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COVER STORY



Photograph by Jacqueline Ramseyer

Hands On: Instructor Steve Burrell helps students from around the Cupertino Union School District learn how to edit their films for submission to the ePic Film Festival.

Picture Perfect
Youngsters learn digital movie-making techniques

By Erin Hussey

Shaky, embarrassing, sleep-inducing homemade videos are becoming a thing of the past. While Apple doesn't provide a humiliation-free guarantee, its website says iMovie is "the fastest and easiest way to turn home movies into dazzling Hollywood-style hits."

For the first time, the Cupertino Elementary Endowment Foundation (CEEF) is hosting the ePic Student Film Festival. All iMovies. All produced by students.

"I took some pictures I got from the Internet, and I did some videotaping," says Ariela Brodbeck, a third-grade student at Nimitz Elementary School who has entered a movie on friendship. "Our teacher and her friend from Apple are going to come over here and show us what we can do with our iMovies, like when we want it to go to the next picture, we can make it wiggle or put words on people when it comes down."

Ariela is among hundreds of students who submitted videos for the festival.

The contest's main theme is "What everyone should know." Within that are three sub-categories: "What I discovered" (documentary films), "What I mastered" (instructional videos) and "What I created" (videos based on original literary works).

A total of 150 two-minute iMovie videos, by both group and individual student filmmakers in grades 2-8, were turned in March 1. The initial cut has

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been made and 50 films now vie for first place.

A panel of iMovie specialists and professional filmmakers, over the next month, will judge the videos on instructional merit, creativity, cinematography, screenplay and soundtrack.

The winners in the documentary, instructional video, video based on an original work, screenplay, soundtrack, cinematography, special effects and most creative categories will be announced at an Academy Awards-style ceremony April 28 at the CEEF Community Arts and Technology Festival. The inspiration for the ePic festival came from last year's arts and technology event, which annually recognizes teachers who use innovative technology-based projects in their curriculums.

"At our technology awards last year, all of the projects but one focused on making digital records," says Eleanor Watanabe, CEEF executive director.

"We wanted to do a contest that involved and invited all the students to be engaged in a different way. The other nice thing is that iMovie is one of the technology benchmarks in the district, so it synced nicely."

Teacher Susan Woods' project on iMovies won best overall project for grades 3-5.

Woods developed her iMovie project during the summer of 2005 when she participated in the Earn While You Learn Institute at the Krause Center for Innovation at Foothill College. The institute helps teachers plan a technology-infused project for their students during the school year. They are also required to mentor and coach two other teachers in integrating technology into the classroom.

"This is the tech generation, and part of this generation is learning how to use all of the technology that is at their hands," says Woods. "I think that this generation, including the teachers, needs to be on board because, if not, we are not going to be as competitive as other countries."

In addition to Woods, who had each of her students create a movie on a topic they thought everyone should know about--such as peace, endangered species and telepathy--a number of other teachers chose to weave the use of iMovie into their coursework.

"The project appealed to their creative spirit, challenging them to tell a story worth sharing, to produce something worthwhile," says Jay Richards, an eighth-grade teacher at Cupertino Middle School.

Richards assigned his class to create documentary films on topics relating to the state's eighth-grade U.S. history standards. More than 25 iMovie documentaries were made and entered in the ePic contest. The subjects included the journey of Lewis and Clark, the causes of the French Revolution, leaders of the women's suffrage movement and entrepreneurs of the early 1900s.

"The documentary project improves upon the traditional research project," says Richards. "Matching appropriate images to the narration requires a layer of thinking about the topic not found in the traditional written research project."

Richards adds that, because the process is fun and does not end when a grade is given, the students are more likely to remember what they learned for the rest of their lives.



"Watching a normally quiet student role- play a French peasant grabbing a pitchfork en route to 'getting those nobles' was not only highly entertaining but rewarding as well," says Richards. "His movie was proof of how he understood the frustration the French common class had prior to the Revolution."

Stephanie Lewis, an art teacher at Hyde Middle School, also decided to include the iMovie ePic contest into her curriculum.

"It seemed to be the perfect marriage of technology and cinematography practice," she says. Lewis used the project to help teach one of her instructional units on the entertainment industry that included cinematography. The students were required to use at least five different camera techniques as well as some symbolism in their iMovie films.

"I want my students to do more than learn and regurgitate facts," says Lewis. "To encourage high-order thinking skills that span across subject areas, students need to be given the opportunity to sit in the driver's seat of their learning and actually do something with the facts and techniques that they learn. Involving technology in the curriculum gives students a place in that driver's seat."

As for the students who were not required to complete an iMovie in class, Woods, as well as CEEF, offered after school iMovie workshops.

"When you utilize technology, it's amazing," says Watanabe. "It encourages kids to want to learn rather than just filling them with knowledge. That's what we're trying to do: encourage innovation, creativity and partnerships."

Woods adds that the project, while important, is more than just about teaching students how to use iMovie and the other associated technologies.

"It inspires kids to have a message," she says.

The top three films in each of the eight award categories will be shown April 28 at the CEEF Community Arts and Technology Festival. The festival will be held from 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Miller Middle School.

For more information, call 408.444.2333 or visit www.ceefcares.org.