

Cameras for Teachers

Background

Before 2005, Central PTA bought disposable cameras for the teachers and also paid to have the photos from those cameras printed, with the hope that some of the photos could be used for the Roadrunner. In September, 2005, the PTA allocated \$2,000 to buy one digital camera for each grade. In December, 2005, the PTA bought additional cameras so that each classroom had a camera. Since then, several cameras have been replaced, and replacement batteries have been purchased for many of the teachers. The initial cameras were purchased from LaGrange Camera (104 W. Burlington in LaGrange). Replacement cameras were from Amazon.com.

The model chosen was the Canon A-series (starting initially with the A510, and later replaced by A520, A570-IS, etc., so that there are a number of different models within this series in different classrooms). This particular camera was chosen based on the preferences of the former technology teacher, Mrs. Margolis, for these reasons:

- Affordable
- Small, but not so small that the controls were too small for young students
- Could use rechargeable or regular AA batteries
- Has an optical viewfinder as well as a screen

As of summer, 2010, the equivalent camera from Canon is the [A3100-IS*](#) (but which does not have an optical viewfinder), for \$166 from Amazon.com.

The 5th grade teachers received new cameras with the 5th grade laptops in 2009, so they passed on their PTA/O-purchased cameras to classrooms in which the cameras had broken. The 5th grade teachers have the Canon SX110IS* (now replaced by the [Canon SX120IS](#)), which also uses AA batteries but has a larger (10x) zoom range (\$193 at Amazon.com).

Camera (Battery) Problems

Most of the problems or complaints about the A-series cameras relate to the rechargeable batteries. These cameras can use regular AA batteries, but PTA/O also purchased rechargeable NiMH batteries and a charger for each teachers. Unlike Lithium Ion batteries used by some cameras, the NiMH batteries begin discharging even if the camera is not used. Consequently, some of the teachers experienced problems with dead batteries.

The manual that came with the cameras says the batteries may not be able to be fully charged when they are brand new, or if they have been stored without use for a long period. The manual says to use the batteries until they are completely discharged before charging them again (although these batteries are not like NiCd batteries that developed a permanent 'memory' if they weren't completely discharged). "After doing this several times, battery performance will be restored."

By discharging and recharging several times (putting the charged batteries in a flashlight and leaving the light on), the battery capacity in one set of "bad" batteries increased from a few dozen pictures to over 600 pictures. The charger manual says you should expect about 300 pictures per charge if the LCD screen is on, and 800 with the screen off. Flash uses more power, and batteries won't stay charged as long if they are cold. Another suggestion in the manual was

to wipe the battery terminals before charging them and before putting them in the camera, because just a small amount of dirt or oil from the skin can diminish their performance.

When the batteries are charged, they should be removed from the charger. If the battery contacts are touching anything the batteries will lose charge faster, so it's better to have them out of the charger. We have purchased several different brands of chargers, so the teachers don't all have identical chargers. The batteries should not be left in the charger over 24 hours.

Many teachers became so frustrated with the rechargeable batteries that they just use regular AA batteries. An alternative, to solve the teachers' complaints about the batteries, would be to buy a camera that uses Lithium Ion batteries; however, each teacher would probably need an extra battery so that one would always be charged. A comparable camera with a Lithium Ion battery would be the [Canon SD1300-IS](#)* for \$179. (An additional battery would cost \$39 for a Canon NB-6L Li-Ion Battery, but 3rd party batteries are available for less.)

The Camera "Job"

At the beginning of the school year, send a memo to all the teachers introducing yourself as the person responsible for assisting them with digital camera problems. As cameras break, or batteries leak or fail to remain charged, teachers will contact you. Some of the cameras do fail, but it's worthwhile to test them yourself and/or take them to LaGrange camera for the owner's assessment (his name is Ray). Occasionally, a lens stuck and he was able to fix it. These cameras cost so little that it is not worth sending them in to be fixed unless they are under warranty (at this point none of them are under warranty). In more than one case a camera that a teacher thought was broken worked fine after the batteries were removed and new ones installed, which resets the camera. Don't discard any cameras without testing them.

If a teacher's camera or battery chargeable is inoperable, replace it with a "spare" camera (and we have three as of the summer of 2010) or order a new one. [Amazon.com](#) probably has the best price for the cameras, although LaGrange Camera was able to meet that price when we ordered a large number of cameras at the same time. [B&H Photo](#) is another source for both the cameras and replacement chargers.

*All cameras mentioned were available during the summer of 2010, but digital cameras in this price range are updated frequently.

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