

Art+Energy Camp: Renaissance Gate

This unique six-week summer camp in the Homewood neighborhood of Pittsburgh gave 20 kids an education in energy science, climate science, art, design, and solar power installation.

Week one of Art+Energy Camp was about understanding the entire landscape of energy generation in Western Pennsylvania—a window onto the existing conditions of our energy portfolio—while also understanding the global environmental and social issues around energy generation. Because Western Pennsylvania has a very high mix of coal-fired power, which contributes to consistently poor air quality in the Pittsburgh region, we felt it was important for the youth to witness a plant first hand. We visited a coal plant that contributes 17 million tons of CO₂ annually. On the tour we walked along a 110-degree Fahrenheit catwalk—an embodiment of the lesson that they had learned the previous day about energy conversion and waste heat. We also visited a nearby nuclear power plant. The students raised lots of questions about the safety of nuclear vs. coal, which lead to some important conversations. We then contrasted these experiences by visiting solar installations and buildings with integrated passive and active energy efficiency systems.

These experiences were then applied to benefit the local community. The campers designed a public artwork utilizing solar panels (4 kWp) to generate renewable energy. Fifteen modules have been installed in an arrangement that was conceived by the students with the principles of the Land Art Generator Initiative in mind.

The process of concept generation was really interesting. We had conversations about the Homewood neighborhood and about words that capture what the campers want visitors to the artwork to feel. Together the kids eventually arrived at the idea of a “Renaissance Gate”—a passageway through which visitors can walk from the old Homewood into a Homewood of the future—a place of prosperity and opportunity for those who live here.

Working from that concept, design sessions brought the kids together to collaborate on various 3D forms and configurations using the 17 panels. The kids incorporated the symmetry of a flower and offered pragmatic considerations for shade and protection from rain.

The solar artwork now provides clean electricity to help offset the demand load of the Homewood Renaissance Association facilities and provides a unique cultural amenity for the community, with a personal phone charging station that can be utilized by anyone in the neighborhood.

The kids have been a driving part of the entire process. They have helped with documentation, social media, design, and meetings with consultants. When challenges presented themselves, the campers were there helping us to brainstorm solutions. The outcome for them goes beyond this particular solar artwork. In a sense, we have graduated project managers. It’s our hope that they’ll be able to apply this experience in all walks of life.

Field trips during the camp included

Beaver Valley Nuclear Plant, Bruce Mansfield Coal Fired Power Plant, Conservation Consultants, Inc. building, Energy Innovation Center, Chatham University’s Eden Hall Campus, a residential solar installation, Homewood Library, Construction Junction, and the Center for Creative Reuse.

Guest lessons and demonstrations by

Fred Underwood
Tim Gerhart
David Edwards

Campers and Participants of Art+Energy Camp

Jordan Blackwell, Canaan Blackwell, Adrian Nanji, Ewane Nanji, Thomas Bowens, Mya Lane, Sarai Robinson, Emani Jones, Elizabeth Blackwell, Jordan Woods, DaVontae Garner, Terrell Williams, Lamonte Farrish, Cameron Jennings, Madison Wilson, Erin Shealy, Caleb Williams, Imani Nanji, Elisha Blackwell, Jasmine Berry, Rodney Heard, Indigo Raffel, Robert Ferry, Elizabeth Monoian

For more information and photos:
www.artenergycamp.org

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A COLLABORATION BETWEEN Homewood Renaissance Association, Land Art Generator Initiative, Conservation Consultants, Inc., Underwood Solar Future

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The Renaissance Gate is an entry point to a positive space in the community.

Canaan Blackwell (age 14)

Renaissance Gate means to me that once you walk through it you will come into a completely new Homewood. A new community without fear, without poverty, and without violence.

Jordan Blackwell (age 14)

Renaissance Gate is when you are walking through a whole different neighborhood that you've never been to. And it's a more wonderful space.

DaVontae Garner (age 14)

It's helping the community. It's a place where you can empty your mind.

Caleb Williams

I feel the Renaissance Gate should inspire the community that in Homewood you don't always have to use violence—and it's a very nice community and it should be represented as one. The Renaissance Gate should stand for peace, non-violence, truth, justice. It should bring us and make us realize that we are all the same and one big family.

Mya Lane

People think Homewood is a bad place to be, but the kids and builders are making a solar panel artwork so that people will not judge Homewood because of some other stuff that happens. We are opening a door of opportunity for Homewood and as a community we are trying to make Homewood a better place.

Terrell Williams (age 11)