THE ZOO AS A CANVAS…

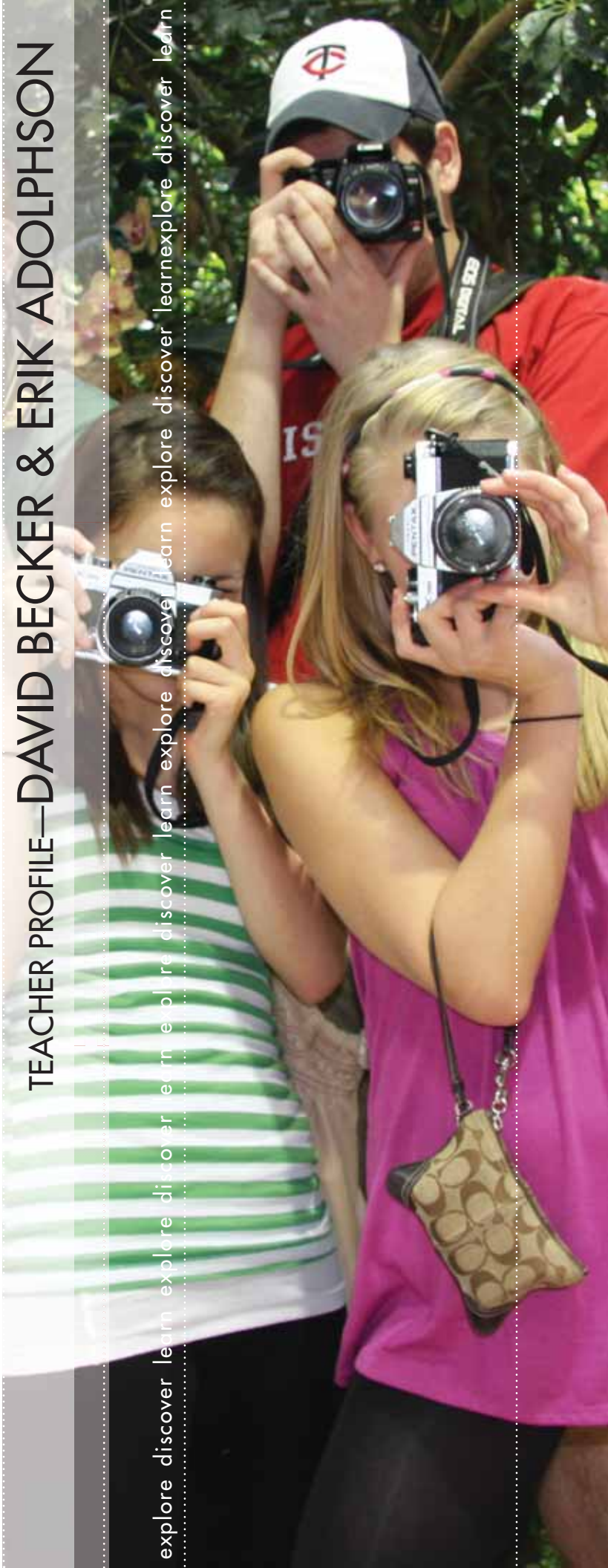
Click, click. Whirr. Flash! The Tropics Trail is alive with activity, but it's not an exotic animal making these noises. It's the photography students of St. Louis Park High School using the Minnesota Zoo as their inspiration.

For more than 10 years, the photography and art students of David Becker and Erik Adolphson have been using the Zoo as their canvas. Twice a year, Becker and Adolphson bring students to the Zoo to practice photography, drawing, and painting. It is part of their regular curriculum—a Zoo project is a class requirement, adding immensely to the students' portfolios.

Becker says they consider other venues, but the Zoo offers the widest variety. The Zoo "has it all," states Becker. More than just wildlife, there are people, architecture, plants, children, rockwork, and landscapes. Other techniques can be practiced as well, such as shooting through glass, practicing depth of field, lighting conditions, textures, contrasts, and using a variety of focal lengths. And for pure logistical reasons, the Zoo is weather-proof. Becker says, "we never have to worry about being rained out because the Zoo has plenty of indoor facilities…we can schedule our Zoo day for what works for us and never have to cancel."

Adolphson agrees, and has joined Becker on his twice-a-year Zoo visits. His drawing and painting students use the Zoo for multiple assignments. Some students practice drawing one subject in different ways—realistic, caricature, cartoon, graphic. Some students use photography and basic sketches to compile ideas or inspiration for future studio projects. Others merely observe, watching animals for how they move or taking note of the Zoo's on-site works of art (graphics, sculptures, and exhibit design). Adolphson also loves the Zoo for a technique called *en plein aire*, a French expression that means "in the open air." The Zoo is "a wonderful location for painting outdoors, on the spot," says Adolphson. Artists have been using this technique for centuries and the Zoo provides a wonderful backdrop with a multitude of subject matters.

You may think a visit to the Zoo is best for biology and science, but it offers so much more. Just about every subject can be found and practiced. Schedule a visit today, and see how the Minnesota Zoo can become a unique canvas for your curriculum.

TEACHER PROFILE—DAVID BECKER & ERIK ADOLPHSON

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