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SENIOR PROJECTS 2016

Katherine Anderson

For my senior project I taught *The Killer Angels*, a historical fiction novel about the Battle of Gettysburg, to this year's eighth grade in preparation for their class trip to Gettysburg. Prior to teaching, I spent the first semester of the year interviewing alums, teachers, and parents who have partaken in the Gettysburg trip over the years and gathering other materials which I compiled in order to document and celebrate the significance of the trip, a tradition of fifteen years, to the Academy community. Upon returning from my own class's Gettysburg trip in eighth grade—a particularly inspiring academic experience for me, largely on account of reading Shaara's novel—I decided that I wanted to teach *The Killer Angels* for my senior project. Nonetheless, when I learned that Nancy Henderson, the creator and leader of the Gettysburg trip, would not teach at The Academy beyond my junior year, I chose to use my project as an opportunity to not only learn about education and experience teaching first hand, but also to document an Academy tradition so that future teachers and students can understand its significance. My senior project is not a call for the preservation of the Gettysburg trip precisely as Ms. Henderson conducted it, but rather a celebration of the impact it had on fifteen years' worth of eighth graders and – quite frankly, in a time of transition at our school – an investigation of tradition at The Academy.

Cassandra Bigelow

My Senior Project, "Reduce, Reuse, Upcycle: Clothing and our Planet," started as an exploration of my creative roots. I wanted to spend my year doing something I loved, so I settled on an artistic and mature endeavor-- making clothing. At the same time though, I wanted my project to benefit more than just myself. It occurred to me how much utter excess we have on our planet, so instead of learning to make clothing from scratch, I journeyed into the art of upcycling. Upcycling is a newish term, which I define as the altering of old or unwanted textiles into fresh, unique articles of clothing. While sewing a skirt with my grandfather's ties, making a jacket from awkward, old sweaters and tattered, bleach-stained jeans, and a scarf out of a faded tee-shirt, I was also learning about the impact that our clothing excess has on our planet. The devastating information that I learned about cotton farmers, pesticide use, and sweatshops compelled me to survey faculty and students about clothing consumption in our community, interview a student from Smith College who was also exploring the issue of waste in our world, and write an article for my Senior Project book regarding these problems.

Through my research, I have realized that supporting healthy and comfortable lives for people across the world and sustaining our planet are more important than filling my closet with cheap, new clothing. I have learned how to make better, more-informed choices about clothing. I hope that we all will start to shop more for second-hand clothing, to look for fair-trade and organic labels, and to extend the lifecycle of our clothing through creative upcycling!

Cameron (Cami) Bluh-Derricotte

For my senior project I made a trailer for a documentary film that I will continue to work on in the coming year about my disease, Wegeners Granulomatosis. My goal throughout having Wegeners has been to try to increase awareness about my disease much as possible. I knew that I wanted to make a documentary because I felt that was the most palpable way to share information. I filmed and interviewed my doctors and parents to get a sense of what they have gone through and seen throughout the five years of me having this disease. In the future I am hoping to connect with other children who have Wegeners as well to document a wider range of stories and experiences. I got much more out of actually working on this project than I thought I would. I formed a real passion for filmmaking and learned more about myself, which is one of the best things I could have hoped for.

Riley Brown

My senior project was to create a short animation based on my dreams. Over the course of the year, I spent time laying out story boards, drawing about 350 physical 'frames', and finally presenting all of my work together in a two minute film.

Ilaria deLesdernier

For my senior project I researched some of the most common sports injuries found in young athletes. I created a book that will stay at the Academy that will be readily available for athletes and coaches. This book is organized from upper body injuries to lower body injuries. Each contains information about how the injury happens, symptoms, prevention tips, and some exercises, stretches and suggestions about how to recover. My hope is that this book will be an easy way for coaches and student athletes to find out more about an injury they might have and what they can do to treat it, and prevent it in the future. I do not want my book to replace a doctor, or to become an excuse for people to play through injuries. The importance of allowing the body to rest and heal properly is a point I emphasized and throughout my entire senior project. I learned a lot about how the human body works and what it takes to break it and put it back together. However, I know there is still so much for me to learn about this topic, and I would like to continue to learn about the anatomy and kinesiology in the future.

Nils Donohue Meyer

I called my senior project "What Are Those: a Yearlong Homage to Sneakers" and it is with sneakers that my project all began. I explored sneakers, sneaker culture, and why they are so important to me. This interest led me into the fashion world and a new interest in clothing design. In the end I designed a small collection of clothes and produced them myself as well. With these clothes I also photographed and created a lookbook in the spirit of modern fashion and streetwear in particular. I learned a lot about fashion and its role in a culture along the way, and formed many ideas about fashion's importance as well.

Leah Finn-Erb

My senior project was an investigation of the problem of marine debris and ocean pollution. I researched the effects of debris in the marine environment including plastics. My senior project had three major components: a research paper, a presentation to the school, and a clean-up of part of the Chickley River in Hawley. My research paper explained in depth about marine debris and plastic, my presentation was a brief summary of my paper, and the river clean-up was a way for me involve the community and to do something towards solving the problem. I researched online and talked to people at the CT River Watershed Council about marine debris. I decided to learn about marine debris because it has become such a problem and is very dangerous to the environment. By bringing attention to it and educating people about marine debris I am helping prevent the problem and making the oceans a safer and cleaner environment.

Allen Gabriel

Going into my senior year I knew I had to do a senior project related to the performance of magic. I set out to answer the question "What does it take to put on a 50 minute one-man magic act?" I went about this through research and trial and error. At the end of the year I performed a successful and fun magic show for an audience of 102 people. The project was a huge challenge, not because of the difficult magic, but because of all the unexpected aspects that are involved in putting on a show. Still, it all came together and I believe it was a great success.

Enid Gallagher

For my senior project I interviewed people in Rowe, Shelburne Falls, and Charlemont who had lived in these towns long enough to see a definitive change in the their atmosphere, people, and industries. However, the written documentation alone was not enough for me so I decided to include a visual element as well. The Academy has greatly increased my love for photography, leading me to turn to photographs as a method of documentation. As a junior, in my Photo II class, I worked on a portraiture project of Jim Williams and learned how to show some aspects of a subject's personality within their portraits. For this documenting project, however, I wanted to not only show aspects of the person's character through their expressions, but also through their environment. Using Brandon Stanton's environmental portraiture of the inhabitants of New York City, known as the famous Humans of New York blog, I chose to take portraits of the interviewees that would show viewers more about the people than their words alone could. Through the photographs and the interviews, I wanted to show Academy students and members of the community how the towns and people have changed from as little as fifty years ago.

My project taught me many new skills and improved on previous ones. Environmental portraiture as well as a limited amount of time with each subject pushed me as a photographer to become more creative and resourceful in taking my shots. Additionally, prior to the start of my project I had no previous knowledge about how to conduct interviews and setup transcriptions. I really enjoyed the challenge presented by finding and contacting the interviewees, as that made me push myself and grow as a person.

Eva Gray

My senior project was a combination of the study of astronomy and astrophotography. For the first half of the year I worked to familiarize myself with the night sky and the constellations that would be visible during the time that I would be photographing, as well as learning about different kinds of stars and star magnitudes. I also researched the history of the constellations and learned about their discovery as well as their importance to the ancient cultures from which we get many of our stories about them. Because there is so much information about astronomy and the constellations, I decided to focus mainly on the forty-eight classical constellations, and to observe and photograph them as they would have been visible in the ancient cultures I was researching. This meant that I did not use any telescopes for observing or telephoto zoom lenses for photographing.

For the second half of the year I applied my knowledge of the skies to my photography, and made a series of trips to the top of Mount Pollux to photograph a total of ten constellations in the winter sky. I used a manual Hasselblad camera retrofitted with a digital back. I edited my photographs very minimally, and only drew lines on to the images to represent the constellations. My final product was a published book with each of my photographs accompanied by a description of the history of the constellations as well as any notable facts about the stars or other celestial objects in each photograph.

Emma Loubsky Lonergan

For my senior project, “Born Without a Barcode”, I studied sex trafficking worldwide. In the Spring of 2015, I received a copy of *Half the Sky*, accompanied by its documentary video. At the time, I did not think much of the book as I threw it onto the passenger seat of my car to read over the summer. Little did I know that this book would change my life. Later that summer, when I sat down to read it, I still had no idea that my entire senior project would revolve around *Half the Sky*. Of all the many inspirational stories in the book, the one that stuck with me the most was that of Srey Rath. Rath was sold into the sex trafficking industry when she was a young girl and yet, against all odds, she found a way to escape and create a life for herself. This story stuck with me because, as I would learn later, hers is the story of millions of young girls across the world. However, rarely do we hear them, for their stories did not end as happily and have been silenced by the cultures in which they live. Consequently, Srey Rath is the reason I chose to focus my senior project on sex trafficking. She inspired me to help tell the untold stories and raise awareness about a topic that no one wants to talk about.

Thus, my project focused on turning the oppression I learned about into opportunity. I did this in three different ways- self education, education of the surrounding community, and activism/fundraising. I spent the first semester educating myself and the second semester organizing a movie screening of *Half the Sky* followed by an educational discussion. The event was a success and I ended up raising over \$600 for the Senhoa Foundation, which focuses on empowering at-risk girls in Cambodia through education.

In the end, the project taught me about the importance of education. I truly believe that the issue of sex trafficking can and will be solved through the education of youth. It is up to us to educate ourselves about social justice issues such as these. An uneducated population is a complacent one. It is my hope to help create an educated population by continuing my project in college.

Matt Plager

For my senior project I explored childhood obesity in the United States. The project looked into answering why the issue is growing in this country, as well as which components of a child's personal and private life can be helpful or harmful to sustaining a healthy lifestyle. I was able to interview local school chefs, P.E. instructors, and the Director of Food Services for Mahar Regional School District. My finished product consisted of a book summarizing the information I gathered through reading articles, watching movies, and talking to local professionals. I hope that my project is able to educate the Academy community on this growing issue as well as assist students in making healthy choice in all aspects of their lives.

Indra Rapinchuk-Souccar

My senior project was an effort to increase awareness of safety equipment and protocol in the sport of three-day eventing. Eventing is a sport that has shaped my life, but it is also the sport that killed my best friend, almost killed me, and continues to kill horses and riders. This project provided me an opportunity to learn about the safety equipment available to riders, the difference in rules between countries, how other sports have addressed deaths and safety protocol, and to hopefully make a small impact on the eventing community. My goal was to educate myself so I am able to educate others, but to also create a simple guide to safety equipment and the US eventing rules that address said equipment. I educated myself in a way that makes me comfortable and confident speaking with others about the equipment available to riders, and made the brochure, titled “Safety Resources for Eventers”. I have started numerous conversations inspired by my senior project and have distributed the brochure to people involved in the sport. I want to help make this sport safer for people and their animals, and I want to help prevent unnecessary injuries and deaths. I believe that this project gave me a good place to start. I plan to follow the path to a career in veterinary medicine, and never plan on stopping the

conversations I've started having with people about health and risk assessment in the sport of three-day eventing.

Christina Secor

My project was an exploration into the world of event planning while continuing my passion for social justice. I put together the layout for a concert to benefit Safe Passage. This event was meant not only to accrue a sum of money to donate to the organization, but also to raise awareness about domestic violence and teen dating abuse, both in the area and nationally. Through the final exhibition I was able to engage in some meaningful discussions about this troubling problem in our area.

I wanted my project to be oriented toward young people to make it relevant to my peers; therefore I chose Safe Passage to be the beneficiary for the event. Safe Passage is a local organization out of Northampton that has a comprehensive program which helps teens who are dealing with dating abuse in addition to its programs for domestic violence survivors and their families.

This project allowed me to begin a conversation that I believe is truly important for our community to engage in.

Mark Vranos

My senior project was to teach a Studio Block on sketch comedy and improvisation, and to perform for the Academy community. The class objectives were to write and perform a show. This show took place at the Spring Open Mic, and included two sketches and one improv piece. The process involved watching several sketches from different media sources, analyzing them and discussing what makes them funny. We also took several periods to silently write sketches individually. In order to practice improv, we played several games oriented toward building an understanding for the rules of improv. Recently, some of my students have expressed interest in continuing the class next year. This was never my objective, but is something that I would be thrilled to see happen.

Casey Walsh-Warder

My senior project was about a specific type of artificial intelligence. Hierarchical Temporal Memory, or HTM, is an incomplete attempt to mimic the fundamental essential principles used by a part of the brain called the neocortex, which is responsible for most human intelligence. In its current form, HTM perceives the world by creating an internal model of what is going on outside. For my senior project, I first learned about HTM by creating a computer program which uses HTM. It would not work if there were flaws in my knowledge, so programming helped me find these flaws. After learning about HTM, I wrote a paper intended to explain how HTM works to people with no background in computer science.

Lyric Williams-Russell

For my senior project, I aimed to represent my cultural identity through my family's culture. Numerous people ask me about my heritage and my origins, but the subject is difficult to flesh out because my cultural background is more complex than most. Yes, my roots truly originate from Spain, but I also associate with being Mexican and Lithuanian. My father's side is essentially unknown. Artistically, my project strived to settle these questions through a personal representation of my cultural identity by producing an oil painting, a luchador mask, a song, and poetry. Attacking the subject from multiple different art forms allowed me to not only gain experience with each form, but it also gave me different vantage points to understanding how I feel about my cultural identity.