

Ask Ark Alumni

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Ark alumna, Janelle Johnson left Ark Burlington Danes Academy in 2018. Now she is in her second year of studying Cultural Studies and Media at the University of Kent and has built the online show [Over The Table](#), a platform for young people to have open and honest conversations about the issues they face.



Why did you choose to study Cultural Studies & Media?

I have always been interested in contemporary social issues and their impact on young people. For me, it made sense to take cultural studies and media as it combines sociology, where I could grasp an understanding of reasons for social disparities, and digital technology, which plays such a massive role in our day to day lives. Although growing up in a working-class community opened my eyes to a lot of social issues from a young age, I thought taking this degree would be the perfect way to make sense of this from an academic point of view. [Over The Table is my way of taking discussions surrounding media, culture and society further than the classroom.](#) It finds the balance between academic research and real-life experiences, while allowing me to connect with people who have opinions that differ from my own.

How did your school prepare you for what you're doing now?

Burlington Danes Academy is a school that does not shy away from important conversations. Through PSHCE and general classroom discussions, there is always a space to learn a lot about society and the different experiences that people have. I think it was through these discussions that I discovered my interest in people, leading me to take this degree and create this platform.

What's the most surprising thing you've encountered in your career/industry so far?

Before coming to university, I massively underestimated the influence that young people can have. I saw things like the Brexit vote and assumed that there was very little power in the youth to make changes in society. However, being surrounded by young people who are so talented, intelligent and outspoken, I am confident that the upcoming generation will be impactful on both small and large scales.

What's been your biggest challenge so far?

Through both my degree and Over The Table, I have learnt that there is a lack of opportunities for creatives. Where there are constant emails and networking events for STEM students, those who do not fit into this category are often overshadowed. It is very difficult to have access to the people who are capable of boosting your career prospects. Taking an unconventional degree requires a lot more self-help than I would have anticipated.

What tips would you give a student who is interested in this field?

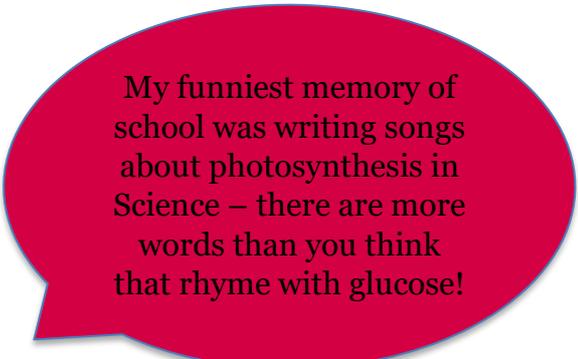
My best advice to someone about to take Cultural Studies would be to stay open minded. You will come into contact with a lot of theorists who have a lot of opinions about a lot of things that are close to you, and though it is important to stand strong in what you believe, it is okay for your mind to be changed. The whole point of the degree is to see society from a world of different perspectives and if you aren't open to seeing, or at least understanding, where others are coming from then you won't get the most out of it.

Where would you like to be in 5 years time?

I don't like to talk too much on the future because I know it is susceptible to change but I hope that I would have excelled in the things I have put effort into. I would like to have completed my undergraduate degree and potentially a masters and hope that I am in a position to positively influence others through having open, informative conversations whether that be through Over The Table or elsewhere.

If there was one thing you would tell a student in school right now, what would that be?

Enjoy being in school. As important as it is to get the best grades you can and to prepare for the future, the best memories and experiences often come from school. Try as many of the opportunities provided to you by the school as you can, as you never know when you will stumble across your passion.



My funniest memory of school was writing songs about photosynthesis in Science – there are more words than you think that rhyme with glucose!

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