

# Georgia arts school partners with studio behind “Spider-Man,” “Avengers”

By Leon Stafford, Tribune Content Agency on 01.31.23

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Fashion and design student Lana Le works on creating her fashion line during a class at Utopian Academy for the Arts in Georgia on December 13, 2022. Photo: Miguel Martinez/Tribune News Service Photo: Miguel Martinez/Tribune News Service

ATLANTA, Georgia — Lana Le focused intently as she used a blackboard to sketch out an outfit she planned to take from concept to reality.

It wasn't easy. The Utopian Academy for the Arts classroom in which she worked was a cacophony of sounds. Scissors sliced through fabric. The needles of sewing machines clacked up and down. Lana's colleagues chatted excitedly as they debated pillow designs.

The 12-year-old seventh-grader tuned out the noise as she pressed the chalk against the blackboard canvass. A silhouette emerged with ruffles at the sleeves, a cinched waist and wide-legged pants.

"My vision for my collection is to be stylish but still comfortable," Lana said. "Clothes should make you feel like yourself."

Lana's ability to freehand a design could come in handy this year when the Clayton County-based public charter school begins offering classes at Fayetteville's Trilith Studios, the home of movies such as "Spider-Man: No Way Home," "Avengers Endgame," "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever" and "Black Adam."

The school plans to enroll 125 middle school students from across the state in a new program focusing on animation, film and television, visual development, visual art and design, coding and game design. The goal is to create the next generation of set designers, wardrobe stylists, sound engineers, directors and writers from the classrooms of metro Atlanta.

"It is very clear that Georgia has a growing film and television industry," Utopian CEO and founder Artesius Miller said. "However, there is not presently a pipeline of workforce development or talent development from a K-12 perspective. And Utopian really desires to match the need with a solution."

That could pay big dividends for the state. The Georgia Film Office in August reported that film and television productions spent a record-breaking \$4.4 billion in the state between July 1, 2021 and June 30, 2022. That has resulted in thousands of jobs and demand for local talent to compete with workers from New York and Hollywood.

"Our goal is to give our students access to the industry as early as the sixth grade," Miller said.

Town at Trilith President Rob Parker said Trilith is committed to creating a comprehensive educational pipeline from K-12 "all the way through a master's in fine arts."

"Working with public and private schools, as well as charter schools like the Utopian Academy, we are investing in the next generation of storytellers," Parker said. "Story arts education has become a priority for all of us."

Utopian Academy, which has an enrollment of about 1,000 students, was launched in 2014 with a middle school, followed by first through third grade in 2020. A high school for ninth and 10th graders was opened in August. The school plans to add a grade a year in elementary and high school until fully enrolled.

The Trilith campus also will partner with the Georgia Film Academy and the Technical College System of Georgia to help the school develop programs aligned with industry standards in filmmaking, screenwriting, film scoring and animation, Miller said. Caleb Land, former director of instructional technology at Utopian and a veteran administrator of 13 years, will be the school's principal.



In some ways, the new school will be an extension of an already established relationship with Trilith. The studio has tasked students in animation and story arts teacher Michael Rosemond's class with short projects that allow the youngsters to flex their creative muscles. Trilith leaders will get on a Zoom call and ask the class to work on a storyline, produce a commercial or write a song.

"A lot of our kids run to the Zooms because they know that they are coming," Rosemond said of his high school students. "It's a social thing that makes learning fun for them."

Fourteen-year-old Christopher Gould was initially reluctant to handle the rigging for cameras during the shooting of a recent short horror film, "Tainted Voices," that the students created. It was big and unwieldy, but he knew that as the director of photography on the shoot, he was a key component.

"I didn't want to touch a camera because I was afraid I was going to break it," he said. "But I learned how to use them and after a while I was good."

Thirteen-year-old aspiring director Dailiaa Garard said he recently tried his hand at directing and found it harder than he imagined, especially figuring out how to eliminate shadows.

"I started messing up a little bit. I was having hard time doing it," he said of getting rid of shadows.



Michael Morris, a media arts teacher at the school, said the hands-on training helps students apply what they learn in the classroom. The discussions on screen writing, creative structure, positioning in film and other aspects of pre-production make sense to students once they are physically working on a project.

Theater teacher Fredena Williams said Utopian students also are learning the sides of the arts that aren't glamorous, but incredibly important. On a recent visit to the school, students were preparing to dismantle the stage of a recent performance of "Willy Wonka Junior."

"For longevity in this industry, the more of the tech side of theater you know, the more work you will get and the more employable you are," she said.

## Quiz

1 Read the following statement.

*Students at the Utopian Academy have demonstrated their ability to work on film projects.*

Which sentence from the article BEST supports the statement?

- (B) Lana Le focused intently as she used a blackboard to sketch out an outfit she planned to take from concept to reality.
- (C) That has resulted in thousands of jobs and demand for local talent to compete with workers from New York and Hollywood.
- (D) Town at Trilith President Rob Parker said Trilith is committed to creating a comprehensive educational pipeline from K-12 “all the way through a master’s in fine arts.”
- (E) The studio has tasked students in animation and story arts teacher Michael Rosemond’s class with short projects that allow the youngsters to flex their creative muscles.

2 Read the following selection from the article.

*Fourteen-year-old Christopher Gould was initially reluctant to handle the rigging for cameras during the shooting of a recent short horror film, “Tainted Voices,” that the students created. It was big and unwieldy, but he knew that as the director of photography on the shoot, he was a key component. “I didn’t want to touch a camera because I was afraid I was going to break it,” he said. “But I learned how to use them and after a while I was good.”*

What can be inferred from this selection?

- (B) Working with Trilith Studios can effectively help students at the Utopian Academy build confidence.
- (C) The students at the Utopian Academy are most interested in developing horror movies with Trilith Studios.
- (D) Trilith Studios employs students from the Utopian Academy for most of the projects it produces in Georgia.
- (E) The Utopian Academy relies on Trilith Studios to buy cameras for students to use on independent projects.

3 Which of these are the reasons WHY the Utopian Academy is partnering with Trilith Studios?

1. *Students at the Utopian Academy designed costumes for movies such as “Spider-Man: No Way Home” and “Avengers Endgame.”*
2. *The Utopian Academy wants to prepare students to work as set designers, sound engineers and other jobs in the film industry.*
3. *There is a need to establish a pipeline of skilled workers for the film and television industry in the state of Georgia.*
4. *Michael Morris, Fredena Williams and other teachers pushed for students at their school to work with Trilith Studios in their free time.*

- (B) 1 only
- (C) 1 and 4
- (D) 2 and 3
- (E) 2, 3 and 4

- 4 How does the article introduce the idea that the film and television industry is important to Georgia?
- (B) by specifying how many students in Georgia have worked in these industries
  - (C) by highlighting the impact these industries have on Georgia's economy
  - (D) by explaining the Utopian Academy is partnering with the Georgia Film Academy
  - (E) by describing Dailiaa Garard's experience with directing a short film

## Answer Key

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