



May Term On the Verge: A Bootcamp Report from Cindy Darling

To attend May Term 2020 Bootcamp on Thursday, April 30 was to feel on the verge. As more and more squares lit up with faces on the Google Meet screen, each the face of a senior about to graduate from MKA, a sense of expectancy hung in the air.

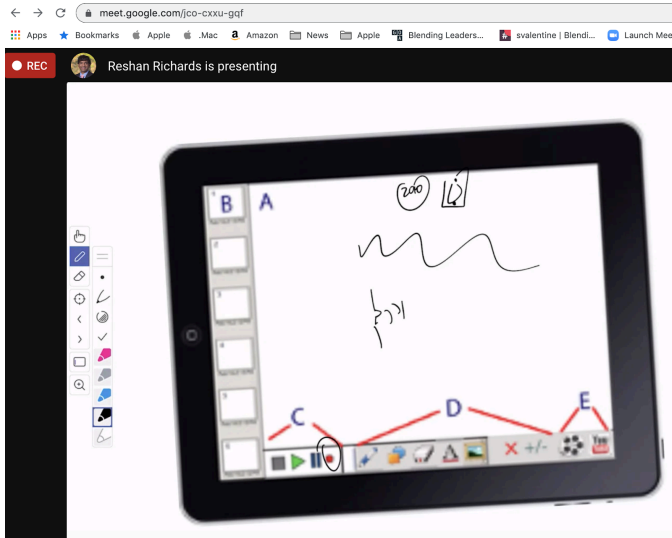
To capture a night as jam-packed with expertise, inventiveness, and inspiration as May Term Bootcamp 2020 proves virtually impossible. Instead, we offer a roving glimpse into each speaker's breakout room.

Joy was the name of the game as Keynote Speaker Adrian Michael Green began his address, "Meaning Unlimited: A May Term Kickoff," with a two-minute virtual dance party. Green then pushed seniors to use their May Term projects to find meaning, citing a friend of his from Stanford, Professor Bill Damon: "The biggest problem growing up today is not actually stress — it's meaninglessness." Green's edgy joyfulness was infectious as he showed seniors a range of the experiments he's taken on during the time of quarantine. From teaching himself to solve the Rubik's Cube to then developing a Rubik's Cube teaching tool for others that he now sells online, to creating a series of virtual open mic nights, Green's time inside has allowed him to carve out a space of frenetic productivity. He urged seniors to take the same fruitful approach to their May Term projects.

What better way to start May Term than with revisiting the immersive sense of play so many felt as kids, involved in their latest LEGO creation. Sarah Wolman is Senior Advisor to the LEGO Foundation. During her talk, she immediately asked seniors to make a duck out of only materials found in their house. The catch? They had one minute to do it. Within 60 seconds, brilliant and comical jerry-rigged ducks appeared on the screen, made from household objects. Wolman asked what specific skills seniors had used in their 60 second project, and from there she identified five types of play that promote the best learning or work: active engagement, involvement in something that has meaning, engagement in an iterative process — where one is trying and failing and trying again — engagement in social interaction, and involvement in a joyful state. Wolman returned, throughout her talk, to seniors' need to challenge themselves to bring play to the screen format of our quarantine lives — and not just for school.

Michael Hernandez's "The How, What, and Why of Digital Storytelling" was a speech not only valuable to the May Term writers in the room, but also helpful in pushing any senior to think outside the box when considering ways of sharing their own May Term projects. Hernandez proclaimed, "paper is dead," inciting students to embrace only digital storytelling, noting that some of the best stories are being told on Instagram. He stressed, now is an "opportunity for us to add to the chorus of voices so we have more

nuanced mosaics.” He then pressed students to consider: “With whatever story you tell—before you open your mouth, before you like or publish—really listen. The most important skill a storyteller has is to listen.”



A crowd favorite at MKA as always, Dr. Reshan Richards presented “How Design Can Help You Do Something Meaningful and Beyond.” Dr. Richards knows many of the seniors in the present class, having taught them during his time as the Director of EdTech at MKA. Dr. Richards launched into his Bootcamp talk by using his app Explain Everything to share the iterative process he underwent when moving Explain Everything from just a concept to a fully revised and successful final version. No senior could walk away from this talk without an abundant

understanding of the ways Dr. Richards uses design thinking for his work and how they might use it for their own.

One of Tejpaal Bhatia’s greatest lessons to seniors included the candid and unabashed way his bio states the number of startups with which he has been involved: “One exit, one failure, one still in operation.” It’s as if the very name of the startup game is try and fail and try again . . . and be transparent about it. Bhatia distinguished that a startup is an experiment — not a company. It is an embodiment of the concept of iteration and about “listening to customers and developing solutions to real world problems that can create value.” As Bhatia noted, “Most startups fail, even well-funded ones.” Because of that, he noted startups’ resounding optimism and encouraged seniors to take on that mentality for their upcoming projects.

Zein Hindawi’s talk was a fast-paced and super-charged look at “Mindful Action Planning and Exploring Your Why.” It is included in full below this post.

Finally, Dr. Horn kept the night truly current in “Approaching the World as a Researcher,” capturing the way that the very nature of research is changing due to the Covid-19 pandemic: “I’m seeing the world through a different kind of lens,” he stated, noting that Covid-19 is changing the way data is shared and presented and also creating new avenues of work. Specifically, he noted that with Covid-19, we now have a “massive amount of data being shared. Suddenly there’s access to data, now being shared for modeling. We have to solve problems collectively around the world.” The cycles of research that Dr. Horn shared with students no doubt felt familiar to MKA

seniors who have gone through the MKA research program. But Dr. Horn's level of detail describing ever more sophisticated research levels and his pragmatic advice on how seniors can continue their real-world research during May Term and into their college years no doubt attracted a few acolytes to follow his path into the world of research.

The net effect of a night like Bootcamp is immeasurable. The stories, techniques, methods, anecdotes, and personal connections shared have the potential to lodge in the brain and appear, not only at a key moment in May Term, when seniors might find themselves struggling to troubleshoot a problem in their projects, but also well into college and life beyond. All in all, the alchemy of the evening set the stage for seniors to venture forth into a world seemingly very different from the one we all existed in just before spring break. True to MKA, the ways seniors are making and remaking their worlds is dizzying, dazzling, and already making reverberations. It's safe to say that May Term Bootcamp 2020 has started the momentum that can't be turned back.

-Cindy Darling, Upper School English Teacher