing and language skills), set up a lemonade stand (a covert math lesson) or take her stargazing (astronomy 101).

All of the studies agree that community programs are the first line of defense against summer malaise, citing achievement gaps between kids who have the opportunity to participate in them and kids who don't. No, you won't be fooling them into an educational opportunity with this approach—your kids will see it coming from miles away—but chances are they won't fight the sense of structure and purpose it will give their wanton days. Whether your child is zoning out on too much television or in town for a leisurely visit with the grandparents, we've got your brain drain problem covered, no homework required.

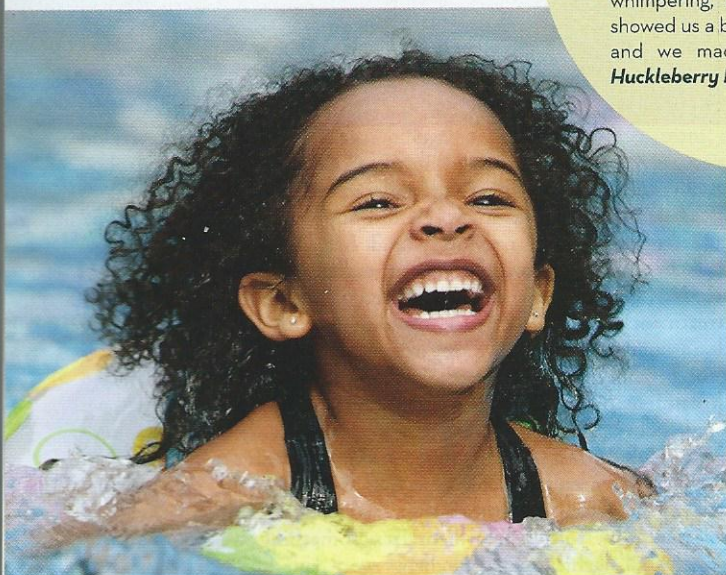
Pretty soon it begun to storm again, and this time worse than ever. The rain poured down, and never a light showed; every-body in bed, I reckon. We boomed along down the river, watching for lights and watching for our raft. After a long time the rain let up, but the clouds stayed, and the lightning kept whimpering, and by and by a flash showed us a black thing ahead, floating, and we made for it. **Chapter 13, Huckleberry Finn, Mark Twain**

### PROBLEM: MONSOON SEASON SOLUTION: STORYTIME

Average rainfall in Sarasota in July is 7.8 inches (compare that to June's 2.8), just shy of August's 8.9 and September's whopping 9.5. But studying precipitation patterns can only provide so much entertainment. If the prospect of another drizzly afternoon makes your kids want to curl up on the couch and read a good book—let them, but also let them know they don't have to go it alone: Little Bookworms summer storytime series turns reading into a social opportunity. Little literatis ages one to six can hear Granny Goose read and sing every Friday at 12:30pm from now until July 25. Bonus points: Granny Goose uses puppets and helps the kids through a craft project tied to the book's theme.

### PROBLEM: KIDS VISITING SOLUTION: CIRCUS AT THE OPERA, TURTLE WALK

Got kids in town? Do what you can't do everywhere else and take them to Historic Asolo Theater to see Majestic Ma Xi Tuan, an acro-



batic troupe from China. With shows running from June 24 to July 27, this is the perfect opportunity to show off Sarasota's marvelously strange history while giving kids a chance to experience the romance of the circus from the equally-thrilling environs of Asolo.

And even if the kids just want to spend everyday at the beach, take heart. The Ritz-Carlton, Sarasota's Turtle Walks are back. These free walks are open to the public and follow the tracks of nesting sea turtles at sunrise on Saturday mornings.

See the grace of the bare-back rider, the daring of the acrobat, the strangeness of the snake charmer, and the delight of the dancing pigs. **Who Put the B in the Ballyhoo?** Carlyn Beccia

**PROBLEM: TOO MANY DVDS  
SOLUTION: FILM SEMINAR AT RINGLING COLLEGE**

Film warrants study, so persuade your teen to look into it: Ringling College of Art and Design's Summer Teen Studios include a seminar conducted by a filmmaker as well as painting, drawing, color photography and illustration and design sessions, all running through July 18. Ringling's dynamic program is taught by celebrated faculty who help young artists develop an appreciation for craft and process.

Those who are younger still will benefit from an evening spent on Towles Court Artist Colony's third Friday gallery walk, which combines fresh air, live music, open studios and the indelible privilege of engaging with the artistic community. "By presenting objects made by hands, a gallery incites a child's imagination through the body," says Tobey Albright, gallery director at Mack b Projects. "When a child's imagination and reflections are discussed, the relationships between the child, the artwork and those involved in the conversation are expanded. Such conversations develop our ability to celebrate creative possibility and imagination."

**PROBLEM: ABJECT BOREDOM  
SOLUTION: KIDS IN THE KITCHEN AT WHOLE FOODS**

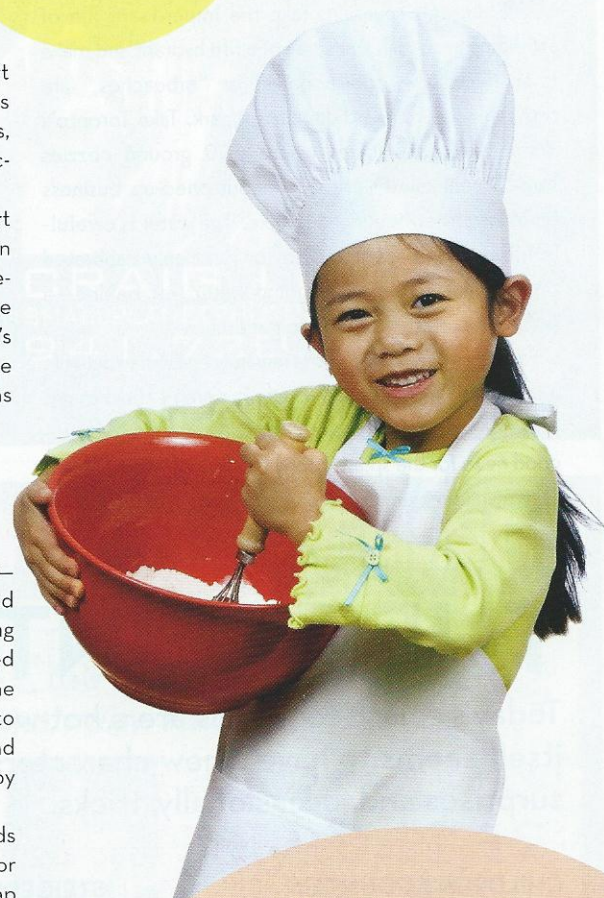
Summertime, / And the livin' is easy / Fish are jumpin' / And the cotton is high / Your daddy's rich / And your mamma's good lookin' / So hush little baby / Don't you cry **"Summertime," Porgy and Bess, DuBose Heyward and George Gershwin**

Childhood ennui often leads to great things—the production of increasingly complicated forts, an encyclopedic attention to rearranging one's bedroom, a mini Grand Canyon created from a dirt pile and a garden hose. When the imagination is underwhelmed it often rises to the occasion, fabricating something so vivid and fantastic as to surprise parents with its scrappy genius. Then again, sometimes it doesn't.

Fortunately for those times, Whole Foods offers us Kids in the Kitchen Cooking Classes for epicures ages 6-12, with sessions scheduled for July 27 and August 24. July's "Wrap it Up" class has kids learning how to wrap chocolate crepes and organic veggies (a nice prelude to August's "Make Your Own Pizza"). The free classes are a true immersion into eating and cooking organically and best of all, your kids get to tinker away in a kitchen that is not yours.

**PROBLEM: FRIENDS ON VACATION  
SOLUTION: GET CULTURE, TOGETHER**

If your kid's BFF is AWOL, and, worse still, to some cool place like Hokkaido or Lake Como, sign him up for The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art's brand new weeklong Culture Camps. Youth Programs Manager Jennifer Sabo says the Museum's approach to the camp was to make it as immersive as possible. "We said, let's study everything about the cultures—food, stories, learning some words from the language... Let's learn it all." And kids ages seven and up do that together, embarking on culture-specific projects. A week at Asian Adventure introduces them to the Japanese tradition of kite-making, while Venetian Carnivale has kids scanning the ceilings at Cà d'Zan for mask-making inspiration. Parents can pop in on Fridays for an hour to see what their culture cultures have been up to.



Little Bookworms, 8111 Lakewood Main St., Ste. 103, Lakewood Ranch, 941-907-3808; The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art and Historic Asolo Theater, 5401 Bay Shore Rd., Sarasota, 941-358-3180; The Ringling College of Art and Design, 2700 N. Tamiami Trl., Sarasota, 941-955-8866; The Ritz-Carlton, Sarasota, 1111 Ritz-Carlton Dr., Sarasota, 941-309-2160; Towles Court Artist Colony, [www.towlescourt.com](http://www.towlescourt.com); Whole Foods Market, 1451 1st St., Sarasota, 941-955-8500