

Filmtastic!

Teens Learn Filmmaking Skills with Kid Film Lab

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Knowing what a powerful artistic medium filmmaking can be for youth, the Edith B. Ford Memorial Library in Ovid, New York, created a Kid Film Lab Project thanks to a Curiosity Creates grant. With the substantial monies, we were able to afford to purchase the necessary equipment and hire quality instructors to help run a successful program.

To create the program, I collaborated with New York City photographer and videographer Tyrone Brown-Osborne, who has a background in documentary style filmmaking and experience teaching youth about the filmmaking process. We were able to create a program overview that would expose children to different aspects of filmmaking while empowering the children to look carefully at their surroundings. Once the children learned how to use the equipment and experimented with different styles of filmmaking, Tyrone would spend a week with the kids creating a documentary about our village.

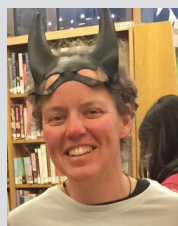
Finding local instructors for our Kid Film Lab led me to email all of the professors at the Ithaca College School of Media, located 25 miles south of our library. I pitched our program to the professors and found one, Bradley Rappa, who took the time to talk with me about the necessary equipment and to share his course outline for a similar program his students oversee with afterschool children at a public school. Each professor did forward my email looking for volunteers to help with our Kid Film Lab program to students, and I received a number of responses. We hired one student, Rebecca Veninsky, to teach the first Kid Film Lab week and to run some of our drop-in sessions. She also offered technical support and assisted with curriculum design. Of our four film lab sessions, Ithaca College students taught three of them; this allowed for diversity in course content.



We structured Kid Film Lab so that over the course of four months, students could attend four different focus sessions ranging in length from three to five days. These dates were timed with school vacations to maximize participation. Our first film lab was a week long, and I scheduled four library staff members to participate so that we could be hands-on with the equipment.

Our Kid Film Lab Structure

Lab 1: Equipment overview and creating a library public service announcement (PSA). Each staff member worked with a group of children to create individual PSAs.



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Lab 2: Sound and lighting, creating sound montages.

Lab 3: Animation techniques.

Lab 4: Documentary filmmaking.

The Ford Library also offered drop-in sessions every other Saturday during the entire Kid Film Lab Project so children could have unstructured time to experiment with all the equipment. Some children brought siblings and parents. We had a teen assistant who would help the participants and when not needed, she worked on editing projects from Kid Film Lab.

Kid Film Lab was created for children ages 7 to 13, and students were recruited through staff visits to third and fourth grade classrooms and through fliers and homeschool networks. Many of our regular library patrons learned to use the equipment during this program, and we now have many volunteers who can take photos or videotape library events.

Moving Forward

Having the video equipment has allowed us to create other programs for our community. With a grant from a local arts council, we plan to run a two-week Teen Filmmaking Camp during the summer. Our library archivist has plans to create a video collection of local people talking about their connection to the Willard Asylum, once one of the largest employers in our area.

We are also hoping to offer an after-school filmmaking club for middle school students to run simultaneously with another after-school program we offer. In addition to programming, staff are using the equipment to capture events in the library. We have had a request to borrow the Go-Pro camera to videotape a first airplane jump, and we are happy to put the camera in the hands of our patrons. Our library system, Finger Lakes Library System, has also invested in a loanable filmmaking kit for member libraries to offer their own video programs.

Thanks to our Kid Film Lab, the library has made excellent connections with local businesses and historical societies. I was stopped on the street and asked, "What are those library kids up to with cameras?" We were the talk of our village for the entire week as the kids ran from place to place capturing images, interviewing community members, and asking questions about places, people, and events in our area.



A film lab participant prepares to shoot.

We measure success for our programs through anecdotal notes, through attendance records, and by talking with students and parents about their experiences.

While we deemed our program a success, it was not without issues. We discovered the editing process required more computer memory than our laptop lab could handle, and the amount of time needed to edit projects was staggering. Also many of the children were not interested in investing the time to edit the film.

We also learned not to hold a viewing at the conclusion of each lab session; the project will never be edited in time. Also, it was essential to acquire signed waivers from everyone appearing on film, and that task was daunting.

The pros, however, of this program far outweighed the cons. And thanks to our teen assistant, who loved to edit, we were able to have completed projects after each session. Our community has embraced the Film Lab Project, and they support the further growth of this program.

For anyone wanting to replicate this type of program, view our Best Practices Guide at <http://ovidlibrary.org/teen-book-review/>. We have also uploaded our videos to the Ovid Library YouTube channel. ↻