



## **Beat the Summer Slump with Smithsonian Digital Badges**

### *Digital Badge Program Encourages Kids to Be Creative and Curious*

June through August usually signal the summer “brain drain” for kids on vacation. With all the trips to the pool and countless ice cream cones, it is easy to morph from student to summer beach bum in no time. September is just around the corner – it’s a good time to get back into the academic groove and Smithsonian has just the tools to do so.

Produced by the Smithsonian Center for Learning and Digital Access, Smithsonian Quest digital badges focus mainly on art, history and science subjects. Students participate in a series of online activities to learn about the badge subject and submit the completed assignments to SCLDA. A panel of Smithsonian educators and state- and nationally-recognized teachers review the submissions and either grant the students a digital badge or provide feedback on what the student missed to resubmit. Once the students earn their badge, it is added to the SCLDA kid-safe website to show what they’ve accomplished.

Teachers appreciate the individualized response each student receives. Eighth grade STEM/ELA teacher Margaret Gladin at J.N. Fries Magnet School in Concord, N.C. praises the program, saying, “I love the individual feedback my students receive after they have completed a quest,” Gladin says. “Sometimes they receive a positive comment, and sometimes they get a little more instruction if something is not quite up to par.”

In conjunction with the two-part online education conference, “From Where I Stand,” SCLDA introduced two new badges aimed at celebrating students’ heritage in April. Proud Publisher, designed for children in kindergarten to fourth grade, asks kids to create a book with images that represent their cultural heritage. Cultural Storyteller, designed for older kids, grades 5-12, focuses on an object from their family, its history and importance. Students and entire classrooms will submit work to SCLDA for feedback and a badge.

More recently, SCLDA introduced two new digital badges to its program: Culture Explorer and Astrophotographer. Kids who participate in the Culture Explorer badge activities will learn about other cultures' style of jewelry, clothing and other adornment and then identify their own adornments to successfully collect the badge. The Astrophotographer badge allows students to combine their inner scientist with their inner artists. Using their own computers to operate robotic telescopes at the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory in Cambridge, MA, and Amado, AZ, students will process digital data on the moon, sun, star clusters, nebulas and galaxies and turn them into astoundingly beautiful images that tell the story of the universe.

While these are some of the most recent addition to the Smithsonian Quests, there are over twenty digital badges to choose from and complete. Others include:

Cool Curator - While visiting a museum, take a look at the connection between objects, exhibits and larger themes within the building. Learn how curators compile exhibits to tell a story.

Portrait Reader - Learn about civil rights activists and leaders through portraiture. Then tell the story of an activist in your community.

Community Historian - Listen to songs from African American Civil Right Movement then create your own freedom song on the topic of your choice. Use the song to create a plan to make a difference in your community.

Historical Biographer - Learn about three American presidents and the legacies they left behind.

Symbols Spotter - Study portraits, presidential seals and the U.S. flag to learn the importance of symbolism in art and design.

Correspondent - Become your own record keeper by studying journals, diaries, newspaper and magazines. Using photographs and written documents, create your own accounts of important moments.

Dirt Detective - Learn about the importance of dirt and its value to all land ecosystems. Get your hands dirty while learning about environmental awareness.

TreeHugger - Become a citizen scientist while learning about classifying living organisms. This badge is part of the Smithsonian Global Treebanding Project.

Oral Historian - Reenact dramatic readings from historical accounts connecting life to water. Learn about life at sea in the 18th century and highlight someone in your community with a water-dependent career. Finally, choose an object that will allow future historians to better understand life as it is today.

Arts Advocate - Learn about the importance of art - visual, literary and performance - as an outlet for creativity.

Enviro-Scientist - Gather data from a local water source to learn about pollution, pH and the importance

of clean water in our ecosystems.

Culture Keeper - Create a slideshow and podcast exploring the similarities and differences between your culture and two others, including American Indian tribes.

Eco-Journalist - You are a reporter for the day. Learn how to write a catchy title, tagline and article about an issue that is important to you.

TimeTraveler - Investigate past, present and possible future underwater creatures by learning about Phoenix, the North Atlantic Right Whale at the National Museum of Natural History.

H2O Hero - Did you know that water impacts nearly every activity in our daily lives? Learn about ways to conserve water and limit wasteful usage as a civic responsibility.

Conservation Campaigner - Become a clean water crusader by learning about the Environmental Movement in the U.S. and the impact of the Clean Water Act of 1972.

Invasions Investigator - Use a global database to identify invasive species and learn about the impact they have on local ecosystem functions. Complete the badge by creating a public service announcement to inform others about invasive species.

The Smithsonian digital badge program stands above the pack in mixing fun with serious learning. The content of these badges is aligned to common core and national standards of learning. Smithsonian Quest badges have been incorporated state-wide in the New York education system, grades K-12 and are even used internationally. Researchers, curators, and educators work with SCLDA to develop these learning opportunities.

For more information on Smithsonian digital badges, visit <http://smithsonianquests.org/>.