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Fighting Apathy in the Digital Age

by *J.D. GRAVENOR, The Gazette* — May 15, 2007

May 15, 2007

Action!

Now there's a word with many meanings. Action can be something as simple as jumping up and down. It's also what you're in store for when you buy a ticket to the new Spider-Man movie. And "action" is what movie directors shout whenever they film a scene.

Movie directors like Ricki Berger, that is.

"I absolutely love filming," said the 17-year-old Dollard des Ormeaux resident. "I do it all the time with my sister, Jamie. We've done animation. We've done little music videos, short films and a dramatization for a psychology project."

But Berger has never entered a video contest. So when she heard that a movie-making competition was being held at her school, she got involved - along with the rest of her Grade 11 video arts class.

"I was so excited to do it," said the student at West Island College, a private school in Dollard.

And while the students are free to shoot almost anything they like, their films must all have common themes of democratic change and social involvement. That's because the contest is the shared brainchild of video arts teacher Annie Krespil and the Montreal-based non-profit organization Apathy is Boring.

Founded four years ago, Apathy is Boring encourages youth participation in social issues and democracy. Concordia University is one of the sponsors of the non-partisan organization.

"Apathy is Boring works to sensitize and encourage young people to understand political issues and get involved in the community and with social causes," explained Perry Calce, co-ordinator of the Concordia School of Community and Public Affairs. "After all, society is the world that young people are going to shape in years to come."

This is the first year of the video contest. The plan is to roll it out in schools across the country next year, but for now, all the action is taking place at West Island College.

Rebecca Besnos is one of the young filmmakers. She likes the idea of using video to convey a social message.

"I think it's really important for kids to get involved in society," said the 17-year-old Dollard resident. "We're the future. We have a chance to make the world a better place. It's an important challenge."

Benos is working on a film that will emphasize how young people are going to inherit the world from their elders, so they better get a handle on things now.

Her classmate, Devon Butters, is just getting a handle on video production, but he says there are few media with as much potential to reach young people.

"A lot of kids watch movies and TV. That's what they connect with," said the 16-year-old Pointe Claire resident. "So if you can get across your message, you can get to them more than with a book or something like that."

Butters has never been quite so involved in making a film and he's engaged in every step, from plot development and script writing to shooting and postproduction.

"Our topic is about the legalization of drugs and how it affects the community," he said. "If teens see the consequences of what this can do, they might make the right choices."

"I think if we put the information out there, teens are smart enough to take the decision not to legalize drugs," he said.

The winners of the contest will be announced in June. Their video will be aired on the Apathy is Boring website (apathyisboring.com). They will also be rewarded with concert tickets and a selection of clothing.

So far, the students are still working on their entries. The first step of the process was to split the class up into production teams consisting of two, three or four members. The second step was brainstorming for general ideas. Next, they wrote and refined their scripts and developed visual storyboards to plan every scene. Then, they started shooting, which will continue, along with editing, for the next couple of weeks.

It's a process that Angie Argyrakos is all too familiar with.

"I'm always shooting," said the 17-year-old Dollard resident who has been making short videos ever since she got her first camcorder at age 12.

Her production team plans to shoot a series of snappy, commercial-style clips and knit them together into a two- or three-minute presentation.

"We're trying to reach the kids who do different activities. We'll get types saying, 'I care, apathy is boring' and stuff like that," she explained. "What we're saying is, 'Either be bored or get involved.'"

So far, Argyrakos's team has 10 or 20 minutes of raw video, which they'll have to cut way back if they want it to be as punchy as possible.

"You want it to be clear and exciting," she said. "If you drag it on, it can become boring."

They also plan to add background music that emphasizes solidarity and involvement, including Peace on Earth by U2 and Heal the World by Michael Jackson.

"Our video deals with peace and unity," said co-producer Catherine Thompson, 16. "We're showing how caring is good. It's exciting. It's our future, so we really need to get involved."

The films will be judged for their ability to teach young people about social engagement.

For Berger, the whole process has been a whirlwind.

"We were shooting in parks, shooting in classrooms, showing how teen voting can make such a change," she said. "We were showing poverty, pollution, then showing the opposite of that and showing the difference voting can make."

She already considered herself to be engaged in society. Now, she's just glad if her filmmaking talents can help persuade others to think the same way.

"I think it's very important for all teenagers to be involved in their community, because every teen has a voice and they shouldn't just settle for anything," she said.

But there's another thing that motivates these students: the idea of competing against each other for a prize.

"It definitely makes it more interesting," said Kate MacGowan, 16. "Everyone feels they want to win. It makes it more fun."

Source: [The Gazette](#)

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