

QUEENS

YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

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Pupils get animated about trash problem

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Sixth-graders Jiwook Chang and Alex Brennan were trying to figure out how to turn a man into a bug.

They saw it on television — dozens of times. How hard could it be?

Hunched over a table at Silvercup Studios in Long Island City, the 11-year-olds found out.

Jiwook displayed a handful of drawings painstakingly traced on transparent paper. This was just one part of his group's 30-second animated public service announcement about trash.

"Imagine how long it takes to make a two-hour and 10-minute movie," he said.

Jiwook and Alex may have thought they were working on their drawing skills, but their teachers knew better. The two-day animation workshop was the final piece of a literacy program for 125 students from Junior High School 157 in Rego Park.

The program was developed by the Children's Creative Writing Campaign, a nonprofit organization that works with schools to promote reading, writing and communication skills.

During the 10-week program, the students wrote in journals, learned how to brainstorm and worked with an author. Along the way, they found an issue that stirred them and created a public service announcement about it.

"We were talking about things we hate about New York," said Robbie Hetzron, a sixth-grader in the same group as Alex and Jiwook. "It was either trash or traffic. We took a vote and trash came out on top."

He said classmate Cindy Goldstein came up with the idea of a trashed city going awry.

"Everything goes opposite," he said. "People turn into bugs. The garbage explodes."

Children were divided into 12 groups, each with its own distinctive topic, such as traditions and rituals, name-calling, grandparents and trash.

Their ideas were culled from the thoughts they penned in their journals.

For this program, "Kids Have the Write Attitude," the Children's Campaign brought



SHANNON STAPLETON

Island City. Below, Jonathan Lee works on his part of the animation project.

in animators from California to work with students during the two-day workshop. Silvercup donated the studio space.

"This really opens up channels of communication," said Keren Taylor, one of the Children's Campaign organizers. "It's difficult getting kids to talk about their neighborhoods. The animation really frees them to talk. It also gives them something to look forward to."

Barbara LaBella, a teacher at JHS 157 who helps oversee the program, said many of the children are immigrants who had to leave close family members and beloved pets in their homeland.

"When they wrote about their neighborhoods, they talked about the different smells, the cooking," she said.

"When they wrote about their relatives, they became sentimental."

Writing mentor Matthew Sharpe, an author, showed the students how to make their writing more descriptive. Jim Shooter, former creative director of Marvel Comics, coached the young illustrators on how to make their characters come to life.

Along with the animated public service announce-



ments, the students will publish a "Kids Guide to New York" filled with their journal writings and interviews.

LaBella said the program invigorates the teachers as well as their students.

"Teachers are very bogged down preparing for tests," she said. "It's always nice to have someone from the outside — a spark of life."

And the usual cliques of

friends were dismantled — at least temporarily. Students selected their topics but had no idea who would be in their groups.

"The teachers tricked us," said student Rosalyn Gold-Onwude, laughing. "Usually, we all want to stay with our friends from old schools. We didn't know we were being picked by subject or we would have all picked the same subject."