

Back-to-school. We all have our traditional layouts we do at this time of year. First day, special programs, school pictures – we’ve all got them. And, if you’re anything like me, you probably get bored with doing the same thing every year. Same layout, same journaling, different pictures. Because, you know, there’s only so many ways you can say, “Jimmy’s First Day of School”. How can we make these memories fresh & different, unique & meaningful? That’s what I’m writing about this month - school from a new perspective.

There is so much more to the idea of school than just grade level, sports, extra-curricular activities and programs. Let’s talk about the idea of “learning”. That’s what it’s all supposed to be about, right? Learning what your curriculum says you’re supposed to learn, but also learning about life. That’s what growing up is all about. Learning what awaits us in the world and learning how to handle it. Developing the tools we need to function in that world. And it isn’t always pretty.

There is so much we can do with these ideas. I’m thinking not only about layouts about our kids, but also layouts that talk about us. What was your school experience like? What kinds of things did you learn? What kinds of things did you experience? What kinds of things do you remember? These can make fantastic layouts using some of your old school pictures. Remember back to when the pictures were taken and ask yourself some questions:

- Was there a teacher that year that you really got along with? Who really inspired you & motivated you to learn & grow? Or maybe there was a teacher with whom you totally didn’t get along...talk about that. How did that impact you that year? Were you discouraged & frustrated? Thinking back, what did you learn from that experience?
- Was there a kid (or kids) who made school life difficult or challenging for you? Maybe it was a bully-type or maybe it was someone who was competition for you. How do you remember those situations? How did you handle it/them? What did you learn from that experience?
- Was there a subject(s) that you completely loved? How did you discover it? What did you love about it? How did that love manifest itself in your life? Were there teachers who encouraged it in you? Did your love for it grow in spite of a teacher’s influence? How about the opposite – was there a subject that was the bane of your existence? Do you remember how it presented itself? Were you able to get past it or did it provide trouble all through school?
- What did you absolutely love about school? Doesn’t have to be a class – maybe it was an extra-curricular activity, sport, club or just hanging out somewhere with your friends. When you remember back to that, what kinds of memories & feelings does it stir up?

You can also apply this same principle to your kids’ school layouts today. Maybe interview them to find out the answers to these questions. School is so much more than just the basics – find out what your kids are learning about the world & life during their school experience.

Another way you can go is a fun compare/contrast layout. Compare & contrast yourself during your school years to your kid(s). Here are some more questions to get you started.

- What things are similar in your schooling and your kid(s) schooling? Were you interested in the same subjects? Did you do any of the same activities? Did you struggle with the same issues or subjects?
- How is the world different now? Contrast your life then to your child's life now. What were the popular toys? What has changed in the world? What is commonplace now that was never even imagined then? What did you love then? What does your kid(s) love now?
- If you & your child were involved in the same activity (band, cheerleading, sports, choir – whatever), compare & contrast a picture of each of you. How are the uniforms different? Does the activity work differently than it did “back in the day”? Talk about the similarities and differences between your stint & your child's.

If you want to delve a little deeper, it might be interesting & insightful to look back on your own school days and remember the more difficult times. Things you struggled with & stressed about. Things that made you want to skip school. Things that made you cry. Do you remember how you felt about these times? Do you remember how it might have manifested itself in your life? Did you talk about what was happening? Did you just close down and refuse to talk about it? Do you think you would recognize the manifestation of those same problems in your own child? How do you plan on doing that?

It's really enlightening and interesting to see how the simple idea of “learning” can be implemented in school-themed layouts. There is so much more to school than the subjects we're exposed to and exploring those things can really shed light on who we've become and who our kids are destined to be.

Think about learning this month. All sorts of learning. It would be amazing to see a bunch of layouts in the gallery with women sharing what life has taught them thus far. Passing that down to our children would be priceless as well. They say that everything you need to know you learn in kindergarten. I don't know about that, but I do know that the experiences we get in school – good *and* bad – can teach us a lot about the world. Think about that this month & try to incorporate it into your layouts. Even something as simple as “five things I learned in school that prepared me for the world” would be amazing. Remember – your scrapbooks aren't just pretty pictures. They're there to tell your story to the people who come after you. Don't make them guess – let them know who you are. It actually *matters* to them.