

# Focusing on Photography: Building a Sense of Place

## Artistic Quality

1a.

Focusing on Photography: Building a Sense of Place is a project designed to increase a Union City High School student's awareness of their surroundings and connection to their community. High school students in grades nine through twelve enrolled in the Digital Photography class offered at the Union City Area School District, taught by Megan Sabatini, will be educated in the mechanics of a digital camera so they can manually capture personal images. Big ideas such as: Family and Relationships, History and the Community, Crossing Paths with Nature, and Identity will be addressed during the course. The Digital Photography class is a nine week course offered twice a year and takes place in the high school's digital art lab. Approximately 20 students per class, 40 students per year, have enrolled in the course for the 2015-2016 school year. If this grant is funded, students will be able to learn digital photography with their own, borrowed, Digital SLR camera. It is very important for the Digital Photography class to have the same amount of equipment as students enrolled in order to maintain the integrity of the course and facilitate quality instruction.

The Digital Photography class will engage students in active learning where they must work hands-on with a camera in a setting where they can create images. This encourages students to interact with and know about the world. Through connecting to the world that is beyond the school, students will build a greater connection to their community. This documentation of surroundings builds a students' sense of place.

The curriculum of the Digital Photography class is centered around students investigating and capturing meaningful themes within their town. Field trips have been planned to downtown Main Street in Union City, the Cemetery, and the Elementary School's Playground. Students will examine their own lives and experiences and further consider the enduring idea of "a sense of place" from a personal perspective. When students use their cameras to capture these big ideas of place and what makes Union City home they are able to share their thinking visually with peers and with the community. When the idea of place is examined from multiple perspectives students can begin to understand what it means to be human and become more empathetic to the people, cultures, and environments they encounter.

### Goals:

- Students will learn how to properly use a digital single-lens reflex camera to compose and capture original photographs.
- Students will gain a deeper understanding of self identity and connection to the world.
- Students will enhance problem solving and communication skills.
- Students will develop a connection with their town while critically examining their surroundings.

### Objectives:

- Adjust and manipulate camera settings for greater creative and technical control in photographic composition: Aperture, Shutter Speed, ISO, White Balance.
- Create unique photographic compositions by altering: Light, Focus, Vantage Point, Framing, and Depth of Field.
- Craft digital images that examine the big ideas: Family and Relationships, History and the Community, Crossing Paths with Nature, and Identity.
- Share ideas with peers and the community through photographic representation.

## **Focusing on Photography: Building a Sense of Place**

Students will be evaluated on all of their photography assignments with various assessment tools such as rubrics, critiques, written reflections, and artist statements. Students will be given the opportunity to showcase their learning with a culminating art exhibit for the school and community at the Union City High School in May. Students and community members who view these photographic works can also gain an increased sense of place and connection to the town because they will be inspired to make connections of their own to the themes.

1b.

My name is Megan Sabatini and I am an art teacher for the Union City School District. At the secondary level, I teach sixth grade general art and animation classes, seventh grade general art and architecture classes, and high school level graphic design and photography classes. I have taught art for the Union City Area School District for seven years, starting at the elementary level in 2008. I know the high school students very well since I have grown with them as a teacher through the grades. I understand the demographic and need of this population of students.

I received a Master's of Art in Art Education from Boston University in 2012. Upon completion of my Masters I accepted a part time online facilitator's position with Boston University College of Fine Arts, Master's of Art Education program. This position allows me to stay active in research and contemporary art education practices. I received my Bachelor of Arts degree in Art Education and Art Therapy from Mercyhurst University in 2007. At Mercyhurst University I studied analog photography and completed my senior art thesis as a study in documentary photography. The project was titled: "Fishing Industries of Erie, PA and Eastern Massachusetts" and consisted of a collection of hand printed, analog photographs. Please see my Curriculum Vitae in the supplemental materials section of the application.

### **Community Engagement and Impact**

2a.

Focusing on Photography: Building a Sense of Place will enrich the lives of students at Union City High School as well as the lives of community residents. The project connects to the CultureSpark Vision and Values Statements in several ways. The photography project "affirms the intrinsic value and relevance of the arts..." in the community of union city. The culminating art exhibit in May 2016 will be advertised and open to the community. Since the work will address important themes and ideas about the community of Union City, viewers of the art will be engaged in learning about local history and build awareness to their surroundings. In addition to "engaging the youth" of Union City, the project "reaches out to all the people" of the town, allowing them to develop a visual dialog "exchange(ing)"and "connect(ing)" to the content portrayed in the photographs. The art exhibit will act as a teaching tool for the community which will hopefully increase the general sense of place within the community of Union City as a whole.

Enhancing the culture of Union City is a high priority of the Focusing on Photography project. The recommendation of CultureSpark to make "arts, culture and heritage... [a] higher priority within our educational system" will be fulfilled. Students will develop deeper connections to their personal history and history of their town. The images produced by students will foster communication between peers and

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adults. Stories about architectural landmarks, iconic landscapes, and special spots in Union City will bridge age gaps and allow the community to feel united.

2b.

Important partners for the Focusing on Photography: Building a Sense of Place project are the Union City Middle/High School, Union City Elementary School, Main Street Art Center, Union City Historical Museum, and Community of Union City. The Middle/High School and Elementary School will actively participate in the viewing and discussing of the photography art exhibit. The art will be exhibited in the Middle/High School, allowing teachers to reference photos as teaching tools for students to learn about local history. The Main Street Art Center is an important partner because they can help display student photographs after the exhibit is complete. The Historical Museum is integral in providing students information about the history of their town to serve as a backdrop for photographs. Students can also photograph historical artifacts within the museum. The museum is a resource that is often overlooked and if students recognize it as a source of information they will increase their senses of place.

2c.

Union City High School students, ages 15-18 are the participants in the Focusing on Photography project. These students are part of a Title I school district in Erie County, Pennsylvania. The community of Union City is home to many low socio-economic status families. This population was selected because they are students looking for a medium of expression. Digital photography is perfect because it gives students something to control and allows the production of as many tangible art pieces as they desire. Creating digital photographs allows students to visually communicate what they are thinking without using words. When a student learns how to use a D-SLR camera, they increase their self worth. Students are able to control something that documents their ideas and understandings of the world. Viewing, discussing, and creating images can be a journey to self-discovery for students.

The audience of the art that will be produced by students consists of family, peers, teachers, and community members of Union City. The photography program has received support from the Union City School District, the Union City Community Foundation, and the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. These organizations have supplied funding in the form of grants for cameras and photography equipment to facilitate the Focusing on Photography: Building a Sense of Place project. The photography program is still lacking cameras and equipment for all students to actively produce work. There is a great interest within the high school to enroll in the photography class. Students were surveyed during their 2014-2015 art electives and 100% wanted a photography program in the high school.

2d.

The Focusing on Photography project differs from art exhibitions such as the Gathering at French Creek, that also occurs in Union City, because the photography project is a specific exhibition focused on engaging the community members of Union City in a visual dialog regarding their place of residence. The exhibit will also use only photography as a medium of visual communication. Students are currently familiar with articulating what they view as important in their lives through art. They not only find meaning in the art they make but also find meaning that others have placed in their artwork. Art tells a

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story about human life and what humanity values across cultures and history. Students need proper digital cameras to investigate enduring ideas such as identity, family and community. The photography project addresses relevant themes and issues, moving students to a deeper understanding of themselves and their surroundings.

### **Management**

3a.

The Union City Area School District Foundation was established in 2000 as a way for charitable businesses and organizations to make tax-deductible contributions to enhance the educational and extracurricular experiences of Union City students. The foundation exists solely to support the students and is directly linked to the school district. The photography class will continue to be supported and sustained with the Union City Visual Arts budget after the Focusing on Photography project has been completed.

3b.

The Union City Area School District Foundation fully supports Union City High School Art Teacher, Megan Sabatini in the management and promotion of the Photography project. Mrs. Sabatini has demonstrated great organizational skills during her eight years teaching art with the Union City School District. She coordinated, directed, and promoted the elementary school's talent show, The February Follies, for six years that brought in over \$1000.00 every year in ticket sales. The talent show is a fundraiser for the foundation. Mrs. Sabatini has also curated thematic interdisciplinary art shows showcasing her elementary students' artwork at the Erie Maritime Museum. Both shows consisted of students' personal expressions on issues relevant to the Battle of Lake Erie and were published in the Corry Journal and Erie Times News. The evidence is clear that Megan Sabatini is capable of successfully managing the Focusing on Photography: Building a Sense of Place project.

3c.

Megan Sabatini will be the key personnel involved in the Photography project. Mrs. Sabatini is a Middle/High School art teacher at Union City School District. She teaches in a digital art lab focusing on graphic arts and photography, as well as animation and architecture. During her six years at the elementary school she was able to fully understand the student demographic. Moving up to the high school in 2014 allowed her to continue teaching the students she got to know so well. She understands the learner qualities of the students of Union City. During Mrs. Sabatini's senior year at Mercyhurst University she executed her own sense of place project through analog photography. Erie's Bayfront was critically examined during the project. Mrs. Sabatini knows the benefits first hand of documenting one's surroundings with a camera.

3d.

The Focusing on Photography project has received funding from several sources this year. The Union City School District provided \$2000.00 for five cameras in September, as well as \$224.25 for 15 camera bags, and \$104.85 for 15 UV Protective Filters. The Union City Community Foundation provided

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\$2000.00 for five cameras in September as well. The Pennsylvania Council on The Arts through Pennsylvania Partner in the Arts provided \$1016.00 for two cameras, ten tripods, and three gray cards in October. Funding is still needed for 8 more DSLR cameras (Canon EOS Rebel T-5), 10 more Sunpak 5858D Aluminum Tripods, 5 protective UV Filters, 5 camera bags, 9 lights and stands, 3 backdrops and stands, 20 16GB flash drives, and 17 gray cards, totaling \$4660.94.