



Summer 2022 saw a return to in-person programming for our high school Summer Institute and the continuation of our middle school camp, which was able to reach more students in its second year. Read on for more details about our middle and high school programs and new partnerships that are expanding our work in exciting ways!

SUMMER CAMP IS BACK



"My daughter is LOVING camp. It's the first camp that she's come home excitedly speaking about. She feels included and seen. Thanks for giving her a great summer experience." – parent of OP camper, 2022

After launching our middle school Summer Camp in 2021, we returned this year bigger and stronger than before. We ran an **in-person camp for 18 girls and trans and nonbinary students** that explored a myriad of subjects, built strong community, and grew skills through hands-on learning.

We offered our camp for the month of July, with full-day workshops that covered a range of topics in science, tech, art, and writing:

- **Comics & graphic novels**, sculpture, urban planning, architecture, poetry, **biology**, game development, **photographic printing**, branching narratives, computer programming, **map-making**, and more.

We learned from several guest teachers—artists, writers, urban planners, and other expert professionals—including:

- Olivia Stephens, **author** of our book club book *Artie and the Wolf Moon*
- Louise Yeung, **Chief Climate Officer** for NYC Office of the Comptroller
- Ananya Garg, educator, writer, and **poet**

We went on several field trips, to **MoMA**, the Brooklyn Museum, and Brooklyn Bridge Park. For our day at MoMA, the museum's educators led us in a workshop about **art and activism**, where students created collages based on issues they felt strongly about.

Our camp was once again hosted by the Urban Assembly Institute, a public middle and high school in downtown Brooklyn. The school provided breakfast and lunch for students, MetroCards, and classroom A/V technology. Three of our campers were Urban Assembly Institute students, while the majority came from other **public middle schools throughout Brooklyn**. Two-thirds of our campers came from low-income households, and 94% were students of color.

Our interest-driven, hands-on approach to teaching STEM through art and writing connected with campers on many different levels. Some students pursued their passion for visual art: ***"This program definitely helped me with my creativity. I felt supported by the people around me, which made me want to draw more!"*** Other students got excited about our biology and engineering projects: ***"I really liked the day we had to build our own buildings with one material and when we did the bioluminescent activity with clay and learned about plankton waves."*** Some students really appreciated the atmosphere for learning and sharing that felt different from what they typically experience at school: ***"I really liked the days we got to work on our Twine [coding and storytelling projects]. I like the quiet that I never hear in class at school, and I felt motivated to write."***



Octavia Project Campers at MoMA this summer

Beyond the subjects that we teach, our programs are about creating safe, affirming, and encouraging communities for our students, many of whom are LGBTQ+. We heard from many students and parents about the positive effects of this type of environment. One parent shared:

"It has been a difficult couple of years for [my daughter] ... She spent most of the school year miserable because of body-shaming, and bullying—I was 'losing' my kid. But in your camp, she has thrived, and in just a few days, I have been able to see a glimpse of my happy-go-lucky, creatively smart, wonderful, kid—SO MANY, MANY THANKS!"

Our STEAM curriculum, combined with our holistic approach, had powerful results:

- **100% of campers** agreed or strongly agreed that they **felt supported** while at OP.
- **90%** agreed or strongly agreed that camp helped increase their **self-confidence**.
- **90%** agreed or strongly agreed they are **more confidence with computer programming** after participating in camp.
- **90%** reported being **more interested in STEM** than they were before joining our camp.
- Finally, **100%** agreed or strongly agreed they **stretched themselves creatively** at camp.

OUR SUMMER INSTITUTE TURNS EIGHT



"This summer is the safest and most heard I've ever felt."
—Summer Institute 2022 Participant

This summer marked our return to in-person programming for our Summer Institute. Our program was hosted at **Pratt Institute's Brooklyn campus** through our continued partnership with the college's Writing Department.

This summer's Institute centered community building and exploration—**our workshops helped participants connect, express themselves through art and writing, and build skills for their futures.** We studied topics such as:

- **App design**, branching narratives and game design, **scientific poetry**, marine life and the environment, genre writing, **body architecture**, urban design, creative programming, performance prep, **Octavia Butler's legacy**, and more.

We had several illuminating guest-taught workshops, as well:

- A session on navigating a career as a writer with *New York Times* **best-selling author Kalynn Bayron**.
- A series of **urban planning workshops** with Daphne Lundi, Deputy Director for Living Streets and Public Spaces at NYC Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice, speculating on possible futures for NYC and reimagining spaces in our own neighborhoods.
- A two-day workshop on **developing architecture through the body** and constructing prosthetics to support our inner strengths with Mexico-based architect and artist Alicia Escamilla.
- A day exploring the poetry of science and creating found poetry from scientific research articles with **professor of biotechnology, Kathleen Gillespie, PhD**.

For this year's Book Club, we read Rivers Solomon's *The Deep*, a book about the origins of Black mermaids, known as *wajinru*, and how they dealt with their shared histories. In reading *The Deep*, our participants held conversations about self-care vs. communal responsibilities while learning about existing marine life.



Summer Institute participant presents her computer game at PS122 Gallery

After discussing community histories and legacy, **we took a field trip to the Weeksville Heritage Center in Brooklyn**. During our field trip, participants learned about the legacy of the historic Weeksville site, one of the largest free Black communities in pre-Civil War America.

At our Summer Showcase, participants had the opportunity to display and present their work at **PS122 Gallery in collaboration with artists collective ABC No Rio**. Participations debuted

Twine games, artwork, stories, and poetry developed over the course of our program. You can find these works, and much more, in volume 3 of our annual zine, *Positive Obsessions*.

In total, we ran 92 hours of in-person workshops over five weeks for **20 participants, ages 14-18**, selected from **over 55 applicants**. Five participants were selected for our Fellowship Program, which offers returning participants 16 and older additional leadership development and experience facilitating workshops, building community, and mentoring younger participants.

We were pleased to see the impact this summer's program had on our high school participants:

- **100% of participants** agreed that the Octavia Project provided them with information or tools to help them along their career path.
- **93% of participants** said the Octavia Project helped them build their self-confidence.
- 40% of students reported being **more confident with computer programming**.
- 100% of participants said they felt **part of a community** this summer.

MAKING NEW CONNECTIONS

We're excited for new partnerships that allowed us to expand our summer programs and offerings throughout the school year.

This year, our Summer Institute partnered with the **Rhode Island School of Design (RISD)**. As part of our urban planning workshops, **OP participants developed design briefs** for ways of reimagining and recreating spaces in their neighborhoods. Those design briefs were then shared with RISD architecture students in a studio design class. RISD students used the design briefs from OP participants to develop **architectural models for each design**.



Computer rendering from RISD architecture student

We also partnered with the Appalachian Mountain Club to offer **our first ever Octavia Project camping trip!** We spent a weekend in late September camping at Floyd Bennett Field in Brooklyn. The trip, open to OP Fellows, included a hike to the beach, lessons in setting up camp and, of course, s'mores. Appalachian Mountain Club supplied all the gear and equipment necessary at no cost, including tents, sleeping bags, backpacks, hiking shoes, raincoats, fleeces, and more. This was a first-time camping experience for most of the participants and even for one of our staff members.

This school year, we will be partnering with **Brooklyn Speculative Fiction Writers**, and their audio literary podcast Kaleidocast, to offer mentorship and publishing opportunities to Octavia Project alumni. Through this partnership, called Constellations, our alumni will have the opportunity to **work one-to-one with professional writers** and **submit their work for publication** with Kaleidocast and beyond. Our inaugural Constellations cohort will start in February.



OP Fellows at our camping trip to Floyd Bennett Field

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Our work would not be possible without your support. Thank you for being there for NYC youth at this critical time. We're so grateful to have you in our community!