

## **Pecha Kucha: A community gathers to save water**

By Flora Mack, TISA 4th grade

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**Courtesy photo**

**Poets from left to right: Sol Valadez-Little, Elsie Clayton, Brooklyn Maestas and Maisy Moscartolo rehearse before Pecha Kucha begins at the Taos Community Auditorium.**

On Sunday, (April 8) at 7 p.m. on a chilly spring eve at the Taos Community Auditorium, a group of four Taos Integrated School for the Arts (TISA) fifth-graders huddled together sharing jokes, eating popcorn and laughing.

Little did they know, Elsie Clayton, Brooklyn Maestas, Sol Valadez-Little, and Maisy Moscartolo had broken the record for the youngest Pecha Kucha presenters ever to present in Taos.

These fifth-graders are all part of the TISA Poetry Dragons. The theme for this particular Pecha Kucha night was water. Amigos Bravos and Beautiful Midden are both activism programs that helped sponsor this year's Pecha Kucha. Both of these programs came to TISA and helped the middle school clean out the acequia that runs through the golden grass and sagebrush alongside the new campus at TISA.

Anita McKeown, creative director of Beautiful Midden, a program of Amigos Bravos, shared her thoughts on the Dragons' reading at Pecha Kucha night.

"I'm so impressed with the TISA poets. Their passion and commitment to poetry was what first struck me. Then their maturity and professional attitude shone through," she said. "Their ability to embrace the process of writing, co-curating and delivering not only their own work but their classmates' work as well as understanding how their work fit into the Pecha Kucha format and the project was extraordinary. I kept having to remind myself they were (in) fifth-grade!"

The Poetry Dragons read their deeply rooted acequia poems with the powerful and confident voices they have developed the past two years as Poetry Dragons and popular local performers.

Valadez-Little's soulful poem, "Light Goes Down," caused an uproar from the crowd. She kept them hanging on her every purposeful word as she read, "If you and I take care of our beloved water stream, our elders' memories their hands filled with the dust of ditch cleanings, to the grandchildren's fields of corn."

Clayton's "The Bridge" described how she used to sit on a little bridge above the acequia while her mom worked at Mabel Dodge Lujan's house and watch the water go by.

Moscartolo hit the stage with a well-crafted rap demanding, "People...Need...Water!"

Maestas took everyone's breath away with her plea to save our water, and we think the sold-out crowd took notice.

We interviewed J. Matthew Thomas about why and how it all began, "Richard and I brought Pecha Kucha Night to Taos in 2010 - in the midst of the 'financial crisis'... things were getting glum in our little art town. Galleries were closing and work was difficult. Yet, what lived on was the creativity and passion of our community. When I first experienced a Pecha Kucha Night in New York City, I just knew we had to bring this to Taos. And sure enough, we have had 27 events, and each one has brought out the best of our community to inspire us and introduce to us who we are and what we can do together.

"We really want to have more youth involved," he added. "Last spring we had our first all teen event and it was incredible. We hope to always have at least one youth representation at each event, to share to our community the future of our town, our people and the world. I also think it's important for the youth to experience and hear what is going on in our town. While it can appear 'boring and sleepy'... Taos has an amazing variety of smart, creative, interesting, progressive, global and activist people here... something that anyone can get excited about."

As far as what he thought about the Dragons' performance? "And what poets! I think we all saw future artists and community advocates on stage Sunday night."

We agree, Pecha Kucha rocks!