



**Western Films**  
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Twelfth Grade  
High Tech High International

Over the course of a semester, students took a deep dive into the Western genre. In English students learned about western expansion, the barbed wire wars, read “No Country for Old Men,” and each student wrote their own western scripts. Simultaneously in Digital Video Communications students watched a wide variety of western films and practiced filming stylized western mini-scenes so that they could better understand the genre. The top three scripts were selected and production teams were created of seven to eight students. Groups filmed in Old Town San Diego, Sunset Cliffs, and Lone Pine’s Historic Alabama Hills.

While each student learned the direct content from the western genre and the production process, some of the more valuable moments came from the development of the soft skills, and life skills, needed to complete such an in-depth project. Real world connections were made with businesses hundreds of miles away that would eventually let us film on site for free. Large student groups led to interpersonal problems which were solved through honest, productive, and sometimes uncomfortable conversations. Students who had never camped survived near freezing temperatures, sustained wind gusts, and a large snake roaming the campground. All in all it was a project that the students, educators, and volunteers who were involved will soon not forget.



**Teacher Reflection**

I was terrified to commit to a project that spans an entire semester, especially one where the groups were so large (up to eight students). While I don’t think a semester-long project is something that I want to do every year, I do feel that there is value in having such an immersive theme to focus on. Additionally, my fear with the large groups was the interpersonal issues that I knew would arise between students. While those issues caused some stress they also provided safe and guided opportunities for students to learn how honesty and kind conversations can lead to conflict resolution and project success.

—Chris Mutter



**Student Reflection**

Best project throughout all of my high school years. It felt like we were actually producers making a big film. We took it seriously and had to plan a lot of the details that we wouldn’t normally think about. It didn’t feel like a high school project.

—Junior M.

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