



Pick your posin'

Spring means kids get to loosen up for school pictures

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Eight-year-old Esther Barrera leans against what looks like a wooden garden gate, a garden in bloom behind her, and puts her hands on her hips, smiling.

"Look right here, gorgeous," says Kristi Briggs of Lifetouch Photography, tapping a plastic dinosaur tucked next to the lens of her camera. "Lift your chin up. Good job, beautiful."

Briggs snaps the picture. It appears instantly on a screen next to her. It's perfect, like something shot at an expensive portrait studio, not in the gymnasium at Creighton Elementary School in Phoenix.

This is the start of the spring school picture season, and these aren't your traditional head-and-shoulder shots.

School pictures taken in the fall are like the ones many of us grew up with, a close-up portrait with a muted background. They're done that way on purpose, so they can be used for yearbooks, school IDs and student records.

But, in the spring, the photographers get really creative, says John Grant, area manager for Lifetouch, which shoots spring portraits at 620 schools across Arizona.

Kids lean on their elbows at a desk in front of a red brick wall or sit cross-legged on an all-white background.

Photographers shoot from above with children looking skyward or from below, making an average fourth-grader look big enough to take on the world.

Parents pick the poses, putting a check mark next to one of three. Briggs tells 9-year-old Luis Alia to put his foot up on a box and then lean onto his knee, like a pose you'd see in a clothing catalog. Most of the boys' parents chose that one.

Most of the girls' parents chose the same pose as Esther, sweet and a little saucy.

Briggs smooths back long hair, flattens collars and whispers to one boy to zip his pants.

Briggs attended Creighton when she was a kid. She remembers, "My school picture was one of those with a painted background, a mug shot-looking thing."

These spring portraits show more of the child and their personality, says Diana Berry, who has shot for Lifetouch for seven years.

Digital photography has revolutionized school pictures. It's rare to get a bad picture because the photographer sees it and can reshoot on the spot. Photographers can adjust lighting and move the camera to more flattering angles.

"We can do much more than we ever did before," she says.

