Civic Scholar Senior Project | Class of 2021

Make-It-Green
an Environmental Art Workshop

Rebecca (Becky) Schuman
“Make-It-Green” is a weekly workshop I virtually taught to students in grades 1st-6th at Lincoln Ave. Elementary School in Orange, New Jersey. This workshop focused both on art and environmentalism, two subjects I am passionate about and hope to pursue in my own career. Through these lessons, I was able to discuss environmental issues facing local communities, the community of Orange, New Jersey, and the world at large. I also tied environmental art into each lesson, visual and literary, so that the students understood an applicable and creative way to organize their activism.

The goal of this project was to bring larger environmental issues, such as environmental justice and biodiversity loss, to the classroom in a way that was educational, innovative, and digestible to young students. I hoped to show the class that their voices matter and deserve to be heard concerning these problems affecting their towns and local neighborhoods.

These goals were met through a series of activities we completed throughout the course. These projects included writing letters to our local representatives about environmental issues in Orange and creating ‘comic books’ about different endangered species. We also learned about environmental art and created proposals for our own earthworks. All of these projects tie into larger environmental issues facing global and local communities. My main goal of this class was to convey to these students they are the future activists of our environment.
This project was in partnership with Lincoln Ave. Elementary School in Orange, NJ. One of the main coordinators of the project was Dr. Rosenbloom, who first connected myself and the other senior Civic workshop leaders with the school, as well as guided our early planning meetings. Lincoln Ave. staff, Stephanie Desanges and Principal Iannucci, also played a significant role, reaching out to students and families about the program, facilitating our schedule, and anticipating any necessities of the courses.

Through the coordination of this class, we were able to bring the students a guided, 7-week program following different environmental issues, all the while using art as a medium. The students were incredibly engaged through our many discussions and conversations, often surprising me with their maturity and passionate stances on advanced subjects and current events. This project could easily be sustained over the years through a continued partnership between Drew University and Lincoln Ave. I have plans to speak with several art majors and ESS/ES majors who may be interested in picking up this workshop in the years following.
Through this project, I was able to strengthen my teaching and presentation skills consistently every week. Planning a lesson requires organization, anticipation of needs and questions, and creativity, in order to piece together a class that is innovative, exciting, and educational. This also required a high degree of adaptability and cooperation.

Moreover, many of the topics we approached, such as environmental justice and environmental racism, are sensitive and necessitate care and mindfulness. Discussing these issues with such young students was an unforgettable experience, and by the end of these lessons, I felt as though they taught me too.

Going forward, I have become somewhat interested in a career in youth education, specifically in the realm of environmentalism and art. Because of this, my experience in the Lincoln Ave. partnership program will be especially significant for my future work and positions.