

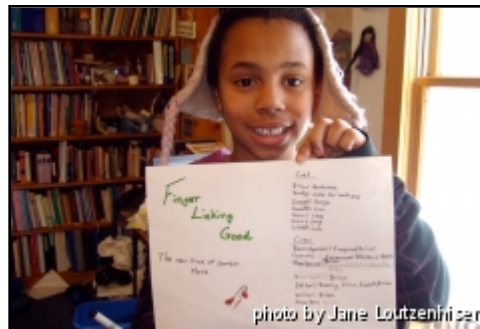
VINEYARD GAZETTE

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Little Props and Horrors: Student Scary Movies Play on Big Screen

By MEGAN DOOLEY

In a decade or two, they may all be headlining the Martha's Vineyard Film Festival. But for now, a group of 14 aspiring young Island filmmakers will at least enjoy the opportunity to share their work with the Vineyard community and possibly a few of the seasoned filmmakers who will attend the festival to promote their own work.



Danielle Hopkins is on the crew.

The group was formed through a filmmaking class for the Martha's Vineyard Public Charter School's midwinter project period, in which students depart from their regular class schedule to pursue their passions and interests exclusively for two weeks. Options include everything from interior design to aromatherapy to hiking. This year, the film festival's new managing director, Brian Ditchfield, signed on to teach kids the ins and outs of making a movie. The final results, which were written, shot and edited in the course of eight days, will screen tomorrow morning, Saturday at 9 a.m.

Film festival staffers began to toss the idea around with Mr. Ditchfield shortly after he took on his role as managing director. "One of the first things that was presented to me was, we want to do this education program," he said this week. Charter school administrators agreed that the project period would be the perfect opportunity to start.

In the end, 14 kids from fifth through eleventh grades signed on to spend their project period making movies. And while it sounds like little more than a fun diversion for students, they didn't treat it as free time. Time constraints made it no easy task for students to pull together two original short films.

"We had two weeks, and one of them was Presidents Day, so that left nine days. The last day was the presentation day, when everybody shares what they've done. So that left eight days, two of which were shortened by snow," said Mr. Ditchfield.

With the help of assistant teacher Jane Loutzenhiser, the students threw

themselves headfirst into the project, beginning with some short film screenings and a discussion about the importance of storytelling. His decision to not divide the kids by age was met with some initial resistance, but turned out for the best. “What would have happened is it would have been the high school film and the middle school film, but I felt like I wanted a good range of ages,” he said.

Once divided into groups, the kids began to brainstorm storylines, exploring different plots and genres. “It was sort of extracting these story ideas,” said Mr. Ditchfield. “And then we began to combine genres . . . and both groups really attached to the horror comedy genre. What I liked about that is that I think it would be harder for kids to make a straight comedy, and I don’t think the school or I really wanted them just to be making a horror film either. So the idea of combining these two was a really fun premise.”

The first film, called *Finger Licking Good*, is about a group of zombies that find themselves miraculously restored to normal thanks to a struggling stand-up comedienne. The other, a ghost story called *The Scare*, is about a ghost that hasn’t seen much success in scaring people until two giggly girls agree to tutor him.



Charter school students turned filmmakers.

The groups were well chosen, as each one had a different way of divvying up the tasks at hand. One group judiciously swapped roles so that everyone got a shot at acting, cinematography, sound and other roles. In the other group, students chose their favorite roles from the outset and stuck with them throughout. “It was interesting how the group dynamics played out,” said Mr. Ditchfield.

Once they wrapped shooting and moved on to editing at the MMTV studio, their teacher realized just how talented his future filmmakers might be. “I felt like I had just enough more skill than them to be able to teach them things, but I could tell they were going to take over really quick,” said Mr. Ditchfield. “I think that was the most astonishing part for me, how quickly they had a handle on the complex editing software. It took me a long time to master it, and I would say I’m still not by any means mastering it. I showed them basic editing and then within 45 minutes they were applying effects on it that I haven’t seen.”

By the end of the two weeks, it was time for the big revelation. The filmmakers screened their shorts for classmates at the beginning of the project period presentation day. “From fifth grade up, everyone got to see the movies, which was a real thrill for them,” their mentor said.

Like the experienced filmmakers they may emulate, the charter school students

still saw room for improvement in their films despite enthusiastic reviews by their peers. One even offered to return to MVTV for some reediting before tomorrow's festival screening. "It just shows the passion that's behind it," said Mr. Ditchfield. "There are definitely quite a few aspiring filmmakers. It's especially wonderful to open their eyes to how much goes into filmmaking . . . I think that kids think that there is a director and there are actors and that's it. And there's so much more that goes in, and each one of those parts of the process is just as creative as acting or directing. It was nice to get them to experience those levels as well."

The short films Finger Licking Good and The Scare will screen at 9 a.m. tomorrow morning at the Chilmark Community Center.