

PHOTO ESSAYS WITH STUDENTS

Anna Walker-Roberts, Teacher, Science Leadership Academy

The SLA CTE Digital Video program is a 3-year course during which students complete 1080 hours of instructional time in digital filmmaking and cinematography. The 3-year CTE Digital Video curriculum guides students through analyzing film/tv, making short videos on their cell phones, pre-production strategies, editing software, sound design, lighting set-ups, operating a DSLR camera manually, operating Sony ENG and Blackmagic cinema cameras, screenwriting, acting, directing, experiential media, and more. Students work alone, in small groups, and on large teams in projects that happen in class and all over Philadelphia.

We have a mantra in our class: “Filmmaking is problem solving.” When students run out of camera battery on a shoot, lose their files, have an actor quit mid-project, or realize their mic didn’t record, we practice saying this phrase out loud. On the first day of DigVid class I say this and ask that students who aren’t interested in problem solving drop the class. A film never goes completely according to plan. The 2019-2020 school year gave a different meaning to our phrase.

Our school, Science Leadership Academy, moved locations in the summer of 2019, and our new building was not complete before school started. One of the spaces that was still under construction in August of 2019 was the Digital Video classroom. We started the year with all our gear and computers in storage, and we shared a classroom with a history class. The door to the storage closet didn’t open and some of the flooring was missing because of exposed piping. We had class anyway. Creating a learning environment became problem solving.

Nineteen days into the school year it was discovered that our building was an active asbestos site. The inspector general recently published an in-depth publication about the mismanagement that led to this situation. Our school was displaced for three weeks. We attended stressful town halls and read about our school in the newspaper. Connecting with each other became problem solving.

We then transitioned to meeting on the first floor of the school district building and the basement of a nearby synagogue. Some classes met in storage spaces that had concrete floors. Carpet dividers separated some classes. The synagogue basement didn’t have wifi. My Digital Video class met in a district computer lab. I rolled some of my equipment down two city blocks on plastic carts so that my students could have some semblance of a normal year. We lived in that computer lab for four months. It felt like living in a hotel. How long would we stay there? Planning for the future was problem solving.

On President’s Day weekend, after significant asbestos abatement, we finally moved back into our building. For the first time that school year the Digital Video program had a space. Parents came to the school over the weekend to help me find my equipment, unpack it, decorate the room, and organize the storage. On February 18th, students had class in a proper space for the first time that school year. Computers still needed to be set up, storage needed to be labeled. The sound board needed to be found. Coming home was problem solving.

We spent an additional week moving in, updating software, and adjusting to the space, before starting one of our favorite activities of the year, 10 Day Film Challenge. Students jumped into the film challenge excited to make movies with each other, using a lot of our equipment for the first time that year. We wrapped up the last day of the film challenge on March the 13th in the midst of an announcement from Dr. Hite that we would be out of school for two weeks. I elbow-fived my student coordinator and jokingly yelled, “Have a great summer.” Nineteen days in our new space and we were already leaving. I have not seen most of those students in person since that day. Processing that is problem solving.

My priority as a teacher became completely about caring for student well-being rather than continuing my curriculum. Students were babysitting their siblings, working essential jobs, and struggling to access the internet. Their sleep schedules were out of whack. For seniors, the grief about their senior year was overwhelming. We had planned to create an immersive projection art gallery as a class with the theme of “Change.” That gallery will never exist. Realizing that your plans are cancelled is problem solving.

I stepped back from the class, realizing that I couldn’t modify our usual course material for the online format. I asked the questions, “How can this be fun?”, “How can this be simple?”, “How can this address our current moment?” I went back in time. I

thought analog instead of digital. I came up with the idea to purchase a disposable camera for each of my senior students so they could capture their experience in the pandemic. I drove each of these cameras to their houses and dropped them off from a distance. The only instruction given to students was to take what they had learned about storytelling over the course of three years and capture their lives during covid. Life is problem solving.

Following are selected photos from the project:

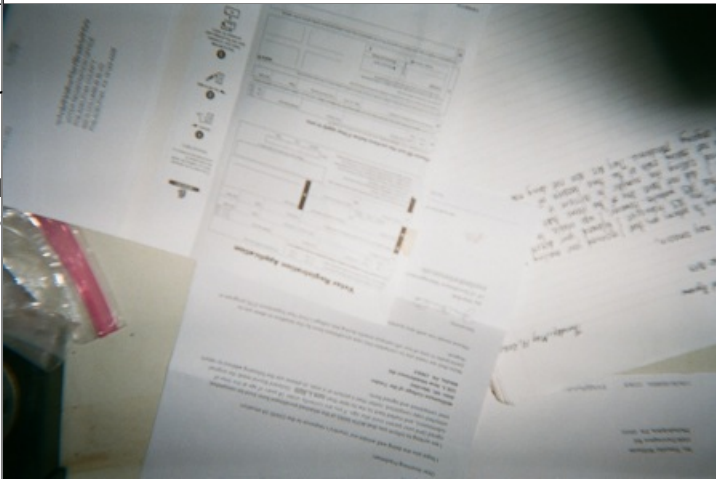
Tommy Conley & Grace Conley

Hanging Out In 2020



Tim Williams

In the Days of Paper Homework
Even though everything is closed and everything feels dead, life still goes on then....adulting hits.



Simone Cruice-Barnett

The Way I Looked When Senior Year Was Canceled



S i m o n e Cruice-
Barnett
MirrorMirror



Simone Cruice-
Barnett

Guillotine



Simone Cruice-
Barnett

Still Growing



Sarah Son

Watching The Clouds
My little sister and I
are always excited
when the sun sets
and beautiful colors
are painted across
the sky.



Sarah Son

Green, Purple, and
Dreams



Sarah Son

Blue

Just another photo of
the sky on a relaxing
day



Sarah Son

Cotton Candy 1

I enjoy watching the
clouds and hear the
sound of cars pass by



Sarah Son

Cotton Candy 2



Sam Gualtieri

*spiderman sitting on
my front steps at my
house*



Sam Gualtieri

*and he is just vibing
at my house*



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Ruby Ginsburg

Senior Year



Ruby Ginsburg

*Shoes I Wore to Walk
Places That Are
Closed*



Ruby Ginsburg
Yard



Ruby Ginsburg
Tiny Pieces



Ruby Ginsburg
Pink Carpet

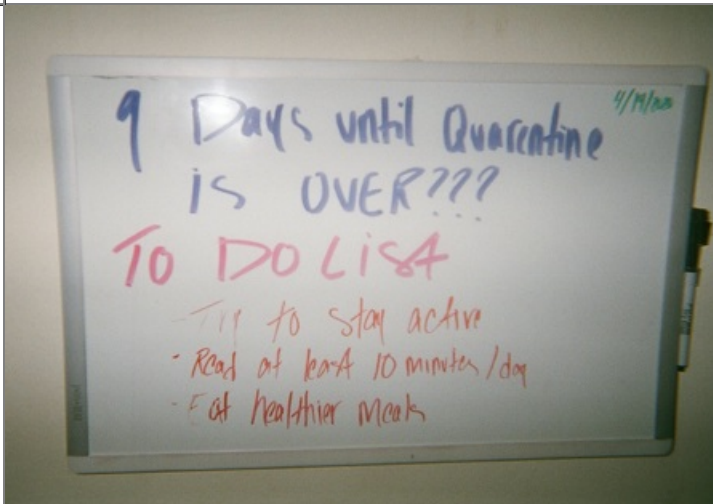


Ruby Ginsburg
Mom



Kyla Gladney-Enos

9 Days



Jorge DaSilva
Porch



Jorge DaSilva
Hoops



Jorge DaSilva
Normals

Typically nothing
crossed your mind
when leaving. Now
without a mask, you
feel exposed to this
new normal. WEAR a
mask!



Jorge DaSilva
Urban Dunes





Jorge DaSilva
Nothing Changes



Jorge DaSilva
5:06 am

Didn't sleep for a couple of nights just napping, or laying down to relax. Waking when it's dark outside and the sounds of distant explosions of the nearby ATMs.



Jorge DaSilva
meets from home



Jorge DaSilva
Self Portrait



Jade Gilliam

Glow



Jade Gilliam

*A Tree Grows In A
Pandemic*



Christina Eng

My Neighbor's Dogs

Being able to use these disposable cameras really brought back old memories where my sister and I would constantly buy them and take pictures just for the fun of it and I'm glad that I got the chance to use it again after long years without it so I took pictures on what I thought would bring back those memories again.



Christina Eng

Rooftop Views



Christina Eng
A Child's Happiness



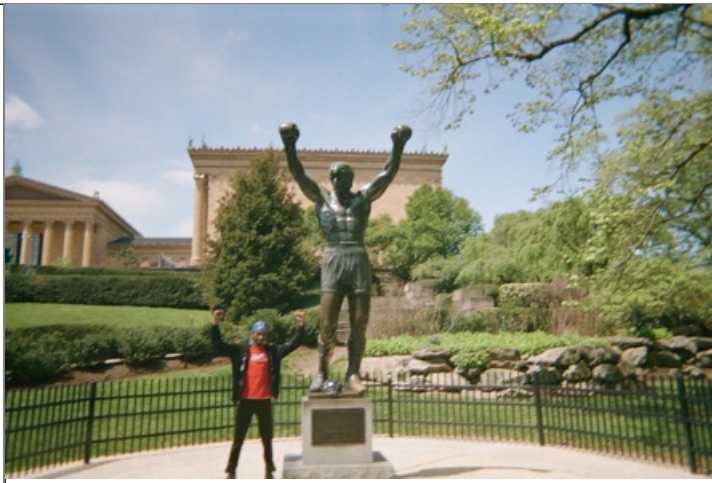
Charles Langley
A light at the end.



Charles Langley
Rides



Charles Langley
Rocky



Charles Langley
My office.



Carlos DeJesus

Self Image

I just thought it would be interesting to take a mirror picture with an older camera like I would with my phone.



Asnain Khan

Glances



Asnain Khan

Preparation



Asnain Khan
Doorway



Anonymous
Essentials



William Flenner
Wood and Lines



Salvatori Camarote
In The Park



Salvatori Camarote
Stored Away



Salvatori Camarote
Afterglowing



Salvatori Camarote
Grey Days



Salvatori Camarote
*The world turned
upside down*



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