

UW-Madison: UW grade student shares hands-on physics, art lessons with local fifth graders

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MADISON – One month into the new school year, Aurora, a fifth grader at Henderson Elementary School and an aspiring obstetrician, is taking the highs with the lows when it comes to virtual learning.

“Now that I know this COVID is not safe at all, it’s a good thing (we’re not in school), and I have all my stuff here and it’s easier to find,” Aurora says. “But sometimes – no, probably like all the time – my computer acts up.”

Aurora’s teacher, Amber Fiene, knows that there can be some positives to virtual learning, but she is concerned with how much screen time school requires this year.

“Every assignment is electronic, everything is on screens, and (the students) do not have the tangible manipulatives,” Fiene says.

For a week in mid-October, Aurora and nearly 80 other Henderson fifth-grade students took breaks from all-electronic assignments. Instead, they got to work with a series of take-home kits that let them explore the physics of light while creating art that plays off of concepts in physics.

The motivation behind the kits comes from University of Wisconsin-Madison physics graduate student and artist Aedan Gardill. Gardill has been illustrating physics concepts with art for years, such as through his Instagram account, where he shares ink drawings. Earlier this year, he applied for a grant from the Madison Arts Commission to create hidden portraits of women in the physical sciences that could only be revealed by using polarized lenses. He also planned to visit local schools to

explain the concept behind his art and help students make their own images based on his technique.

By the time Gardill learned he had been awarded the grant, the pandemic was in full force, and his plans had to change. While he could still present his portraits at the Wisconsin Science Festival, school visits were no longer in the cards.

“With the realization this summer that school was going to most likely be online in the fall, I had to rethink how I was going to use the funding from the grant,” Gardill explains. “And that has morphed into providing at-home, hands-on learning experiences that we’ll lead virtually.”

STORY CONTINUES AT <https://news.wisc.edu/uw-grad--student-shares-hands-on-physics-art-lessons-with-local-fifth-graders/>