



Apocalypto

Scott Swaaley, *Physics & Engineering* and Mike Strong, *Humanities*
High Tech High

Human history is punctuated by the prolific rise and inevitable collapse of civilization after civilization. In this project, students formulated hypotheses for these fluctuations, compared their hypotheses with historical evidence, mapped quantitative changes throughout history, then created a narrative and mechanical representation of their findings. The final product was exhibited on the eve of the Mayan Apocalypse.

Teacher Reflection: *See article on the next page*

Student Reflections

Working on Apocalypto was the first glimpse into what I would later define as a “real” project: a project in which the students choose the scope, method, and design. If a student made a mistake on one of those three, it was up to him or her to fix it. In this project, failure wasn’t an option; it was simply a means of reaching success.
—Sharon Tamir

Taking on the role of mechanist felt like a lot of weight on my shoulders. However, as I put in more and more work, I started to see progress towards an end goal, which made me even more tenacious. After months of hard work, seeing the final product on the wall at exhibition was one of the greatest feelings I’ve ever had. I had created a masterpiece and all of a sudden, the many late nights and fatigue-filled mornings felt worth it.
—Josh Ortega

As one of the students who had to go through the humiliating experience of telling exhibition-goers that my piece belonged in one of the gaping holes of the exhibition’s centerpiece, I can now say that it was perhaps the most significant experience I’ve had in high school. My failure to have my mechanism ready on exhibition night along with the overall project made me so much more resilient and calm which would prove to be very important during my next three years of high school.
—Maya Ervin

To learn more about this project and others, visit <http://pbl.scottswaaley.com/apocalypto-project-summary/>