Seventh and eighth grade Buffalo Public Schools students from the My Brother’s Keeper program recently collaborated with teaching artists from the CEPA Gallery. The artists joined us at McKinley High School and provided twelve of our MBK scholars with a creative opportunity to engage in hands-on photography instruction and the use of digital cameras to document their fieldwork experiences.

We began our project with a workshop led by teaching artist Christian Coronado. A best practice in terms of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching (CLRT) is to create opportunities for scholars of color to see themselves in their learning. Christian, as a young man of Hispanic decent and a graduate of Hutchison Technical High School, provided immediate inspiration for our scholars, many of whom as a direct result of his work now see themselves as future Christian Coronados in the field, seeking out that perfect shot.

In the two-hour intensive pre-fieldwork workshop, Christian taught our scholars about key elements of photography. They learned how elements such as light, texture, and line affect photographs. They also learned about bug’s and bird’s eye view and the many different angles from which to set up specific shots.

After the workshop, we took the scholars outside to practice. We trekked around the school grounds while they searched for shots to represent what they learned in the workshop. We had no way of
knowing if the scholars were applying the skills Christian taught them until we returned to the classroom and began viewing their photographs. That’s when the magic happened! The MBK photographers took amazing shots on their first try! If you happened to be in the hallway during the moment when we began sharing their work on the SMART Board, you would have heard the loud, cheerful chorus of “oohs” and “aahs” pouring out from the room. Their practice pictures were amazing!

Ready for the field, the MBK photographers traveled with their digital cameras to the Salamanca-Iroquois National Museum in Salamanca, NY and to the Underground Railroad Heritage Center and Niagara Power Vista in Niagara Falls, NY. It was easy to spot the MBK photography team on location. They were standing on rocks and benches, laying down on concrete sidewalks, ducking behind exhibits, and doing anything it took to snap some amazing perspectives and amazing shots.

Three days after our fieldwork journey, the CEPA team returned to our classroom to provide our scholars with twenty-five of their developed photographs. As the MBK photography team opened their envelopes, they were satisfied to see how well they did. Each scholar was asked to evaluate their work to select the best photograph, i.e. the shot that represented most of the photography elements about which they learned the previous week. Their chosen photographs were then enlarged and presented at our closing ceremony on Saturday, 18 August.

Looking at the photographs (see below), it is obvious that we do, in fact, have future professional photographers like Christian Coronado sitting in front of us in our classrooms in the My Brother’s Keeper program.

As MBK scholar James McNeil said, “The CEPA photography project was very helpful because it showed me what photography was all about. So now I may take photography in high school
and college. I will definitely look at going to a CEPA after school or summer program.” MBK scholar Dereck Franqui also remarked, “The CEPA project let me take really cool pictures. Now I, too, will be pursuing photography in the future, going to CEPA workshops, and looking at high schools with a photography program.” Props to the CEPA team for providing a spirited and inspirational opportunity for creative growth! Props to the MBK scholars for finishing the project like champions!

The MBK photography team would like to sincerely thank the CEPA Gallery, specifically Ms. Lauren Tent and Mr. Christian Coronado for providing a very valuable creative arts experience for our students. We would also like to thank Superintendent Dr. Kriner Cash and Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Dr. Fatima Morrell for making MBK a reality. For more information about our project, or about MBK, please contact curriculum designer and instructor Jason Hall at jhall@buffaloschools.org or tweet to @JayHallBuffalo or @brother_buffalo.