

# VINEYARD GAZETTE

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## Digital Exhibit: Picture a Student In Oman, Iraq or the Vineyard

By COOPER DAVIS

Less than 10 years ago, a high school photography class involved loading cameras, fussing with myriad settings and working with chemicals in the darkroom. Today photography has been democratized by technology, and most students already carry a camera around with them all day, whether it's on their cellphone or iPod. And without having to be concerned with the cost of film, taking pictures has never been easier, cheaper or more accessible.



One Day in the Life is on display at Featherstone.

So what is a photography teacher to do? Chris Baer has given his photography students a chance to share their work with the world.

And the world has shared back. The current show in the Virginia Weston Besse gallery at Featherstone in Oak Bluffs, One Day in the Life, brings the work of Vineyard high school students together with their peers from around the world, in a testament to the unprecedented educational experiences afforded by modern media technology.



Tova Katzman's self-portrait Looking into Mirror.

Mr. Baer explains the project: "One of the things that people are taking away from this experience is that kids all over the world lead very similar lives, and at the same time, kids all over the world lead very different lives. And a lot of those differences can be very striking."

The concept behind the project was for students in this program, which is facilitated by a larger network of international educational exchange called iEARN.org, to document a single day in their lives. The first of these was Tuesday, Nov. 10 of last year. And the experiment was repeated on Tuesday, March 23. The show at Featherstone includes work from both days.



Carl Gosselin shoots while longboarding in Chilmark.

The resulting images capture moments and realities that may seem mundane to the person taking the picture: what they have for breakfast, what they wear to school, what they do when they get home. But the everyday experiences of one person become endlessly fascinating to another, when the cultural and geographic distances are vast. Participating schools are found in 30 countries around the world, including Morocco, Oman, Thailand, Uganda, Brazil, Russia, the Philippines and Iraq. The show features just a sample of the work being exchanged through this program.

The project kicked off when Mr. Baer attended an iEARN conference in Morocco last July. There he presented the idea of a synchronized documentation of a single day, using writing, photography and any other medium available, and then using the Internet to share.



Emmaje an Holly captures her friend Clara on bus.

“At first, there were some teachers that were a little cautious about connecting with Americans because some of the topics that might come up might be immoral. But everything has worked out fine,” he said. The iEARN network provides teachers and administrators with the ability to monitor discussions, though Mr. Baer says that there have been very few problems.

Though minor, the risks that come with connecting young people from different religious, cultural and economic circumstances are real. Feelings can get hurt, confusion can arise. But overall, the positive effects of this unique exchange far outweigh the negative. “More than anything else,” Mr. Baer said, “this has worked extremely well in terms of bringing down some of the stereotypes that we all share.”

*The exhibit is open from noon to 4 p.m. daily through April 7.*