



NORTHWEST INITIATIVE PHOTO PROGRAM:

teaching literacy through photography to neighborhood youth

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ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Students in the photo class are given cameras and asked to document their lives. We blend art, therapy, communication skills, reading and writing. Students in Lansing need additional outlets to keep them successful in school, increase literacy and decrease dropout rates. According to the MEA, during the 2007-2008 school year dropout rates were 15 percent statewide, in Lansing they were as high as 24 percent (Center for Educational Performance and Information). Photography helps children stay interested in reading and writing, and helps them become strong community voices.

SUPPORT

- This activity is supported in part by an award from the **Michigan Council for the Arts and Cultural Affairs** and by **generous donations from the community**
- Staffed by 6 committed volunteers: professional photographers, photojournalists, college professors, and students from MSU and LCC

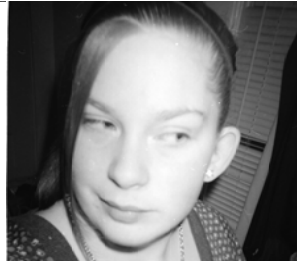


A DAY IN PHOTO CLASS

- Students have a healthy snack
- They are given cameras (they use digital in the classroom and are given film cameras to take home)
- They document their lives
- They write about their experiences



THE STUDENTS



More than 50 students from ages 8-17 years old participated in the program.

Over the past year we've:

- Quadrupled our camera collection
- Had a student place first in a professional photo show
- Been featured in a newspaper article
- Had a student interviewed on Channel 6 News
- Helped a ton of kids become more interested in reading, writing and communicating visually

We were the first photo program for more than half the students (and the first art-based literacy program for almost all the students). The students learned so much this year about composition, visual variety, new vocabulary words, creative expression and so much more. Each student was an INSPIRATION.



ROXANNE
FRITH

It has been my pleasure and honor to be part of the program this past year.

I received my first camera at seven, and it set a course for my life. As an artist, teacher, and arts activist I am always looking for ways in which I can contribute to the ever ending need to expose children, pun intended, to the power of art, and photography in particular, as a tool for expression and commentary. To tie photography to literacy, or reading in the more common sense, is a fun and great way to teach core skills that these kids might be struggling with in the traditional learning environment. The assignments provided kids so much more than just how to take pictures. As images are so ever present in how we know the world, it is one way in which we read. It is also an incredible tool to help build self-esteem and a means to look at and understand our world. The program was a perfect fit for a personal commitment to contribute to society, and specifically our youth.

What I learned, or what was reinforced, is that there are always incredible rewards to giving and teaching what one loves. This extends beyond the immediate kids in the Northwest Initiative project to watching current and past adult students become mentors of the next generation. Three generations of looking, seeing, talking about and making images. It was wonderful.



NICOLE
HARING

I started with Literacy Through Photography because it was a chance to get involved with an organization in it's infancy and be a part of something that has had proven success. It was an opportunity to be involved with content I actually knew about, photography, writing, and working with kids. It has been a learning experience not only for the kids, but for me as well. I've learned that these kids have a great deal to offer and giving them a creative outlet to express themselves not only through a visual sense but also in the important aspect of writing, it has been inspiring to watch them grow. The kids are talented, involved, willing to learn, and I look forward to learning with them every month.



CHARLES
MANKEY

I volunteered for this program because when I was younger, I was involved in several programs from youth soccer leagues to various church programs in which I worked with kids. Helping out kids is something I had always planned on doing. When this opportunity came around that not only involved mentoring young people but also photography, I knew I wanted to be a part of it.

Working with these kids for the last nine months has helped me come to the realization that education and photography will always be a part of my life. Not only has this program been a determining factor in my decision to pursue my M.F.A. in photography so that I can teach at the collegiate level, I also wish to be more involved in similar programs throughout my life. It has helped to shape my philosophy involving education and photography. No longer has it become a simple career decision, but goal to use photography and education to give back to others in need. Working in this program has become more than just a good way to a letter of recommendation for school, but a blessing to me personally that I hope to carry on with me wherever I go.



JAMIE
MILLER

Being a volunteer for the children's photo class at Northwest Initiative has been an amazing experience for me. One of the main reasons I decided to get involved was Jeana-Dee herself. When she came to speak to my photography class at Lansing Community College, asking students to volunteer, she was so positive and obviously inspired when she described her vision of the class. Her enthusiasm convinced me that it would be a great success and I knew it was something I wanted to be a part of. I thought about how my life may have been different if someone had given me an opportunity to experience photography when I was young and I realized that, as a volunteer, I could be that person for someone else. Photography has an amazing way of allowing you to grow as a person and it challenges you to look at everything around you in a different way. It has been my great pleasure to observe and guide the children as they discover their talent. Every class is an adventure and I am constantly amazed at the beauty and honesty that pours out of each image created by the children.



KAT
PETERSEN

To the kids: Thank you so very much. My intention in being a part of this class was to help you see the world through your own unique lens. But each and every week you inspired me. I am so glad I got the opportunity to meet all of you, learn your stories, watch you grow, and be a part of your introduction to the beautiful world of photography.

To Jeana-Dee: Thank you so much for the opportunity to be part of your vision. Thank you for all that you do and all the time you commit. Your beauty radiates far beyond your reach.

To my fellow volunteers: I am so thankful that I got to know you all. Thank you for giving your time so selflessly, and for passing on your knowledge and inspiring young minds to look closer. We made a great team.



DYLAN
ROGERS

I've been volunteering with the NorthWest Initiative Photo program since its inception. I have a great interest in writing and photography, so this opportunity to mentor kids in these subjects was wonderful for me. In the last year this class has become something I prepare for and look forward to every month. I've personally enjoyed making new friends out of fellow volunteers and children, and have been incredibly impressed with the beautiful work that the students do. It's my hope that my influence might be a positive one on the lives of these students, and that this class is valuable artistically, intellectually and emotionally.

Additional thanks to:

BABAK GHAEMIAN

KIRBAY PREUSS

ROBERT COUCH

DIANE HORANBURG

LAUREN TALLEY

MONTHLY LESSONS

OCTOBER: SELF-PORTRAIT



"I want to take pictures of family activities, going out, playing games, play tickle, Mackinaw Island, myself, and everything." - Judy, 17

NOVEMBER: FAMILY

"My favorite thing about family photographs is we all smile."

- Mikayla, 10



"I'm hugging Paul. I'm thinking I love him. He's looking at me."

- Isiaha, 10

LESSONS (continued)

DECEMBER: COSTUMES AND VISUAL VARIETY



The Lansing Civic Players (LCP) generously donated several costumes and props to the photo class. The youth were able to work on visual variety: abstract, tight, medium and wide images while they were dressed up. Thank you LCP!

JANUARY: FAVORITE THING ABOUT YOURSELF

"My smile. It shows how friendly and outgoing I am."

- Dameika



"I am good at basketball - shooting 3-pointers. I am cool. I like hanging out with my friends. I have a girlfriend that likes me."

- DeVante, 13

LESSONS (continued)

FEBRUARY: NEIGHBORHOOD



If I could change something about Lansing it would be that we would have less crime," - David, 10



"Lansing has lots of beautiful trees and scenery. We have a zoo with lots of trees and plants. We also have a water park with plenty of space to run around."
- Shelby, 13



MARCH: NATURE AND COMPOSITION

Students were asked to focus on three elements of composition.



Framing (left), Simplicity (above), and Rule of Thirds



LESSONS (continued)

APRIL: DREAMS

We asked the students to share their dreams with us. They took a series of images that narrated their dreams. They created characters, rising and falling action, strong beginnings, and final resolutions. They structured their visual stories around colors, sounds, and actions.

A DREAM FROM NAKIA, ALSO ACTED OUT BY JUDY AND SHELBY:

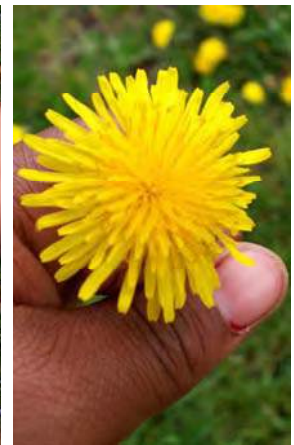


Nakia turns into a yellow sponge and goes to live with Sponge Bob in a pineapple under the sea.



MAY: MOTHER'S DAY POETRY

The youth took pictures for the mother figures in their lives this week. They took pictures they thought their moms would like: lots of flowers and pretty colors. Some of the youth wrote short poems for the important women in their lives.



"I love you mommy. I love you so much. I love you in my heart. I love my mom very very very very very much."

- Anastacia, 11

PHOTOGRAPHS ON FILM

Each month students are given a film camera to document their lives outside of the classroom. Film gives students a way to visually communicate their home lives, interests and experiences living in Michigan.



PHOTO CLASS BLOG



www.litandphoto.blogspot.com

- Bi-monthly updates
- Photos
- Videos
- Quotes from students
- Newspaper articles
- Contact information



Picture-perfect

Photographer Mikayla Spyker is only 10 years old, but she's already competing against professionals

By JAMES SANFORD

On a Saturday afternoon at Perspective 2, studio owner Lynne Brown and photographer Mikayla Spyker are discussing light placement, aperture settings and shutter speeds while a model waits in the lobby, preparing for his shoot.

"Tell me a little bit about what you want for your first shot," Brown asks.

"A chair," Mikayla replies, as she surveys the scene. "And funny hats."

The strap on the camera Mikayla will be using is much too long: The camera is dangling down below her waist. Adjustments must be made immediately.

Meanwhile, the model — Mikayla's brother, Damon — rolls around on the floor, digging oversized Legos out of a WALL*E backpack.

Mikayla is 10; Damon is 4. But this is not playtime.

Mikayla, a fifth-grader in the North West Initiative's Literacy Through Photography program, is preparing to compete against adult amateur and professional photographers in the Perspective 2 Studio Photo Contest.

She was recommended for the competition by her instructor, Jeana-Dee Allen. "She's the most dedicated student," Allen said. "She's come to every single class, and she wants to learn anything and everything. If you ask her what is an abstract shot and what is a wide-angle picture, she can tell you."

"You look at a kid and you can see the magic in there, and you need to feed that magic. So when Lynn said she'd sponsor a student from the class in the competition, I instantly said, 'Mikayla.'"

See Mikayla, Page 11

Mikayla

from page 10

Although it's Mikayla's first time working in a studio, she shows no signs of nervousness or tentativeness. As she surveys a rack of assorted outfits and accessories, she immediately senses what will work. A cowboy hat. A thick, Elvis-style white pleather belt with brass studs.

"You wanna put on a silly costume?" she asks Damon, as he takes his place in front of the stark white backdrop. Damon shakes his head. "Pleeease?" Mikayla coaxes. Damon acquiesces.

Later, when Damon becomes a bit grumpy while posing with his dad, Mikayla knows exactly how to refocus his attention. She grabs a couple of cushions out of a nearby trunk and tosses them to Damon. "Pretend you're having a pillow fight," she suggests, and within seconds Damon is squealing with laughter.

"She's kind of a natural," comments Jamie Miller, a North West Initiative volunteer who's helping out with the shoot.

During a break in shooting, Mikayla explains she took the class to "learn about photography — what it is and what it does to change the world."

Although she's only been taking pictures for a few months, she's already well acquainted with both film and digital cameras. Outside of the studio, Mikayla says she likes to look for photo opportunities in nature.

Perspective 2 Studio Photo Contest

Open house noon to 4 p.m.
Sunday, March 7, at Perspective
2, 310 E. Grand River, Lansing;
winners announced at 2 p.m.
(517) 653-5880
www.perspective2studio.com

"During the wintertime, I look for icicles," she said. "When we started in the fall, I took pictures of the different colored leaves."

So it's not surprising Mikayla's eyes are drawn to a collection of multi-colored silk-flower leis that happen to be hanging on the costume rack. She knows exactly how she wants to use them. Giving half of them to Allen and

the other half to Miller, Mikayla positions herself on the floor in front of Damon. On the count of three, Allen and Miller toss the leis into the air above Damon, who beams as the necklaces rain down around him. Mikayla eagerly snaps away.

"He likes to make funny faces, and he's a good brother," Mikayla says of Damon. "And he shows a lot of personality."

Damon's modeling career may be short-lived, but Mikayla insists she's planning to take pictures "until I'm old enough not to do it anymore."

She loves using her pictures to augment her writing. "It shows what you're writing about," she says of her photos. "It shows detail. You can still put detail in your story, but if you don't put the detail



Photo by Mikayla Spyker

When she's not working in the studio, Mikayla Spyker finds subject matter in nature. This shot shows a sinuous icicle winding along a chain-link fence.

in your story, then the pictures can show the details."

Allen will help Mikayla choose two shots from the two-hour studio session to enter in the contest. A panel of judges will score the entries based on creative use of lighting, set design and overall creativity; cash awards and studio memberships are among the prizes. The winners will be announced during P2's Gallery Walk Open House on Sunday, March 7.

Brown says she's impressed with Mikayla's ideas and her knowledge of how to use the camera. "She's going to see things in a whole different way than our adult minds," she said, as she watched Mikayla prepare for another set-up.

But when she's not thinking about framing, lighting and art direction, Mikayla is also very much a 10-year-old. As she and Damon exit the studio at the end of the shoot, Damon pushes through the swinging door, which flies back and stops just short of hitting Mikayla.

"Damonnnnn!" Mikayla says, sharply. "I'm telling Mom!"



Photo by James Seelhoff

Mikayla Spyker is a fifth-grader in the Northwest Initiative's Literacy Through Photography program.



THE
WINNING
IMAGES

THE GALLERY EXHIBIT: JULY 24-AUGUST 29

It is also our great honor to be able to offer the Creole Gallery to host an exhibit of the work that these young photographers created over the past nine months. What better tribute to Robert Busby, and daughter Ena, to show these young artists' work. It embodies the heart of what Old Town is and what Busby and five others began 30 plus years ago - and that is to provide a venue and to inspire community artists to exhibit and dialog.

- Roxanne Frith



THANK YOU

The NorthWest Initiative Photo program is so proud to have support from The Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs, RJF Photography, The Creole Gallery, and the Absolute Gallery. We are also grateful to our private donors who gave time, money, supplies and cameras for the youth. Finally, we would like to thank the backbone of the program: a group of dedicated volunteers. Thank you all for your countless hours chasing kids with cameras, your advice, and for just rolling with it.

Thank you,
Jeana-Dee E. Allen

Jeana-Dee E. Allen
Program Coordinator



The Creole Gallery





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