



EXPLORATIONS ACADEMY

Newsletter of Global Community Institute



FEATURED HIGHLIGHTS:

- ◆ Winner of Museum of Native American History Graphic Novel Contest
- ◆ Reflections on In-Person Instruction
- ◆ EA's New Endowment and Matching Program

A New Year

by Bacchus Taylor, Head of School

As the end of 2020 approaches, the general mood of society seems to be good riddance. Clearly this year has offered challenges the likes of which humankind has never experienced. Nonetheless, I cannot help but look back at this year and marvel at the way that the Explorations Academy community has risen to the occasion and responded with the thoughtfulness, creativity, and flexibility that are hallmarks of the institution. In that light, I would like to celebrate a few of the many accomplishments that we have been able to achieve this year.

For the first time in the school's history, two different groups left to study abroad simultaneously. Our first ever middle school international expedition left for Mexico, and our high school group left for Peru. All told, our students were gone for a combined six weeks of language immersion, outdoor adventure, service work, and recognizing that the world is a big beautiful place with limitless learning opportunities. Yes, this really happened this year, although it is hard to believe with the way that

time has slowed.

In March, like most of the world, we responded to the first wave of the virus. Before the public schools shut down and before Governor Inslee's Stay at Home order, Explorations had already shifted all of its classes online. At that point, many of us had never used Zoom before, and for many in the community, Explorations was synonymous with backpacking and other such outdoors activities. While most schools were completely shut down for weeks, Explorations' teachers artfully adapted to the new environment, finding creative ways to respond to both the academic and the emotional requirements of the pandemic.

In the strangest of times, Explorations Academy celebrated its 25th anniversary. To survive for that long as an independent school is exceptionally rare. In fact, just in the time that I have been associated with EA, four other secondary schools in Whatcom County have had to close their doors. Meanwhile, Explorations Academy was emerged stronger than ever. In fact, we set a new high for enrollment in 2020 and interest in the school



has never been higher.

Spring of 2020 saw unprecedented demand for action to address racial injustice in America. Sparked by the murder of George Floyd, people flocked to the streets to demand change. Explorations Academy was able to rapidly create new curriculum focused on racial justice and implement it for the next term. Many of you saw the results of the Politics of Change cluster's work at our most recent Term-End Event. As a school dedicated to creating the change agents of tomorrow, I could not be more proud of the teachers' efforts to create these classes in a way that is both of the moment and rooted in history. And, of course, the students' work was further evidence that the leaders of tomorrow are already in the school today.

For the last term, students and teachers have learned to adjust to in-person instruction during the pandemic. Many of our students experienced a dramatic improvement in their grades and level of engagement with the in-person offerings. This is a testament to our exemplary instructional team and their ability and willingness to work in extremely challenging circumstances. Likewise, the fact that we have re-

mained safe and healthy while doing so speaks to the work of our Covid-19 Taskforce and their dedication to following the science and looking out for all members of our community.

Finally, as was recently announced, Explorations Academy now has an endowment! This fund, hosted by Whatcom Community Foundation, ensures a steady revenue stream that will grow over time and not be affected by year-to-year changes in enrollment. This represents a further strengthening of our financial position and ability to plan for many more years of success. And don't forget, there are still a few more days to take advantage of a matching offer. All donations made to the school in 2020 will qualify for a 1:1 match to the endowment. By giving today you will also be giving to the future of the school.

Without a doubt, 2020 has been a challenge. It is also further evidence of why this school needs to exist. We will be confronted with other unprecedented circumstances in the future. It will be today's youth, armed with critical thinking skills, creativity, adaptability, wisdom, stewardship, and empathy who will see us through those challenges. I am honored to work with them and all of you to ensure that they will be ready.

Now, who's ready for 2021?

[Click Here to Give Today!](#)

2020 at a Glance

70: Total Number of Students Enrolled at Some Point during 2020

4: Countries that Students Explored (United States, Canada, Mexico, Peru)

16,469: Total Feet of Elevation Change during Peru Expedition's 4 Day Trek to Choquequirao

26: Percent of Students who Received Scholarship or Financial Aid

171,750: Total Dollars Allocated for Financial Aid/Scholarships for 2020-2021 School Year

2: Number of School Days Required for EA Staff to Implement Online Learning in Response to the Pandemic

3: Students Graduated in June

6: Students for Each Full-time Faculty Member

20: Percentage of Days Getting Outside the Building or Connecting with Community Members, even during the Pandemic

The Story of Skybear

by Tayden Swank, Current Student



When I was told that the middle school was going to be making and entering graphic novels into a contest I was excited! The workshop with Joseph Bruchac had been really inspiring. It made me want to tell a story of my own through pictures. The only problem is that I am by no means a great artist. However, I decided to give it a shot. My

first step was to pick my story. I chose The Story of Skybear which we had learned about in the workshop. Next, I had to make a rough draft. This part was probably the hardest, as I had to figure out what to say and draw. I realized there was no way that I was going to be able to draw a realistic human being. So, I decided to use symbolism. It was much easier to draw this way, and it added a creative element to my story.

In The Story of Skybear each of the brothers has a different skill. The oldest is strong, the middle brother is fast, and the youngest is lazy but an excellent spear thrower. I decided that I'd use their skills to represent them. The older brother I drew as an arm, the middle brother a foot, and the

youngest a spear. I think making the art was the hardest part for me. The writing on the other hand came pretty easily, though it was hard to remember to let the pictures tell the story versus the words. After I finished with my rough draft I got some helpful feedback from my teachers and started on my final draft.

The final draft wasn't as hard but it was very tedious. I had to recopy all my drawings and words to make it look nice. Then I had to go over everything in pen and color it in. It took a long time and I was afraid I wouldn't finish before



Congratulations to EA Middle School!

This fall, the middle school attended a graphic novel workshop through the Museum of Native American History featuring New York Times bestselling author, Joseph Bruchac. They then entered a graphic novel contest judged by Joseph. They retold either "The Story of Sky Bear" myth that Joseph told during the workshop or another myth we've focused on in our mythology class. EA had three winners! Tayden got first place, Rohan got second, and Whitney got third. They received cash prizes for their winnings!

Joseph said this about all the submissions: "I have to say that I enjoyed all of these. I especially loved the inventiveness and the sense of humor these young artist-storytellers brought to their texts and illustrations. They all deserve congratulations"

He also gave specific praise for each winning entry, if you'd like to hear it, all of the three winning submissions are up on the MONAH website. www.monah.us

the deadline. Finally though, I turned in my submission and basically forgot about it until a couple weeks ago when the winners were announced in Mythology class. I was astounded to find that I won first place. I didn't think I'd win at all, so I was very surprised and excited. Winning the contest definitely gave my confidence in my artistic skills a boost, and inspired me to want to make a graphic novel again. If I did make another comic I would rely on the pictures more, and try and see if I could tackle a longer story. Overall this was a really amazing experience and I'm so happy I was able to have the opportunity to partake in it. If it wasn't for the school I would never have entered a contest like this or tried my hand at making a graphic novel. My advice to everyone is that no matter your artistic skills you should try making a comic of your own. Believe me, it is a super fun and cool experience. Who knows, maybe your graphic novel will even win a contest!



Reflections on In-Person Instructions

by Jay Reimer, Core Faculty

Over Christmas break I realized that watching television, even a Seahawks game, was not as fun as it used to be. Like many, I had simply had too much screen time this year. Between the phone, the computer and the TV, quarantine has changed a lot of our usual habits both personally and as an organization.

Upon reflecting on the changes this pandemic season, it is easy to see the unexpected benefits of some of the changes. Zoom classes have been a great opportunity for teachers to get a lot of one-on-one contact time with their advisees. Several teachers commented that they found they had more individual conversations with students during online learning than a normal term when students are together in groups in the building. That is great, and there are certainly other benefits that we have discovered by teaching remotely: the ability to record and share, having students who are ill or having car troubles still present, and bringing in guest speakers from all over the world. Nonetheless, most students and staff would definitely trade Zoom to get together again!

In the Fall term many students enjoyed being able to have in-person instruction. Despite the masks, despite the social distancing, despite the vinyl curtains, mask-wearing, hand washing and the desk wiping; despite all of those extra responsibilities it

was great to see students' (partial) faces and hear their (muffled) voices. It was fun to work together (at a distance) on common goals and in parallel collaboration. Making political documentaries was interesting when students sat six feet apart in classrooms and heard each other's ideas and saw draft footage. Engineering a car carefully only to see it outpaced by a classmate's gave students a chance to learn from one another in common space.

Teachers are trained to identify learning outcomes and measure student performance against those goals: "Compare and contrast morality in scientific atheism and Buddhism." "Identify six types of chemical reactions," and "balance chemical equations." "Outline the hero's journey in the novel _____." These kinds of learning outcomes are explicit; students tell you what they know. They are academic knowledge or intellectual skills. A student articulates these to demonstrate competence.

However, there are many valuable skills that are implicitly communicated and these might not be measurable in written responses: perseverance, cooperation, thoughtfulness, reflective action, craftsmanship, leadership, curiosity. When using a file to shape an aluminum window retaining rod a student demonstrated thoughtful action by noticing how their work produced an even and smooth or uneven and asymmetric effect on the material. When fabricating something that is too awkward for a single person to hold and fasten simultaneously a student can demonstrate their ability to communicate clearly



and another student has the chance to demonstrate cooperation in helping. In receiving and implementing instruction a student can show thoughtfulness by synthesizing advice and personal agency to accomplish the task. An unexpected student may demonstrate leadership when their peers see competence in a new domain and defer to their advice and direction. When exposed to new experiences students can discover affinities they did not previously know they had.

In-person instruction also connects the student and teacher in constructive ways. On-screen a teacher is a source of information and verbal feedback. In person, a teacher is an expert one moment and a listening ear the next. Teachers and students can talk informally while eating lunch and during travel opportunities to get to know each other outside academic contexts.

In-person instruction also permits more nuanced communication when a teacher can observe a student struggling with a concept or bringing challenges from outside school which become hurdles to learning at school.

Proximity is the state of being near another person; a seemingly unnecessary term, and a word that is rarely used. I last heard this word in a psychology class forty years ago. But nearness and common experience are what grows relationships. When we go hiking or when we build something together, individual students (and teachers!) grow in parallel. But these common experiences not only promote individual growth, their proximity connects students to the teacher and students to one another. Like Steve Jobs allegedly said, "Life is about creating and living experiences that are worth sharing." It has been a joy to have the chance to create and share these opportunities in an in-person context once again. While we all recognize the need to be flexible moving forward, the end of this pandemic is in sight, and I cannot wait to get the full school together so the synergy associated with proximity can be felt even more strongly as we work as a community to build a better world.



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Explorations Academy is committed to diversity and maintains a policy of nondiscrimination.