



“Every Classroom a Green Classroom” Green Classroom Profile: *Harbor High - Digital Media & Photography*

Teacher Leadership Institute for Sustainability 2023-2024

TEACHER LEADER BIO: *Chrissy Mata*

I teach photography and yearbook at Harbor High School and I'm thankful for the opportunities to get my classes outside in nature with cameras and nature journals in hand. My classes provide a much needed mental health break for students and often the photography assignments easily allow them to spend time outside. Personally, our family owns 5 acres in Aptos and we have a garden, fruit trees, chickens, ducks and 250 olive trees which we harvest and use to create olive oil. We are learning about sustainable agriculture and working to put those techniques into practice on our land. We try to eat local, walk often and spend time in nature daily. My hope for my students is that they understand the importance of time in nature for their own physical, mental and emotional well being.



BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Class(es)	# of student impacted by this project: 85 Grade level(s): 9-12 Content area(s) of focus for this project: Student quotes: “Nature is a blessing to me, I would never want to be apart from it.” “Nature makes me feel like I’m being pulled back to reality.”	
School Site	Harbor High School	School Logo 
School Demographics	Find ed-data here and fill in the following: Grades served: # students: 1,023 % English learners: 12% % qualifying for free and reduced price meals: 43%	
District	Santa Cruz City Schools - Secondary	District Logo
District Demographics	Find ed-data here and fill in the following: Grades served: 9-12	

	# students: 4,394 % English learners: 8.3% % qualifying for free and reduced price meals: 31.8%	
General Vision/Mission of School and/or district	<u>Mission Statement:</u> Harbor works to educate all students to become critical thinkers & globally-minded community members. <u>Vision Statement:</u> Where adults and students are respectful and own their learning. Harbor High graduates are college and career ready and equipped with the skills needed to become the best version of themselves.	

1) ORIGINAL GOALS AND INTENTIONS

What originally drew you to this program?

I was looking for ways to connect with like-minded educators in Santa Cruz County and the accountability and resources to incorporate more intentional environmental education into my classes. I already had a nature photography component to my curriculum but wanted to integrate concepts of sustainability, conservation and the importance of spending time in nature into my curriculum. When I went to the first session, I felt the program staff did an excellent job of creating a safe and flourishing educational community. I felt at home.

Share your vision for your Green Classroom. How has this program affected this vision? (50-100 words)?

My students, like most teenagers, spend quite a bit of each day in classrooms, on computers, phones or other screens. My goals for my classroom is that they create art through their photographs and learn to look at the world in new ways through the lens of their cameras. In the first semester, we spend quite a bit of time learning about camera settings (the exposure triangle) and practicing changing the aperture and shutter speed. Some of these activities are outdoors, like taking photos of bubbles floating, water balloons popping and textures, flowers and succulents. In the second semester, I already had a nature and landscape photography unit but I was looking for ways to enhance and expand this unit with intention. This program helped me enrich my nature unit by adding some journaling and reflection time, some conversations about the value of time in nature and our individual "environmental identity". Another focus of this CTE class is to show students the connections to real world careers so, thanks to the concepts we learned in this program, I was able to

bring in guest speakers and show documentaries about people who are making a difference in conservation efforts through their photography.

2) KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL BUILDING

A critical part of this program is building knowledge and skills related to Sustainable Schools. Examples include: Environmental Literacy & Sustainability Frameworks; Environmental Identity; Building student engagement through Campus, Curriculum, Community and Culture efforts; Continuum of Environmental Literacy Integration. **Where are you experiencing the most growth in your knowledge and skills related to being a teacher leader for sustainability?**

I found the most growth through the conversations with other people in our cohort and the educational partners we connected with in our meetings. This program gave me the language I needed to be able to discuss Environmental Identity with my students and encourage them to reflect on the origins of their Trust in Nature and their individual progress towards Environmental Action. They did journaling in nature journals and we also watched some documentaries about photographers that are using their powerful images to move others to care about environmental causes.

3) ACTION - COMMUNITY IMPACT PROJECT OVERVIEW

Provide a brief summary of the purpose of your project and overall goals.

Summary of Project Purpose and Goals for student learning:

My goal was to add layers of intention to an existing nature and landscape unit in my photography classes. I wanted my students to reflect on their past experiences with Nature and to move further in their development of their own Environmental identity as they learned to observe and record time in nature through the lens of their cameras. I wanted them to feel proud of the photos they took in nature and to keep a physical notebook where they recorded nature journaling while outside and added photos they took while spending time in our campus garden, on a nature walk nearby the campus and of birds on the campus.

MRS MATA'S HARBOR HIGH PHOTOGRAPHY STUDENTS REFLECT ON THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH NATURE:

Nature makes me feel at peace

Me ayuda a olvidar las problemas

THE OCEAN WAS LIKE MY THERAPIST

Nature makes me feel like I'm being pulled back to reality

Nature makes me really happy and nostalgic

NATURE IS ACCESSIBLE TO EVERYONE

SPENDING TIME IN NATURE MAKES ME FEEL SUPER ALIVE

NATURE IS VERY IMPORTANT TO ME

Nature makes me feel connected to the earth

I feel so connected to the Earth when I swim and spend time in the sun

I like going camping, there's no phones so you feel more connected

SPENDING TIME IN NATURE MAKES ME FEEL HAPPY AND FREE

Nature is a blessing to me, I would never want to be apart from it

NATURE HELPS ME KEEP PEACE IN MY MIND

Being in nature helps me feel connected with my culture and ancestors

Spending time in nature makes me feel euphoric

NATURE MAKES ME FEEL CALM AND RELAXED

Spending time in nature makes me feel happy and alive

How does this project connect to your Green Classroom vision and the broader mission and vision of the school/district?

A stated goal of our school is that students become “*equipped with the skills needed to become the best version of themselves*” and by understanding the importance of time in nature to our physical, mental and emotional health, this unit is helping to prepare them to incorporate time in nature with their own healthy lifestyles in the future.

What specific learning intention(s) did you share with your students?

They would be able to see the connection between time in nature and overall positive health benefits. They would use existing camera skills to capture photos of flowers, plants, landscapes, birds, etc

How did this project serve your pre-existing instructional goals?

In the first semester I spend a majority of the time teaching students how to use the cameras, editing software (Lightroom) and basic graphic design (Canva). In the second semester I look for ways to advance those skills in a variety of new settings (still life, product/commercial Photography and Nature/Landscape photography).

4) ACTION - IMPLEMENTATION STORY

Describe how implementation of your community impact project went. *If your project has not finished yet, describe how the start has gone, and how you anticipate it completing.*

General story of implementation: My students learned the basics of Canon M50 Mirrorless cameras and the “Exposure Triangle” in first semester. As part of second semester, they built on these skills by learning to take macro photography shots in nature, bird photography, landscape photography and other components of nature photography that allowed them to get outside with cameras in hand. To frame these lessons, we spent time talking about our relationship with nature in the past/growing up, currently and the importance of time in nature for overall mental and physical health. Students also kept a nature journal and recorded observations while spending time outside on at least 5-8 class periods.

Challenges and obstacles and how you overcame them: Most of my student work is shared on computers (uploaded photos through Google Classroom). As part of moving away from technology and having the ability to journal and print actual photos, I was able to use some of my classroom money to invest in photo printers, instax cameras, notebooks and other journaling supplies. This allowed us to unplug and take our journals outside (as well as our cameras). The photo printers are supposed to allow students to send photos from their phones but the technology has worked sporadically. I am still troubleshooting it and looking for other ways to print out student photos so we can have more photos printed for the nature journals.

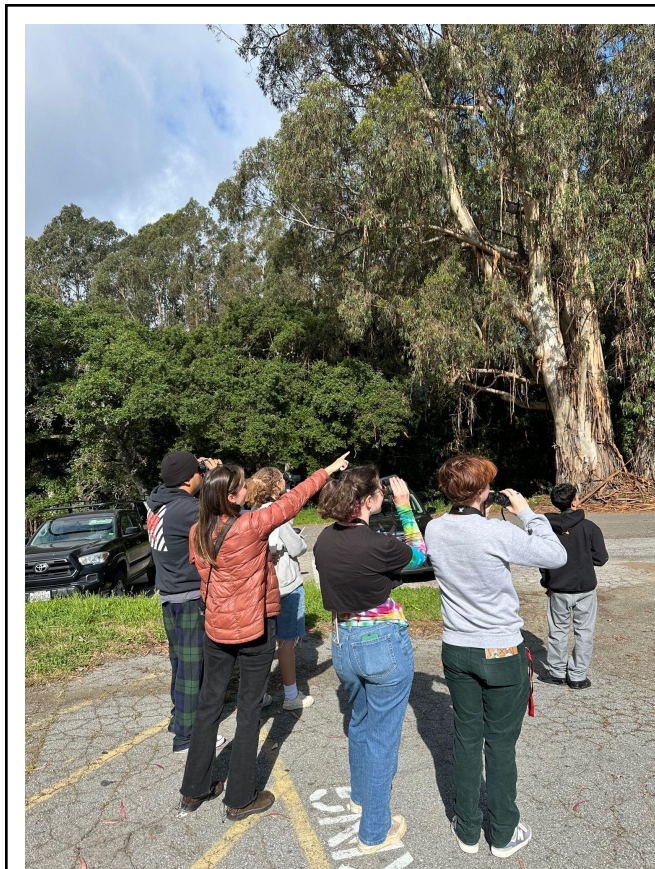
Successes and what contributed to success: One of the most successful parts of this project was partnering with the Bird School Project (BSP). Students went out to look for birds on campus with nature journals in hand BEFORE the BSP came to campus and they were only able to list 4-5 common species of birds they saw (seagulls, crows, pigeons, hummingbirds, etc). On the day that the Bird School Project came with binoculars, field guides and identifying apps, students were able to observe a wider variety of species (including Pygmy Nuthatch, Dark Eyed Junco, House Finch, California Towhee and more!!)

Next Steps for this project: Students will go on a nature walk with telephoto lenses in the neighborhood near campus and take pictures of the birds they spotted with binoculars when the Bird School Project visited the campus. They will be able to add these photos to their nature journals. They will also be looking for other specific landscape composition techniques on our nature walk. Using telephoto lenses will allow them to get a different perspective and composition than they can with a standard lens or their phone cameras.





Size/Tamaño	SHAPE/Forma	Beak Type/Tipo de pico
Give a measurement or comparison! (example: 5-6 inches or the size of my whole hand) Not just "big" or "small"	Standing up straight or hunched over? Shape of wings and feet? Length of neck, legs, and tail?	Long or short? Curved or straight? Thick or thin?
BIRDS! ¡AVES!		
Color Bright or dull? Where is the color on the bird? Are there any patterns? (Spots, speckles, stripes, streaks)	Behavior/comportamiento How does it sound? Is it perched? Flying? Swimming? How is it flying or moving? Down on the ground or up high in the sky?	Habitat On land or in the water? Around buildings? In trees/shrubs or out in the open?



5) ACTION - METRICS AND OUTCOMES

- **Overall Assessment:** How would you characterize the success of your project?
- **Ecological Benefit:** If possible, how were you able to measure the ecological benefit (reduced GHG emissions, reduced waste, increased biodiversity, etc.) and what were the outcomes?
- **Community & Culture Benefit:** If possible, how were you able to measure impacts on classroom culture and community (for example, students' sense of connection to nature, stewardship) and what were the outcomes?
- **Student and Staff Learning:** *Reflect on evidence of student learning from this project, and how this project shifted your classroom to further integrate environmental literacy.*

Overall assessment:

This project was very successful as student engagement and interest was high. Students expressed a connection with nature and were proud of the photos they captured. They were excited to see their work in print. Student nature photos and reflections were also included in the TLIS event at Seymour Marine Center and Earth Day event at Camp Koinonia. I also hope to be allowed to display them in the Harbor High Library to share their work with the HH community.

For the three sections below, include how you tried to measure impacts and what evidence of outcomes you found.

Ecological Benefit: This was not seen as much with this particular unit.

Community & Culture Benefit: Students seem to interact more with each other (and me!) when we are outside and “unplugged” than they do when we are sitting at computers in the computer lab.

Educational Benefit: A review of student journals shows thoughtful reflections, cool nature photos and students engaging with the content.

Impact on Students’ Sense of Connection to the Environment (results of Children’s Environmental Attitude Survey and any other evidence of impact):

My students took the pre-survey on “Students’ Sense of Connection to the Environment” and they will be taking the post survey when we are done with our nature and landscape unit. My hope is that through taking photos of nature, journaling and the other activities we did together, they will feel more connected to nature.

6) REFLECTION AND COMMITMENTS

What is your enduring understanding about teaching for a sustainable future? And what are your commitments for next year and beyond for this important work?

Reflection: This experience was so enriching for me and I was thankful to spend time with like-minded educators that are also seeking to integrate environmental education into their curriculum. I felt “at home” when spending time with this cohort—encouraged, supported and motivated.

Commitments: My commitment for the future is to continue to look for opportunities to get my students outside with cameras in hand. I plan to partner with Bird School Project in the future and possibly have them come more than once. I also plan to look for at least one new educational partner to work with in the future to continue adding to this unit.