

Ossining Fifth-Graders' Strength, Resilience Shine in Capsule Project

Each year at Roosevelt School, fifth-graders complete a research and advocacy project on a topic or cause they are passionate about, such as ending homelessness and preserving endangered species. The Capstone Project culminates with a student showcase in June.

That was the plan this year too until the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Staff members were concerned advocacy efforts could put children at risk, so they turned Capstone into the Capsule Project.

"For me, the whole idea was to find a way to encapsulate this moment in time," Principal Michelle Grier said. "It's really an avenue for expressing what they're experiencing right now and to see themselves as resilient and strong enough to overcome any difficulty, even a global pandemic."

The 379 fifth-graders spent five weeks from early May to mid-June exploring their "Connections with Family," "Connections with Others," "Connections with World" and "Connections with Self." Submissions included graphic design, poetry, realistic fiction, journals, dances, musical performances, videos and more.

On June 17, more than 100 guests attended an online event titled Capsule Project: A Collective Message of Overcoming and Resilience. One student presented from each classroom.

For the first assignment, students considered what builds family unity and how family members have helped them overcome challenges. Camila Godoy's quarantine journal included details and photos of a trip

to the Walkway Over the Hudson, an Easter egg hunt, backyard yoga and her birthday party.

"My family is unique because we always have each other's backs, we always are together and when we're not, we can't stand it," she said.



In an earlier virtual meeting, fifth-grader Alexandria Ward discussed her "Connections with Family" project, which was a realistic fiction story about estranged twins. "So their whole life, they weren't together," she said. "Then, during the pandemic, it brought them closer and they realized how they should have been twins all along."

Max Miller wrote journal entries about visiting his grandparents in New Jersey and locally for "Connections to Family." Everyone wore a mask and stayed more than 6 feet apart. "I was kind of like desperate to be able to go into their house and stuff," he said. "It was also still just good to be able to see them."



For "Connections to Others" the second week, students contemplated the value of strong relationships, how others have inspired them, or how they can inspire others.

Max Lazarowitz learned to play "Lean on Me" by the late Bill Withers on piano. Close friends and family members took turns singing the lyrics during a Zoom session as Max performed the piece. "During this hard time, my friends and family have been helping me get through this," Max wrote.

"The words in the song represent how we all need to support each other."

For the third week, the fifth-graders tackled "Connections to the World." They considered experiences that have connected them to the world; big or small changes in the world; or changes they would like to see.

Kayla Hutchinson wrote a poem about the crazy new world that COVID-19 has created – one with bluer skies and less litter, but with people getting sick every day because some don't follow the rules.

"Drive by celebrations are happening, sounds very happy right?" she wrote. "WELL CORONAVIRUS IS TAKING OVER THE WORLD DAY AND NIGHT."

The final assignment was "Connections to Self," in which students captured moments when they had persevered, learned lessons, or showed strength and resilience.

Lerissa Johnson read two poems she wrote for that week. "Courage isn't a substitute for fear but the ability to move past things. Courage is what I have. Even through my ups and downs," her piece "Courage" read in part.

Ms. Grier thanked teachers and staff for embracing the project and collaborating to carry it out so well.

"What you see here tonight is innovation – giving students an authentic platform to share their voices, empathize with, inspire and encourage each other," she said.

For her final assignment, Sarah Solganick played "The Sun Will Come Out Tomorrow" from "Annie" on the piano. "Although the pandemic has been difficult for everyone in many ways, I found ways to persevere and push forward," she said.



Ossining Teacher Parade

Elementary and middle school students, parents and community members on April 28 enthusiastically greeted a teacher and staff parade of close to 100 cars and police, fire and ambulance vehicles. Staff members wrote messages like "Ossining Strong" and "We Miss You" on their vehicles. Students held signs that said things like "Ossining Teachers Rock" and "We Are All in This Together."

