



## **New York: A virtual Storytelling Club during the Pandemic**

### **November to December 2020**

A virtual Storytelling Club during the Pandemic was ambitious in retrospect, yet with all the challenges putting it on, I am happy to have served the children. I was excited because during the early days of quarantine for the months of May and June, I had 7-10 students 3 days a week in Film Club, so when I was invited to the Storytelling Club Training I was excited to incorporate it into Film Club.

I discovered that many children are struggling with going to school online especially as lockdown seems as if it will never end and after school can add another dimension of stress for some children. However, some children are happy for the social interaction and not having the rigid structure of online school, a break from the 'new ordinary'.

However, I also learned that many parents wanted to restrict their children's screen time, because they felt that it was too much, so children were placed on schedules that gave them only 4 days a week of online school and parents also expressed that their children would attend after school when we're physically back in school premises. There was much confusion and students who were in after-school online, were unaware that they had after school on whatever their off day was: some did not show up for that reason.

I started with 10 students, grade 6-8, ages 11-13. Some left, some came in a few weeks after our starting date, not realizing after school had begun. Then, it came to a point where students from all our afterschool sites were allowed to choose any club from any site because we were not restricted by area. We were all online, so I had a few children in and out from other sites/schools. Most of my club members attend the same school, although one of them is quarantining upstate with her family, while the rest are still in Brooklyn.

Also, if students had doctors' appointments or other family obligations, or school events or in the case of my 8th graders, activities pertaining to applying to high school which they will attend this fall, or even difficult school assignments or slipping grades could interfere with after school attendance.

Overall, it was challenging, I decided to keep going so I went in order of the Virtual STC, but reviewed what we did before for those who had missed it. I had 4-5 students consistently, but days with 3, 2 or even 1,

but I gave my all, happily and enthusiastically each time, no matter who or how many I had because, they needed to play and to laugh and to share what they probably don't talk about anywhere else, so I was happy to do it.

I only used the STC icebreaker games and we usually do improvisation games. Like all children they enjoy this part very much, just playing games and having fun.

### **Conclusion:**

For me, I loved the STC club. The lessons were already written for me, I only had to adjust as needed and combine with Film Club. But I only wish I had more children and I could do it in more neighborhoods especially where the children are even more underserved or in Jamaica; perhaps in the future.

However, I am happy for the group I had especially the discussions we had. They were very respectful of each other and critiqued whatever videos or ideas emerged in a constructive and encouraging way. I look forward to editing everything together and who knows perhaps two or three of their own pieces may be award winners in the DYCD Film Festival this year, inspired by our STC experience.

### **Examples of stories children shared:**

Kyla, my star since 6th grade who won the Audience Choice award last year at the Department for Youth and Child Development Film Festival, attends regularly and has shared her stories and was willing to have them documented or document them.

During the pandemic, Kyla's family moved upstate New York to stay with her grandmother, but her father had to stay in New York City because of his job. She didn't see him until a month later. It was very hard to be away from him for so long... and scary. Although she knew they were safer in a large open area with grandma's chickens and not cramped in the city, she missed him so much. Then one day her mother said they had a package and when she ran outside with her little brother and sister, their dad was there and they hugged and she was so happy to see him.

Having to be without him for long periods of time has made Kyla strong. She says her dad has praised her for helping out around the house and helping with her little brother and sister. She also shared what she did to cope during the pandemic which was to make little clay figures from her favorite online video game, "Among Us". She has made an impressive collection which she proudly displays on her bedroom wall.

Vera, who is in grade 6, shared that a problem she solved during the pandemic was clearing up a misunderstanding with a friend. She says it was much easier before quarantine when you could go to school the next day and talk it over, but because of that not being possible upsets lingered for days, because each person didn't know what to do about the other's texts. So a few friendships ended that were not true friends and true friends were willing to spend a little extra effort to work out their problem. These experiences of challenging friendships pre-quarantine and during quarantine, inspired by the prompts in storytelling club, have inspired Vera to create her short film "The Read Feature" because when you send your friend a text, you can see she has read it, but then she just ignores you.

Vera became strong during the pandemic when she made a TikTok video to let her family know that she likes girls and boys and they all told her that they loved her.

Vera also advises, kids to learn new hobbies, she's learning to play the Ukulele and she learned to ride a skateboard.

Henry shared that he always had a fear, which he warned us is morbid, but when he went to the bathroom (toilet) at home he would think what if his parents find him dead in the bathroom. Because he was home all the time and he had to go to the bathroom day and night, he realized that his fear didn't make any sense and he just got over it. So the pandemic cured him.

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