

Young Voices of the Anacostia River

Exploring Black Roots to the Eastern Shore and Back

Written by Anacostia High School Seniors

Edited by Caroline Brewer



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PRESENTS:



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First Printing

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Introduction of Partners

PARTNERS IN THE ANACOSTIA 2024 SUMMER INTERNSHIP PROJECT



At Conservation Nation, we are working to save wild animals, their habitats, and our planet by building a more inclusive conservation movement. By investing in future leaders from underrepresented communities through education, career development, and funding, we are creating opportunities to bring more voices and more solutions to the urgent biodiversity challenges facing our planet. We believe that all students deserve equitable access to inspiring role models and fun experiences in nature. We were honored to support nature-based field trips and bring Caroline Brewer and her Nature-Wise Literacy and the Environment Program to Anacostia High School students as part of this summer internship program. Learn more about our work at conservationnation.org.

Conservation Nation Director of Education, Diane Lill, and Educational Multimedia Producer, Gabriela Paola Franco Peña.



Consultant Caroline Brewer and Nature-Wise

Nature-Wise helps us explore and connect with the natural world, our place in it, and our power to better protect all living things. We help students understand and practice, on creative levels, that human beings are also included in the definition of the environment. We, too, are nature and from our earliest days we practice literacy. And that opens a world of opportunities to explore many forms of literacy, including performing and visual arts. Nature-Wise was created by Caroline Brewer and is a professional development program and a series of workshops for students that uses literature, videos, and research to support students in expressing themselves as readers, writers, speakers, song-makers, and storytellers. They get to explore and evaluate wildlife (colors, shapes, patterns, textures, and behaviors of plants, animals, waterways, and humans) in their neighborhoods and beyond, and for the 2024 summer program, were invited to make this book, *Young Voices of the Anacostia River: Exploring Black Roots to the Eastern Shore and Back*.



Caroline Brewer is literacy consultant, environmentalist, and an award-winning children's book author, most recently of the picture book *Say Their Names*, and author-illustrator of the forthcoming picture book *Harriet Tubman, Force of Nature*, which explores through a series of biographical poems her oneness with nature. She is the former Chairwoman of the Taking Nature Black Conference and former Marketing and Communications Director of the Audubon Naturalist Society. She is currently working on forums to address climate change and other environmental crises.



The University of the District of Columbia (UDC) is the only public institution of higher learning in, and for, the nation's capital. UDC is a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) and the only exclusively urban land-grant university in the United States. In alignment with this unique position, UDC has established the Developing America's Workforce Nucleus (DAWN) STEM talent pipeline initiative as a key strategic priority. DAWN includes a partnership with the Department of Interior and other District and federal partners to operate a six-week high school student internship program at Anacostia High School focused on creating multi-credential, seamless STE(A)M academic and career pathways for Black, brown, and economically disenfranchised students. Deputy Chief of Staff Patrick Gusman, Former President Dr. Ronald Mason, and Associate VP of Educational Outreach and Partnerships LeKisha Jordan have been leaders of this effort along with Xavier Brown, Coordinator of the UDC - Justice 40 Internship and the Anacostia Ambassador Director in the Office of the President for UDC.

Xavier Brown, Anacostia Ambassador Director, UDC

Xavier Brown, Coordinator of the UDC - Justice 40 Internship and the Anacostia Ambassador Director in the Office of the President for UDC. Xavier is UDC's "boots on the ground," supporting the environmentally-focused Anacostia High School redesign and driving UDC's overall education partnership efforts with the Department of Energy and Environment (DOEE), the schools in the Anacostia High School feeder pattern and other schools in Ward 8, the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), and community leaders and residents in Ward 8. Brown also serves as Anacostia Ambassador in the Urban Waters Federal Partnership (UWP). Brown got his BA from North Carolina A&T and his MS from University of Vermont. He was a Robert Wood Johnson Culture of Health Leader and DC Black Justice Fellow.



The Department of the Interior (Department) plays a central role in how the United States stewards its public lands, increases environmental protections, advances environmental justice, and honors our nation-to-nation relationship with Tribes. The Department's Office of Environmental Policy and Compliance (OEPC) serves as a leader in resource stewardship and the sustainable and equitable management of the Department's resources. We foster partnerships to enhance resource use and protection as well as to expand public access to safe and clean lands under the Department's jurisdiction. We strive to continually improve environmental policies and procedures to increase management effectiveness and efficiency. The National Park Service's Stewardship Institute is actively engaged in keeping the National Park Service at the leading edge of stewardship for our natural and cultural heritage and is supporting OEPC in developing innovative partnerships to support underserved communities.

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To each of you, we owe deepest gratitude. For you being who you are -- thoughtful, curious, bold, brave, determined, sensitive, serious, conquerors. There would be no book without you. You are our griots, our storytellers, the inventors of this work. It is through your voices, in written and oral formats, that we get a much better view of the impact of our Black environmental roots in the D.C. metropolitan area. Thank you. I hope you always will take pride in your contributions to this unique publication.

To C2C Academy Director, Anacostia Ambassador, and lead Coordinator of the summer internship Xavier Brown, your legacy is well-established. You are a force to be reckoned with. Our students, partners, and communities could not have a better friend, a stronger ally, a man more committed to their uplift. Bless you for so richly blessing us.

To the rest of the UDC team, including Deputy Chief of Staff Patrick Gusman, Former President Dr. Ronald Mason, Associate VP of Educational Outreach and Partnerships LeKisha Jordan, Program Assistant for the DAWN Initiative Eric Harris, and the team at the Department of the Interior, what a gift it has been to work with you again. You represent knowledge, experience, and expertise that are priceless to our young people. Thank you for being so generous with your time and talents.

To Principal Walker, Ms. Benjamin (who retired at summer's end), and the leadership team of Anacostia High School, bless you for being our partners and for giving the students the social, emotional, mental, and academic support they need to succeed in this program and in high school. We are grateful for all that you do to make new learning and career opportunities possible.

Thank you to former Anacostia High School Teacher Ashton Minor and our assistants Olivia Howard, Carl Brown, Price Holmes, and Alex Arispe-Fernandez, who were critical to our students' growth and development over the summer. This fantastic team of writers and thinkers assisted us in the classroom, providing tremendous support with the crafting of poems, essays, and reports. They provided staffing on all of the field trips, steadfastly encouraging students to dig deep for reflections readers would find meaningful. Mr. Minor helped expand writing experiences by challenging the students to reflect more deeply on every field trip. The growth we all witnessed over the summer and the contributions for this book would have been much more challenging to achieve without each of you.

A huge hug and big round of thank yous to Gabriela Franco Paola Peña, our book's designer and a program photographer, courtesy of Conservation Nation, for offering to lead the design of this book for a second year. Gaby's commitment to creating an outstanding work of art out of the students' journeys over the summer is a gift.

My deepest appreciation to Conservation Nation's Executive Director Lynn Mento, the board, and, especially, Education Director Diane Lill. Your sincere willingness to provide Anacostia's students with unique and profound experiences is beyond inspiring. I am delighted to be your partner in this endeavor and to witness your passionate support of these students and the stories they have to tell about their experiences with the natural world. Diane's outsized commitment to each student's success is a rare and invigorating thing of beauty.

We offer special appreciation to the UDC Foundation and Pepco Holdings for generously supporting the summer internship program all the way through the book-launching phase, including covering transportation and food costs for the students.



Editor's Note/About the Book

Nature-Wise introduces students to ways of knowing about nature and the roles they might play in better protecting it through children's literature, research, field trips, exposure to environmental leaders, and thoughtful reflections as group and individual readers and writers.

I am clear that whatever progress we make protecting the environment and understanding that we, humans, are a part of the environment, we make with the understanding that we need everyone. We need every voice, every hand, every heart, every soul, and every mind. The younger, the better. The more diverse, in every way, the better. So, with *Young Voices of the Anacostia River: Exploring Black Roots to the Eastern Shore and Back*, we meant to take a small leap forward, to move the needle on this big idea, and watch for what more the universe will do through our earnest actions.

"Come to the edge," he said.

"We can't, we're afraid!" they responded.

"Come to the edge," he said.

"We can't, We will fall!" they responded.

"Come to the edge," he said.

And so they came.

And he pushed them.

And they flew."

This poem, by French Poet Guillaume Apollinaire, is a remarkably precise description of our experience this past summer with Washington, D.C.'s Anacostia High School seniors. We pushed the 15 students enrolled in the internship to practice self-love and self-actualization as they journeyed through six weeks of literacy and nature exploration. They reflected on their excursions through poetry and prose and through the lens of African American contributions to the environment and environmental movement in the D.C. Metro area.

They flew through nearly 20 field trips in five weeks.

Sat and listened to around four additional speakers in-person or via Zoom.

Traveled hundreds of miles by bus and dozens by foot.

Got up close and personal with family farms, urban farms, forests, fields, rivers, streams, ponds, parks, trees that held special memories, and neighborhoods, including their own.

Conquered the intensity of 100-degree heat

Resisting the howls of trail-weary feet.

Shouting back: No, we're not tired yet!

Played every single day

with words, on the water, in the water,

in the woods, on the trails, with old friends, and new ones,

with ideas they could chew on.

Learned from Black poets, such as Lucille Clifton,

that the earth is living; it's always gifting

That Mother Earth sings new songs each day

Forever sending raw wonders our way

Sometimes, it's the birds and the bees

Sometimes, the comfort of a shady tree

Sometimes, it is we

who carry Mother Earth's tunes

As they ate lavishly from our ancestors' and elders' tables.

Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and Linda Harris
have lived real lives, not fables.

The Aunties, Brother Ab Jordan, Hustlaz to Harvesters,
the staff of The Well, the leaders of Empower DC and
the activists of Ivy City all had grand stories to tell.

Willing to forgive and forge ahead.

Understanding that relationships are humanity's
butter and bread.

And yet the journey had only just begun.
Because the distance they-we traveled
in and out of the hot sun
As thinkers, speakers, writers, creators,
members of a collective, is greater than we can imagine.

Ultimately, this was a summer, fall, winter, and spring of becoming,
of identifying who we are in positive ways, of acknowledging trials,
tribulations, and triumphs through every phase. We pushed them.
And they flew because that's what our young people, regardless
of circumstances and backgrounds, always will do
when they know we care.

I am thrilled about what will unfold for all of us, and especially
the young people, as this book makes its way around the world.
Please enjoy Young Voices of the Anacostia River, and let us know
how it affects you.



CHAPTER 1

What You Don't Know by Looking at Me

What You Don't Know by Looking at Me

by Antwan Allen

What you don't know about me by looking at me is that I enjoy the sport of basketball.

I'm selfless.

I'm trustworthy.

I'm responsible.

What you don't know about me by looking at me is that I've been through enough to understand the world and people around me. I come from problems and possibilities inside the urban community.

What you don't know by looking at me is that I have become nonchalant about most things happening because the world seems to be numb to problems and to people's pain.

I'm at peace while gaming and listening to music. It helps me escape from my troubles.

What you don't know about me by looking at me is that I'm an understanding person with morals. I believe that the energy you put into the world is the same energy you will receive in return.



What You Don't Know by Looking at Me

by Mandell Bellamy

What you don't know by looking at me is that I enjoy learning about technology. I'm also interested in learning about botanic gardens and the way they can help feed and beautify the community.

What you don't know by looking at me is that I've lived with my grandma ever since I was born in Maryland. We live in D.C. now, and I take care of the house with her. I appreciate her. She is a strong woman.

What you don't know by looking at me are the challenges I've faced and how much I've overcome to get where I am today.

My passions, dreams, and ambitions aren't written on my face, but they drive everything I do.

You wouldn't know my hidden talents or the hobbies that bring me joy. My values, beliefs, and the lessons I've learned from experience are invisible but deeply shape who I am.

The kindness I strive to show others and the goals I quietly pursue aren't always apparent. There's so much more to me than meets the eye, and my story goes beyond appearances.



What You Don't Know by Looking at Me

by Kahri Borum

What you don't know by looking at me is that I am a loud person because I love expressing myself through my voice. When you first meet me I am quiet, but if I am comfortable around you, I am loud.

I like to draw, whenever I get the chance, mostly with pencil. I draw people, characters, landscapes, and so much more.

What you don't know by looking at me is that I've been doing competitive cheer ever since I was three years old. In high school, I was a three-sport-athlete. I cheered, played volleyball, and ran track. My favorite race to run was the 100-meter hurdles. I also threw shotput.

What you don't know by looking at me is that I am a problem-solver and an improviser. If one thing doesn't work, I will try the next. I think outside of the box.

What you don't know by looking at me is that I take chances to improve my future, like the chance I took signing up for Study Abroad in 2023. I went to Ecuador.

What you don't know by looking at me is that same summer, I wrote poems and essays for a book called *Through My Anacostia Eyes* for the UDC-Justice40-Nature-Wise program, sponsored by Conservation Nation. The same program and sponsors that are producing this book.

I graduated from Anacostia High School in 2024 and am now a freshman at North Carolina Central University, class of 2028. My major is social work. With my degree, I plan to become a clinical therapist. Helping people is my passion. It gives me a sense of self. Helping people helps me heal because when I was in need of help I felt as if I had no one to turn to.

What you don't know by looking at me is that I come from a hardworking single mother. I come from a stepfather who has treated me like his own since Day One.

What you don't know by looking at me is that I am a warrior. I've watched my mom be put on life support. I've had two close family members taken away by gun violence. My great-grandmother passed from Covid-19. My family and I had no way of comforting her. An uncle I was close to passed suddenly. I haven't seen or talked to my younger brother in three years. I've been touched without my permission. I've been beaten. I've been cut. I have been through trials and tribulations with myself and my family.

What you do know by looking at me is that I'm still here to inspire the youth and others who have been through challenges similar to those I have faced. I'm not done with my journey. I still have more people to help and much more to achieve.



What You Don't Know by Looking at Me

by Kaishon Champ

What you don't know by looking at me is I'm a native of Southeast Washington D.C.

I only enjoy cold weather because I suffer from "skeeter syndrome". When I get bit by mosquitoes, it stings more than itches, and my skin swells up pretty fast. Despite this irritating and painful condition, I went on practically every field trip this summer and never complained.

What you don't know by looking at me is that I love eating food. My favorite dish is chicken alfredo.

I listen to a lot of music because it's ear-cleansing finding new artists. Not sad music, though. I've never enjoyed listening to those sentimental, bluesy expressions.

What you don't know by looking at me is that I'm fond of writing because it's calming. Writing became one of my main hobbies when I turned 16. I can write about anything, no matter the category, such as music, cooking, sports, you name it.

I also have an affection for art. Illustration has been my big hobby since I was four years old. If I didn't love writing so much, I would definitely head into the art field since art has been something I've been good at for a long time.

What you don't know by looking at me is that I enjoy reading books because books build your imagination.

I also have an appreciation for socializing. I find it a good thing to make new friends that, over time, you can call family.



What You Don't Know by Looking at Me

by Winter Collins

What you don't know by looking at me:

You don't know my favorite sport. You might think it's basketball because that's what I like to play. But, no. My favorite sport is football. I grew up in a household that was always watching football games when football season came.

Somehow, I fell in love with football and that became my favorite sport and my favorite game to watch. But you didn't know that by looking at me.

What you don't know by looking at me:

You don't know my feelings. You might think I'm sad, mad, angry, or even depressed because I'm always quiet. I stay to myself, and I don't like talking to people, so I see why you might think those things. But just like polar bears, I like solitude.

You wouldn't know any of that just by looking at me.



What You Don't Know by Looking at Me
by Ziyah Givens

My name is Ziyah Sumar Givens. That's one thing you wouldn't know just by looking at me.
My name means splendor, light, glow. This is a major fact you wouldn't know just by looking at me.

I am 17 years old, but people think I'm much older because of my wisdom.
You wouldn't know this just by looking at me.

What you don't know by looking at me is that I like washing clothes
because it brings me a sense of peace.

What you don't know by looking at me is that I take accountability for my actions in any situation.
Once, I started a fight and I took the consequences without complaining.

What you don't know by looking at me is that my only focus in life right now
is creating generational wealth.

What you don't know by looking at me is that I am not sensitive or affectionate.
I love my mother with all my heart. I would give her the world.
I see my mother's strength as a woman and how she shaped me to be a well-rounded person.
I tell my mother I love her every day, but I don't give her hugs.

I'm a human being, so you can't just look at me and know anything about me.
Maybe, someday, I'll tell you more.



What You Don't Know by Looking at Me

by Genora Gray

What you don't know by looking at me is that I like to read because it helps me get away and escape reality.

What you don't know by looking at me is that my favorite color is pink, but you wouldn't know that because everything you see me dressed in is black. I like to wear black because I feel as if it goes with anything and everything.

What you don't by looking at me is that I don't really enjoy talking. I like to be alone. I like to be alone because when I'm alone I can be my authentic self.

What you don't know by looking at me is that I hate the summer. I prefer winter and fall. I don't like the summer because of the intense heat and the nuisance of bugs. I like the fall and winter because I like to wear hoodies and I like the feel of fresh, cold air. Just a peek into the window of what you don't know by looking at me.



What You Don't Know by Looking at Me

by Heaven Hammond

My name is Heaven.

I am a 17-year-old young woman who grew up in Southeast Washington, D.C., trying to better my community.

What you don't know by looking at me is that I am a strong, resilient young woman who doesn't give up easily.

What you don't know by looking at me is that since the 9th grade, I have aspired to be a firefighter to help protect, nurture, and fight for my community.

What you don't know by looking at me is I am a kind-hearted person who has been through a lot. I've been very misunderstood.

Most people might perceive me as mean or a bunch of other things.

But who cares what they think?

I am a young woman with a bright personality who has big goals and dreams.

What you don't know by looking at me is that I love learning about history and I take my education very seriously. History inspires me.

I believe in fighting for what is right, just like our American hero Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., did.

What you don't know by looking at me is that I am an ambitious young woman who likes to rise above challenges and seize every new great opportunity.

I believe the challenges I faced as a young girl motivated me.

Now all I wish for is great things for my future and to be gifted with wealth and prosperity.



What You Don't Know by Looking at Me

by Harold Harris

What you don't know by looking at me is that my favorite colors are blue and green because, growing up, I had toys those colors and I have a money green wall at home in my room.

What you don't know by looking at me is that I'm 5' 10" tall.
I listen to NBA YoungBoy and Rod Wave because their music is relatable.
It helps us young people get over the tough things we face these days.

What you don't know by looking at me is that I play football.
My positions are defensive tackle and right guard.
I play football because my brother played, and the sport is fun.

What you don't know by looking at me is that I like math.
It's a little easier for me to understand and sometimes it's fun.
It's like a little pattern. You just have to follow it.

What you don't know by looking at me is that I'm in the 12th grade.
I'm playful. I like to play a lot. I've been playing since I was a kid,
and I have kept it going. I also play a lot to make people laugh and smile.

What you don't know by looking at me is that I like to keep everything easy and simple
because I really don't like doing a lot of hard work. Sometimes it can just be too much.
But there are times when I push myself. I enjoy the feeling of succeeding.



What You Don't Know by Looking at Me

by Keon Hopkins

What you don't know by looking at me is that my name is Keon Hopkins. I am going into the 12th grade. I am 17, and I'm also a student-athlete who plays football and track.

What you don't know by looking at me is that I'm the only boy in my family. I have four sisters. When I graduate high school, I want to go into cyber-security.

I didn't get to participate in the entire summer program, but I made the best of each day I attended by speaking and writing about my reflections on the field trips and speakers.



What You Don't Know by Looking at Me

by Lanaisja "A.J." Jackson

What you do not know by looking at me is that my name is Lanaisja.
But I like to be called A.J. for short. It's easier for people to pronounce and easy to remember.

What you don't know by looking at me is that my favorite color is purple
because it is a beautiful color. I love all things in that color – flowers, grapes, clothing, butterflies.

I also love to sleep. If I could do it, I would sleep all day long. When I go to sleep,
I feel free, unbound, unrestrained. It takes my mind off things and brings me peace.

Listening to music brings me peace too. I enjoy listening to my favorite artists –
Rod Wave, Lil' Durk, Jhene Aiko, NBA YoungBoy, and sometimes Nocap, too.
I play their songs on repeat. Most of their songs speak to me because I can relate to their lyrics.

Another thing you wouldn't know by looking at me is that I am big on respect, loyalty, and trust.
I am a loving, fun, trusting person and would not want anyone to disrespect me
because I would not disrespect anyone. I also am genuinely nice and caring.
People might try to take advantage of that.

What you also wouldn't know by looking at me is that I'm quiet. I'm a picky eater.
I often shut down when I'm mad. I love to laugh. I love sports.
And, I have a soft spot for the people I love.

These are all things that you would not know by looking at me.



What You Don't Know by Looking at Me

by Kennedy Mosely

What you don't know by looking at me is that I have the worst attitude and get irritated quickly. For example, when I get mad, I'll be mad at everybody, even if they didn't do anything to me. And I get smart with everyone who talks to me when I'm in a bad mood.

What you don't know by looking at me is that I'm a fun person to be around, because whenever I go out with people, I'm the life of the party.

I make it fun, and I laugh a lot and the people I am around love to laugh too.

What you don't know by looking at me is that I love to dance and cheer.

Dancing and cheering make me happy, and when I do it with other people, it's even more enjoyable.

What you don't know by looking at me is that I love to eat. Some of my favorite foods are baked mac & cheese, ribs, and greens.

What you don't know by looking at me is that I love to sleep. I love to sleep because I can get a lot of stuff off my mind while asleep. It also feels good to my body to sleep.

What you don't know by looking at me is that I love listening to music.

I love to listen to music because it keeps me calm.



What You Don't Know by Looking at Me

by Ikia Pyles

What you don't know by looking at me is that I understand that it's not just the struggle in life. It's what you make out of it.

What you don't know by looking at me is that I move the way I do because nobody has my back the way I have their backs. They are not there for me the way I'm there for them. When things go wrong, people run to me for help, but when I need help, nobody is "available". I make things happen for myself because if I don't do it, who will?

What you don't know by looking at me is that I love Stitch from Lilo & Stitch because he reminds me of myself. He's misunderstood. He isn't a wild animal. He's just protective of those he loves. He wants to escape to be "normal" and not feel limited.

What you don't know by looking at me is that I'm by myself sometimes because being around a big crowd can lead to a lot of drama. And I don't like drama.

What you don't know by looking at me is no matter how mean I might look, I'm one of the most respectful and humble people you will ever meet.

What you don't know by looking at me is that no matter what, I'll always shoot for the moon and the stars.

What you don't know by looking at me is I want to be a social worker and work with juveniles to help create a better future for the next generation.

What you don't know by looking at me is that my story will inspire future generations.



What You Don't Know by Looking at Me
by Ra'lon Ray

What you don't know by looking at me is that both of my parents are locked up. My mother has been locked up for seven years, and my father for three years. Their imprisonment made me feel sad all the time because my mother is the only person who has been there for me. She gave me and my brothers everything we asked for.

My mother was the most independent mother in the world. My father wasn't around, so my mother did everything she needed to make sure I was cared for and didn't have to worry.

When my mother first got locked up, I didn't know that it had happened until later when her friend came to pick me up from my police program. I was confused, because my mother always picked me up. I didn't think anything of it – at first. Then, my mother's friend's phone rang, and she answered. Somebody on the other end said, "Did you tell her?" She replied "No." They then proceeded to tell me. I broke down crying.

Later, I went to visit my mother at the D.C. jail. One thing I never saw my mother do was cry, so when I saw her cry for the first time, it made me feel special. I felt like all those years she hid that pain from her children so we wouldn't know what she was going through.

What you don't know by looking at me is that I cry when no one is around because I hold so much in and I don't like for people to try to care for me.

After I cry, I like to listen to music. Rod Wave and Jhene Aiko are my favorite artists. They sing and rap.

What you don't know by looking at me is that my emotions span a broad range. I feel anger, joy, sadness, anxiety, ennui, disgust, and fear. My anger has gotten bad lately. But I'm working to control it.

What you don't know by looking at me is that most of the time, I'm happy. I'm a good person, and I'm a fun person to be around. I have a good sense of humor and I'm respectful, especially to elders. I can be very nice at times.

What you don't know by looking at me is that I'm a fighter. I'm strong. I know how to dig deep within myself and overcome my fears. That makes me an achiever. You wouldn't know any of that, just by looking at me.



What You Don't Know by Looking at Me
by Ri'chard Wheeler

What you don't know by looking at me is that I am a young Black man from Southeast D.C., born and raised. I am proud of where I come from.

What you don't know by looking at me is that I smile when I'm mad. I laugh through the rough times.

What you don't know by looking at me is that I'm very determined. I want to be the first in my family to succeed by going to college.

What you don't know by looking at me is that I work hard to be the greatest at what I do. People ask me, "Do you want to be good or great?" I answer: I want to be great.

What you don't know by looking at me is that I've seen a lot of bad things in Southeast but I'm using that to make myself stronger. Few people seem to care about what's happening in Southeast, except the community, so we stick together and beat all odds and everybody that's against us.

What you don't know by looking at me is that I'm developing into a better, smarter young man. I'm learning about different trades and career opportunities so that I can become the best man I can possibly be.





CHAPTER 2

Names, Nature, Beauty

The Alliteration of Winter

by Winter Collins

I'm Wonderful Winter because I'm wonderful at a lot of things
Such as basketball and other sports
Nature is wonderful because it's peaceful
I see people out here exploring nature
I hear the wind and feel it blowing across me
I can still taste the organic food I've been eating
I smell the fresh grass
It's all wonderful

Kind Kaishon

by Kaishon Champ

I chose the word kind because I'm a nice person
I help other students with their work
And it's the first word I thought of
Nature is kind because bees make honey for us
The birds feed their children
Breezes help cool off hot weather

Rainbow Ra'lon

by Ra'lon Ray

I'm Rainbow Ra'lon because I'm bright and colorful and pop out after feeling down.
Rainbows make nature prettier and more peaceful.

Natural Beauty – A Reflection

by Keon Hopkins

When I think about nature and what makes it beautiful,
it's the greenery, and the scent of the leaves on trees
as the wind rustles them.

When I think about nature and what makes it beautiful,
I know that I am nature. I am the sun. I am water.
I am the wind blowing, pushing, and prodding
new seeds deeper in the ground so that they can
grow more plants,
just like me.

The Flow of A Garden Dance

by Mr. Ashton Minor

I hear laughter, clapping, and birds chirping
As soon as I walk into the school's courtyard
I feel cheerful; that's the energy
Coming from friends standing in line
Ready to have fun moving
Their bodies to a vocal and hand-slapping beat
Under the limbo stick. *How low can you go?*

The garden is illuminated by the sunlight
And the sunlight is illuminating us
My feet touch the grass
I bend and smile broadly
Life is our movement
Flowing, healing, reflecting
Echoes of laughter form joyous memories
Of a dance in the garden

CHAPTER 3

Ivy City/Empower DC

Time for Ivy City's Legacy of Environmental Injustice to Come to an End

by Anacostia High School Seniors

Ivy City, tucked in the far Northeast corner of D.C., is one of the most historic Black neighborhoods. It was founded in 1872 by formerly enslaved African Americans.

The working-class Black residents who made this section of the city their home experienced environmental injustice from the start, according to Sebreana Rhodes, Community Organizer for Empower DC, the non-profit group that gave us the history and a tour of Ivy City.

We learned about redlining, a practice by banks to draw red lines around areas where large numbers of Blacks live, and then refuse to give loans or grants to the residents, which makes it hard for them to maintain and invest in their communities.

We could see the legacy of redlining and environmental injustice from the time we stepped off our bus. We noticed immediately there were no trees on the streets. Abandoned buildings were prominent. The smell of chemicals swamped our noses and the heaviness of the heat weighed down our bodies. The narrow sidewalks were making it difficult for people with disabilities to safely use them. The neighborhood seemed deserted.

An important story about the neighborhood and its people was found in an abandoned, boarded up, red brick school. It's more than 100 years old, and was named after Alexander Crummell, an inspiring Black man who was an abolitionist and Episcopal priest. The residents have long wanted to turn the school into a community center, but they have not been able to get public or private funding for it.

They led a peaceful protest by creating a makeshift park for kids in front of Crummell school, hoping to convince the government to provide the funding. Eventually, a promise was made to provide money to remodel the building into a community center and for other uses. Nearly 10 years ago, developers were offered the chance to submit bids. But the remodeling still hasn't happened.

And yet, something else, seemingly out of place, has sprouted: beer gardens and wineries. Not at all what the community has been seeking for so long. Not an answer to air pollution, or the need for wider sidewalks and safe places for kids to play. Sadly, the government finally planted new trees but they planted them in areas where there used to be parking spaces. So that created conflict. And the trees were not properly cared for. D.C. City Council members Robert White and Trayon White helped fund basketball courts for the neighborhood.

But there are still concerns about the area being infested with chemicals from the industries that remain based there, and there are big concerns about residents getting cancer. We think Ivy City should be more like Anacostia with more trees and stores. And it should have some water features to bring more natural beauty to the neighborhood. Overall, we think it's time that Ivy City's legacy of environmental injustice comes to an end.

CHAPTER 4

The National Park Service, Rock Creek, and Malcolm X Park

Editor's Note: *Our students explored Rock Creek Park along Beach Drive over the summer, allowing themselves to be mesmerized by the flow of the stream, climbing rocks, skipping rocks, choosing to let go of cell phones and inhibitions to hike trails, take in the breezes ruffling leafy trees, and the embrace of birdsong.*

A Heartfelt Tribute to National Park Service Leaders

by Caroline Brewer

UDC-Anacostia-Nature-Wise-Justice40 students have benefited from the generosity of the National Park Service (NPS) in numerous ways over the past two summers. Various staff of the NPS have volunteered their time to speak to students about the work of the agency, to support visits to parks in the region and show up in person to salute the students for their achievements during the internship. Key over the past two summers has been the outstanding support of Tara D. Morrison, National Capital Parks – East Superintendent. Morrison has a remarkable resume when it comes to African American history and culture and the parks. Included in her portfolio is “the management and direction of Anacostia Park, parks that date to the L'Enfant Plan, and national parks that honor heroes of American history including Frederick Douglass, Mary McLeod Bethune and Carter G. Woodson,” according to the NPS website.

“I’ve dedicated my career to urban parks, and I have seen first-hand and believe in their power to improve people’s lives and well-being,” Morrison said in the announcement of her position as superintendent. She also has worked with “parks and communities from Maine to West Virginia to discover, preserve and share stories of the Underground Railroad,” the statement said. Morrison was in the audience in August to celebrate Anacostia’s young people when the students spoke at the awards ceremony hosted at the Department of the Interior.

The students also were privileged to hear from Michael Donato, Chief of Staff of the National Capital Parks – East during the summer. Donato visited the students at Anacostia and took them on a verbal tour of the park system, what it offered environmentally, and in terms of careers. We are deeply grateful to Morrison and Donato for the investment they’ve made during their careers in national parks and in ensuring that young people of the D.C. region get access to its riches.

Editor's Note: Our students toured Malcolm X Park last summer, hiking across storied green space, up the long and wide staircase, around the classically designed structures for a waterfall and reflecting pool, around newly restored statues, reading about and discussing the events that unfolded over more than 200 years, including the role of Black men in constructing the park. Malcolm X Park is the unofficial name of the 12-acre space, originally established with a presidential mansion in 1819. It is overseen by the National Park Service, and part of Rock Creek Park.

A Tribute to D.C.'s Malcolm X Park

by Caroline Brewer

Before Meridian Hill became a park in D.C., it was a special feature
Designed by the brilliant Black mind of Surveyor and Naturalist Benjamin Banneker

Before Meridian Hill became a park in D.C., it was a camp
For Black Union Army soldiers, fierce, hearts on fire, bold, bolder

Before Meridian Hill became a park in D.C., it was a Black space
Filled with Black homes, Black love, Black history all over the place

Along with the idea of Meridian Hill as a park in D.C., came anguish
Mandates to create recreational space, let Black joy and prosperity languish

Once Meridian Hill became a park in D.C., Black mandates required a name change
From Meridian Hill to Malcolm X, thundering, roaring justice, a game change

After Meridian Hill became a park in D.C., Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s feet
Walked all over it whenever he was in D.C., leaving behind the cologne of liberty

After Meridian Hill became a park in D.C., Angela Davis planted gardens of freedom songs
More demands for Malcolm X Park and truth that all people are born equal and belong

Once that park became Malcolm X in the hearts of the people, drum circles emerged
With dancers and singers, multi-colored humanity, undeniable dignity and worth



CHAPTER 5

Potomac River/Great Falls

Reflections on the Potomac River and Great Falls, Maryland

by Genora Gray, Harold Harris, Winter Collins, Mandell Bellamy, Ra'lon Ray, Devyn McDonald, Kennedy Mosely, Heaven Hammond, and Kaishon Champ

What did I know about the Potomac River and Great Falls, Maryland before our visit?

I knew nothing about the Potomac River.
I knew the Anacostia River flows into the Potomac River.
I knew that the Potomac was a big river.
I knew that we got our drinking water from there.
I once rode on a boat on a portion of the river with teammates and teachers.
I knew nothing about Great Falls.
I knew that it had powerful waterfalls.
I heard that Great Falls is home to some big trees.
I had never visited the Potomac River or Great Falls before.

What did I want to know about these places?

I just wanted to know if the Potomac was clean.
How long has it been polluted?
How it came to be. How it got its name.
How many waterfalls does it have?
I wanted to know the background behind everything.
I wanted to find the history behind all of it.
Hopefully it has a cool breeze.

Before we arrived,

I really didn't know what to expect.
I was expecting it to be a real cool spot.
I was expecting to see pretty, glistening waterfalls
I was expecting it to feel peaceful, calm, and relaxing.
I was expecting to hear and feel a strong wind.
I was expecting to hear water crashing on the rocks.
I was expecting to smell nature; her freshness, her variety.
I was expecting to hear the roar of water, smell the breezy air.
I was expecting it to be hot and irritating.
I was expecting it to have a lot of green trees and clean water.
I was expecting it to look like a forest, and it did.
I was expecting to have a good time.
I was expecting something beautiful.

Once we got there,

I saw larvae in the creek water. I heard bugs buzzing.
I saw waterfalls and river foam rushing downstream.
It was a long, hot walk on the trails. The waterfalls were refreshing.
When we crossed over the bridge, the new views of the river and the falls made it hard to take our eyes off all of that motion.
I saw the blue and white foamy water of the waterfalls.
I heard the water crashing on the rocks.
I noticed how fast the falls were flowing and how dangerous the water was to us as human beings.
The rocks were huge - black, white, gray, and chunky.
They helped the water stay in its position of flowing downward, quickly.

I felt the sand underneath my sneakers at the beach and down the steep steps leading to it.
I saw a beach and a waterfall side by side, which I found crazy because, in my mind, it doesn't make sense for these very different natural features to be next to each other.
But both are good for our mental and emotional health, and provide food and habitat for wildlife.
Back by the bus, I saw Canada geese, a dozen or more. They didn't move when they saw us approaching and sitting down to have lunch. I heard them cry for our Frito chips.

If it had been a cooler day, I would have felt more relaxed. But that wasn't the fault of the river or the falls. They were just being who they are year after year, and were enduring the 90-some-degree heat just as we did.

CHAPTER 6

George Pointer, Black Sailor on the Potomac

George Pointer, Black Sailor on the Potomac

by Caroline Brewer

George Pointer was a Black man who knew two worlds,
enslaved and free, and knew one river, intimately
From when he was a boy, Pointer knew the Potomac
Knew its lustrous, winding, bossy ways
Its ancient body, always awake
In some places gentle, serene
In other places, thrusting its waters around big and tall
Black metamorphic rocks, weighing hundreds of pounds,
highly resistant to erosion

Pointer knew the trees that crowded and rooted the river's banks
Partnering with cool breezes, supplying shade, mental and emotional respite
Knew the rhythmic chatter of crickets
And the soft buzzing of dragonflies

Pointer knew rainy days and nights and the storms of life on the river
Born in 1773 in Montgomery County, Maryland
At age 13, Pointer was "rented out" by enslaver *William Wallace
To work for the Patowmack Canal Company (PCC)
While enslaved, he earned small pay for his labor
Saved and used it to "buy" his freedom at age 19
A happy day, no doubt, and yet freedom was his birthright
And all those years of being stolen could never be repaid

Pointer knew the river bone-deep and did his work on it so brilliantly
He was promoted from teen-aged assistant to Captain to Chief Engineer
And Engineering Superintendent for the PCC
Of Washington, D.C., a first for any Black man at any U.S. company
In spite of the strange and horrifying system of American chattel slavery
In 1787, directors of the PCC built Pointer a cottage
To watch over the storage house's goods, such as gunpowder for constructing the C & O Canal
Pointer also ran businesses fishing on and farming near the river

Pointer knew the hums and moans of the Potomac River
Well enough to survive an accident that could have killed him
While piloting a boatload of free stone, fine-grained stone used for shaping and molding
He hit an object downstream, was thrown from his boat
Broke a leg and, remarkably, managed to survive for four days
He also, amazingly, managed to save his cargo and deliver it to downstream locks

Pointer's service on the river for the Potomac Canal Company his entire career
Was a dream for them
The greatest engineering accomplishment of the 18th century, he gave to them
As a result, a riverside home for more than 40 years was his
He spent most of that time with his eventual wife, Elizabeth Townsend, and their three children
The cottage built near Little Falls, Maryland is now located at Lock 6 of the C & O Canal
Still in territory familiar to a man who knew the Potomac River as well as it knew its path to the sea

So when you think of the Potomac, think of Pointer, a Black man on the river
Strumming its heart, up and down, venturing side to side, experiencing pearly blue skies
Orange and red sunrises, and a special kind of freedom, akin to the eagle, hard won, bittersweet

CHAPTER 7

Appreciation for Southeast D.C. Activists

Editor's Note: *How do you spell love? Friends-of-Oxon-Run-Park, that's how you spell it. Oxon Run Park is referred to as a hidden gem in D.C. by the non-profit organization. And, as the largest city park run by D.C. Department of Parks and Recreation, it is. Nestled in the farthest corner of Ward 8, lush with green space, trees, berry-bearing bushes, trails, a stream, a Mother's Peace Garden, and multiple recreational opportunities for kids and kids at heart, spanning 128 acres, it's a neighborhood dream. But it's a dream that has had to be fought for. Prior to 1971, the park was mostly a large expanse of grass run by the federal transportation department. But for 13 years after it was turned over to the city, it became much of what it is today, a neighborhood oasis, a source of peace and natural prosperity, a gift of wellness to the community.*

The Friends of Oxon Run Park say, "Our goal is to enhance the community's mental and physical well-being through trails, tree plantings, amphitheater performances, exercise and outdoor learning." The Friends have been around, by the current name and another, since the early 2000s. These volunteers have given untold hours watching over the park like a gardener over his flower beds, planting seeds, watering, ensuring ample sunlight, and battling weeds and other life-threatening forces. We are grateful to the Friends for loving the park and their community enough to ensure that it thrives for new generations. Grateful to Stacey Stewart, formerly of the Fannie Mae Foundation, for helping to make space for a playground. We are especially grateful to longtime Friends volunteer and Board Chairman Absalom Jordan for providing our students and staff with a fabulous tour of the park and sharing its incredible history.

Letter of Appreciation to Southeast D.C. Community Activist Ab Jordan

by Heaven Hammond, Harold Harris, Mandell Bellamy, Ra'lon Ray, and Devyn McDonald

Dear Mr. Ab Jordan,

Thank you for telling us the history of Oxon Run Park and giving us a tour.
Thank you for advocating to protect our community park for so many years.

Thank you for answering our questions about the creek and the barrier that was built to stop flooding in the 1970s but turned out to cause harm. The information you shared about protecting the park and the residents will help prepare us for the future so that we can be advocates and help our community keep our parks safe and clean.

Thank you for providing us information about the beefsteak plant, garden canna, Indian shot, and Carolina horsenettle and showing us how you and others maintain the plants and herbs.

Thank you for introducing us to the delicious, fresh blackberries that we ate off the bushes along the creek.

As we learned in the book, *The Thing About Bees* by Shabazz Larkin, we students are just like bees. Bees are like kids that go around buzzing in your ear all day. But these buzzy creatures are positive because our future relies on them as pollinators. Kids are something like pollinators too. If we pass on information to them, they can keep it alive and help it grow. So having bees and young people around makes our lives easier and ensures us a future. Thank you for welcoming us and taking your time to give us information that we can use and pass on.

Sincerely,
Heaven Hammond, Harold Harris, Mandell Bellamy, Ra'lon Ray, and Devyn McDonald

From a Young One to an Elder, Thank You!

by Lanaisja “A.J.” Jackson

Dear Mr. Ab Jordan,

Thank you for the time you spent with us teaching us about life at Oxon Run Park and what you and other community organizers had to do to maintain it as a peaceful place for the whole community.

I found it interesting how the professional golfer Tiger Woods tried to build a school on the park’s land and rejected the suggestion to build on a space that was already built up. It was important to know that without Oxon Run Park there would not be space for people in nearby neighborhoods to gather.

Thank you for showing us different sections of the park and getting us to try new things like eating wild blackberries straight off the bush, just getting us out of our comfort zones.

I am writing this letter to say thank you because I imagine it hasn’t been easy volunteering to work there for 20-plus years and fighting for a land that others would have chosen to let suffer.

Sincerely,
Anacostia High School Senior Lanaisja “A.J.” Jackson

Mustafa Santiago Ali

Editor’s note: *Dr. Mustafa Santiago Ali is a longtime Southeast D.C. resident, renowned Thought-Leader, Strategist, Policymaker and Activist committed to fighting for environmental justice, public health, resource equity and political empowerment to uplift our most vulnerable communities.*

For more than 20 years, Ali has focused on creating power to bring about positive change for communities that are often unseen, unheard and forgotten. Ali is internationally renowned as a Keynote Speaker, Trainer, Leader, Community Liaison and Facilitator with 26+-years of expertise specializing in social justice issues focused on revitalizing our most vulnerable communities. He has also worked with more than 500 domestic and international communities to secure environmental, health and economic justice.

Ali worked at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for 24 years. At the EPA, he served as the Assistant Associate Administrator for Environmental Justice and Senior Advisor for Environmental Justice and Community Revitalization. Ali later became the senior VP for the Hip Hop Caucus, a national non-profit and non-partisan organization that connects the hip-hop community to the civic process to build power and create positive change. He currently serves as the Executive Vice President for the National Wildlife Federation. Ali was hoping to meet with our students over the summer, but was unable to do so. Still, his work to ensure environmental justice in the D.C. region and around the world is so important that we wanted to offer this small tribute to him as an environmental leader and man who knows that he personally belongs to the natural world.

Below please find Ali’s essay on the topic of Black Americans and belonging.

“For 10,000 years, the Nacotchtanks lived in harmony with the air, water, and land now known as Anacostia. Those Indigenous brothers and sisters understood the beauty and majesty of the natural world and honored it every day. Today, Anacostia Park, where I visit so often, is a space in a historic African American community where people come together to learn, play, pray, and celebrate culture.

I am one of them, ritually embracing nature along the Anacostia as nature has always embraced and been a refuge for me, providing a place to escape, to grow closer to the Creator, express myself, and meditate on deep connections to the past and present. Mother Nature invites us to be who we are, without judgment or question. Nature doesn’t care if we are Black or White, rich or poor, straight or gay. She invites us to sip from her raindrops, bathe in her sunlight, and get lost in her moonbeams. In nature, all things are possible. Whether we are lounging in urban parks or exploring primordial forests, nature invites us to rediscover ourselves on silent breezes that whisper welcome home, where we, Black and beautiful, and all people in between, belong.”

– Written for the Nature Forward Taking Nature Black Conference e-book, *Belonging: Black Americans in Nature Photography Project* Learn more at <https://natureforward.org/download-belonging/>

CHAPTER 8

Kayaking Haikus

Editor's Note: Our deepest appreciation to Candice Autry, John Mein, Ian Milne, and Duane Cunningham from the DC Youth Leadership Oasis Program for arranging the kayaking trip on the Little Patuxent River, teaching us how to kayak, and encouraging us to embrace this new experience; Sonora Phillips, Program Manager of Youth Outreach and Community Engagement for Earth Conservation Corps (ECC) for arranging a visit to Wings Over America for students who chose to forego kayaking; and John Wood, raptor handler and educator at ECC, for teaching us about the raptors they care for. ECC has been a terrific partner to Conservation Nation and the Anacostia summer internship program each year, and we deeply appreciate all that these organizations and individuals do for young people in the region year-round.

Adventurous me
Kayaking on calm waters
Brave, free, don't fall in

– students Heaven Hammond, Harold Harris, Genora Gray, Ziyah Givens, Mandell Bellamy, Winter Collins, Lanaisja "A.J." Jackson, Kaishon Champ, and assistants Olivia Howard and Ashton Minor

Calm summer and fun
Builds bravery and teamwork
For kayaking joy – Kaishon Champ

Hayride, life jackets
Irrigation, joyful, wet
Arm strength, kayaking – Winter Collins

Kayaking? I'm scared
Sense death on the calm waters
Fearful of drowning – Heaven Hammond

Courage on water
Sunshine, strength, fear of boating
Bow, stern, teamwork, calm – Harold Harris

Strong teamwork on boat
Paddling free without drowning
Bow and stern hold weight – Lanaisja "A.J." Jackson

Summer colors, calm
Scary, bravery, tandem
Kayaking, freedom – Ziyah Givens

Courage on calm waters
Adventurous partnership
Paddles to freedom – Mr. Ashton Minor

CHAPTER 9

The Well at Oxon Run

Editor's Note: *The Well at Oxon Run is one of D.C.'s greatest natural wonders. It's not just that it's a one-acre farm and wellness space dedicated to Ward 8's Southeast D.C. community. Or that on its 20,000-square-foot farm, you can find the most gorgeous-looking fresh vegetables and herbs, such as tomatoes, squash, brassica, mint, lavender, and beans. The Well is a natural wonder because of the people who run the place. People who, along with their immense knowledge of how to grow and serve, spread so much positive energy throughout the environment of The Well.*

We appreciate The Well's Executive Director, Jaren Hill-Lockridge; Farming and Garden Manager Kenneth Bridgers; Programs Coordinator, Melanie Guerrero; and Farm Assistant, Makeeda Bandele-Asante for a fantastic tour.

Agriculture is the Culture at The Well

by Ziyah Givens

In Southeast, The Well at Oxon Run
Was warm, bright, and shiny as the glowing sun
Which produces for us the vitamin D
The greens it helps grow are sources of vitamin C

I saw trees, gardens, flowers, and fruit
I heard inspiring stories of our ancestors' roots

At The Well, agriculture is the culture
And that provides some neighborhood structure
For nourishment of the body and spirit
Visit The Well and you'll flourish in it

This free urban garden is a place you must go to see
There is nothing else like it in Washington, D.C.

Wonderful Scents at The Well

by Devyn McDonald

We traveled to a community garden in Southeast D.C.
The Well at Oxon Run is a vibrant, healthy place to be

We got introduced to the smell of straight-from-the-garden mint
It can be described as a strong, wonderful scent

Farmer Kenny told us that it also was a charm
Put mint in our pockets, he said, to keep us from harm

With marigolds, he told us to make a wish
I couldn't make just one with so many on my list

Touching and Tasting at The Well

by Winter Collins

I remember the Memory Tree
It's been there for years and it's taller than me

Best part about my trip to the urban garden at The Well:
The tour featuring colorful flowers made it swell

We touched sunflowers; sniffed the invigorating scents
Of marigolds, lavender, basil, and mint

Some tasted fresh tomatoes; some sat on the ground
I was glad there weren't a lot of bugs around

Natural Opportunities at The Well

by Ra'lon Ray

I went to The Well.
I felt sick and it was hot.
So I stayed off to the side and didn't do a lot.

Eventually, I got up and took pictures of the flowers.
Saw butterflies showing off their fancy flight powers.

The Well uses its food gardens as an opportunity
to feed the Southeast D.C. community.

I am a warrior of a Black woman who refuses to die.
Yet my gentle side loves to see clouds float in the sky.

As I was leaving The Well, I felt as if a tear might slide from my eye.
Then I thought to myself, this is a "see you later," not "goodbye."

Hugging The Well

by Heaven Hammond

I want to tell you about my trip to the place they call The Well.
Fresh mint from the garden was the first thing I got to smell.

I remember the "memory" tree; the bark was peeling;
Ms. Benjamin hugged and kissed it; that gave me a weird feeling.

We broke marigolds into pieces and threw them in the air.
Farmer Kenny said, "Make a wish,"
and that chased away despair.

Love at First Bite

by Kaishon Champ

We went to The Well at Oxon Run
Which flooded my mood with joy and a sense of fun

Summer heat is known for ruining my day
But for this trip, the bad vibes stayed away

The tour guide told us to eat fresh veggies to make our spirits bright
I was soon given a fresh tomato; talk about love at first bite!

I met the Memory Tree that holds onto The Well's memories
I gave it a hug and felt the community's unity

Fun at Oxon Run

by Kennedy Moseley

We went to The Well at Oxon Run
Plenty of veggies in the gardens and lots of fun
We saw a plot of brassica, in the form of broccoli
The area seems ripe for a food shopping spree

By giving away plants, fruits, and vegetables to the community
The Well provides neighborhood support and healthy opportunities
The colorful space also beautifies the environment it's in
And welcomes everyone who comes as a cherished friend

Mint and Other Scents at The Well

by Mandell Bellamy

Went to The Well and saw a well of vegetables, flowers, and trees
And even a peanut garden that doesn't require bees

At The Well, I inhaled mint
It had a pleasant, powerful scent

Saw a "memory" tree towering over me
It's a keeper of The Well's history

The community saved it from being chopped down
Some thought it was dead; we found it safe and sound

In fact, it was growing new leaves and plants
Folks at The Well provided a nice experience

CHAPTER 10

Baltimore's Stillmeadow PeacePark

Stillmeadow is aware that a community's capacity for resiliency and sustainability depends on the mental, physical, and spiritual health of its residents. Therefore, SCPI's 10-acre urban forest was revitalized and transformed into a PeacePark - stillmeadowpeacepark.com

"We have discovered the joy of bringing what happens inside the church outside, while bringing the wonder and appreciation of God's creation inside." – Stillmeadow Community Church Pastor Michael Martin

Gratitude for Stillmeadow PeacePark

by Kaishon Champ

I went to the 10-acre Stillmeadow PeacePark in southwest Baltimore to learn about their work to combat food insecurity.

The Stillmeadow Church and Community Project wants to better their community and convert more green space into more fruits, veggies, and herbs for the kids, teens, adults, elders, and future children in the city.

It was a hot summer day, and the birds singing and gentle breeze made familiar sounds. Sounds that would bring you to a calming place, and one of gratitude witnessing all the good work by this church and its people.

Leadership with Unity at Stillmeadow PeacePark

by Keon Hopkins

Stillmeadow PeacePark in Baltimore was a hot, burning sensation
The heat had trees growing faster it seemed than all of creation
The weather wasn't the park's fault, so let's give it some grace
The problem is that climate change was showing its steaming hot face
I felt bugs creeping up on me like a shadow
I saw water flowing in a rocky stream that was shallow
Our young tour guides told us they plant crops
To give away to the community
Such as squash, tomatoes, strawberries, and beans
This church demonstrates leadership with unity
The shade from the hundreds of trees was so cool
It covered us like air-conditioning
Stillmeadow Church and PeacePark, just know
you're an inspiration for eternity

The Good Work of Stillmeadow PeacePark

by Kennedy Mosely

On this day at Stillmeadow PeacePark, the temperature reached 100 degrees. There was plenty of shade on the trail, thanks to hundreds of tall, leafy trees.

The church wisely marked the poison ivy with orange spray paint all around. The gentle flow of the stream and birds chirping made beautiful, relaxing sounds. The team at Stillmeadow has planted more than 2,800 plants on the property. The park lies in a food desert on the southwest edge of Baltimore City.

The church maintains several gardens, with vegetables, pollinators, and fruit. In just a few years, from invasive vines everywhere, a healthier park has taken root. They also are working to reduce the amount of waste that ends up in landfills. They have started composting leftovers on-site using volunteer and staff skills.

CHAPTER 11

John Francis, The Planetwalker

Editor's Note: John Francis, Ph.D., is a National Geographic Education Fellow; founder and director of PlanetWalk, a nonprofit environmental education organization dedicated to a vision of world peace and cooperation; and author of the autobiography "Planetwalker: 22 years of Walking, 17 years of Silence." He has traveled around the world by foot speaking on pilgrimage and change, and we were so grateful for his time speaking to our students via Zoom this summer.

Mr. Planetwalker *by Antwan Allen*

John Francis was nicknamed "The Planetwalker".
For 22 years, he didn't use motorized transportation.

He wanted to make a change in the world after witnessing a horrible oil spill.
"I had no idea who I was gonna be," he said, after making up his mind to walk everywhere.

He also took a vow of silence for 17 years, ironically, after not caring for the
vow of silence by monks, originally.

He explained that silence while walking isn't not speaking but silence to find
the music of nature. He also played the banjo to connect with people.
Some invited him to stay over in their homes.

When confronted by two white men with guns,
John had a feeling of death coming on him.
But he said he didn't flinch, because he didn't want anybody to stop him
from doing what he wanted to do. Death was inevitable, he told himself.

Even with not talking, he still made the decision to achieve multiple degrees, including a PhD.
John stood by his morals and principles, even though the odds were against him.

John Francis, The Wanderer *by Keon Hopkins*

When a massive oil spill hit the San Francisco Bay,
John Francis' old life evaporated; dried up, went away
And the new one began
Just for him to walk the land

The way John Francis walked the Earth,
The music of the environment, he felt and heard
This type of music wasn't boring or bland
Keep walking, John, was its forceful command

He walked and walked; and for 20 years didn't talk
When to find a new way of living he sought
With any other protest, you'd see signs and lines
But this one was solo, in the woods, a different kind

He was courageous; when a white man threatened to end his life
He said he saw death, but refused to take flight
He didn't want anyone to scare him out of doing what he wanted to do
"Live life today what you believe," was his favorite truth

A heart so kind, a spirit bright
His walking and not talking brought day to the darkest nights
When nature called out, he listened and received a new birth
His walking in silence taught us how to better love the Earth

The Planetwalker Raises His Voice

by Kaishon Champ

Can you imagine only walking and sailing in a world of great technology, for nearly 20 years?

John Francis, nicknamed the Planetwalker, walked across America, and other parts of the world, never taking motorized transportation, to protest a major oil spill that polluted the San Francisco Bay and killed birds and fish.

He wondered how hard that life, in addition to a vow of silence, would be.

I don't need people to hear my voice, he concluded. I need to listen to theirs.
So he used other ways to communicate, such as sign language, drawing, and writing.

Will people think I want attention, even if attention is what I want to escape? he wondered.

Battles will come my way, I may even be threatened, he understood. And he was. Once, by gunpoint.

My voice was never anything special, Francis declared to himself, and also noted,
Now that I've been quiet for so long, the whole world wants to hear what I have to say.

Who is the Planetwalker?

by Genora Gray

Who is the Planetwalker?
Well, for starters, his name is John Francis.

Have you ever tried to go a long period of time without speaking?
John didn't speak for 22 years and he walked everywhere he needed to go for 17 years.
His longest one-day walk was 50 miles, in South America.

Have you ever stood up for your beliefs, even when people thought you were crazy?
John didn't believe in getting in things that had a gas-powered engine.
He walked and avoided motorized transportation because there was a major oil spill and it killed a lot of birds and fish and polluted the water in the San Francisco Bay, near where he was living.

Although it was difficult and, at times, very dangerous, John stayed true to himself. His advice to others is: "Live today what you believe."

Do you think you could demonstrate the courage of the Planetwalker?

10 Things You Should Know About John Francis

by Devyn McDonald and Kennedy Mosely

John Francis was silent for 17 years.
He spent 22 years only walking.
He accidentally spoke five times during the start of his mute mission.

He learned sign language just so he could socialize with the people around him.
His life was threatened once and he used sign language to get out of the situation.

He was nicknamed the Planetwalker.
He became the National Geographic Society's first education fellow in 2010.
He wrote his autobiography, Planetwalker, and a children's book, *Human Kindness*.
He visited Antarctica and sailed through the Caribbean.

John emphasizes that a balance is required in talking with people; he says
we should do more listening than talking.

John Francis' Development

by Mandell Bellamy

After the oil spill in the San Francisco Bay and his decision to protest by walking everywhere, refusing to ride in planes, buses, cars and trains, John Francis argued with family and friends about whether one person could make a difference.

He said he learned he hadn't been listening to people, so he took a vow of silence, too. He said he didn't know who he was going to be after beginning the protest.

He learned, though, that how we treat each other is how we treat the environment. He learned that it was important to live today what you believe because death could come at any time.

It's ironic how early in his life he wanted to be a monk without the vow of silence, but ended up doing it anyway, after the oil spill, and showing us that one person could make a difference.

John Francis, Planetwalker, Peacemaker

by Mr. Dequwan Smith

Change of life brought by disaster,
What world is this where money is master?
I can't stand by like it's okay
My soul is shaken so I walk away
A spark is lit, what will I do?
Further my education and I'll walk there, too
So quick to listen, no need to speak
But my passion is contagious, why not teach?

My protest evolved to diminish destruction
And uplift our environment through healthy discussion
As I walk and sail around the globe
The earth fills my ears and enters my nose
Life is as evident as the buzz of a bee
I'll walk with love, and I'll walk to peace

CHAPTER 12

If I Were Frederick Douglass

Editor's Note: This poem was inspired by a trip to the Frederick Douglass - Isaac Meyers Maritime Park Museum on the Baltimore Harbor and the reading of "If I Were a Tree" by Andrea Zimmerman. Zimmerman's book uses a rhyming scheme that invites all of us to vigorously tap into our five senses to imagine how different kinds of wildlife experience the world. Students used the rhyming scheme of the book, their senses, and sense of rhythm to imagine Frederick Douglass's world.

If I Were Frederick Douglass

by Ziyah Givens, Harold Harris, and Genora Gray

If I were Frederick Douglass, I know what I would see:
Enslaved Black people on plantations,
Whips striking the backs of those who look like me.

If I were Frederick Douglass, I know what I would hear:
Birds chirping, ducks quacking, wind rushing through trees,
Incessant talk of fear.

If I were Frederick Douglass, I know what I would smell:
Hay, horses, and their excrement,
The pungent odor of a captive's hell.

If I were Frederick Douglass, I know what I would touch:
Rivers, the busy, shipbuilding-life of the Baltimore Harbor,
Nails, screws, hammers — tools I needed to clutch.

If I were Frederick Douglass, I know what I would taste:
Family, freedom, justice,
And an amazing form of grace.

If I were Frederick Douglass, I know what I would know:
Racism, prejudice, and cruelty,
Courage and perseverance — fuels allowing me to grow.

If I were Frederick Douglass, I know what I would miss:
The love of my mother and grandmother, their collective tenderness
Which I had in my life for only a short time
But they were a balm to the misery that threatened my soul and mind.

If I were Frederick Douglass, I know what I would love:
The power of reading, writing, and speaking,
Which I wore like a glove.

CHAPTER 13

Harriet Tubman Museums and The Aunties

Editor's Note: These poems/raps were inspired by a trip to three institutions on the Eastern Shore of Maryland – The Harriet Tubman Museum and Educational Center in Cambridge, run by Linda Harris; the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Visitor Center in Church Creek, run by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources; and Mount Pleasant Acres Farm, run by “The Aunties,” Paulette Green and Donna Dear.

Legacy, a Harriet Tubman Rap

*by Mandell Bellamy, Kaishon Champ, and Harold Harris
with assistance from Alex Arispe-Fernandez*

*If Harriet Tubman ruled the world
She'd free all the people
She fought in wars, was a spy and nurse
So people would be more equal*

Tubman's Legacy is bigger than Black and white
It's the problem with the way of life and it won't change overnight
But we gotta start coming together somehow
Without Harriet and others like her, we'd be nowhere now

*If Harriet Tubman ruled the world
She'd free all the people
She fought in wars, was a spy and nurse
So people would be more equal*

Her courage lit the darkest nights
Guiding enslaved people to the light
Through forests, farms, and fields, she led
With the North Star always overhead

*If Harriet Tubman ruled the world
She'd free all the people
She fought in wars, was a spy and nurse
So people would be more equal*

Her courageous spirit echoes still
A beacon burning bright we all can feel
She understood that she was born free
And free is what we all have a right to be

*If Harriet Tubman ruled the world
She'd free all the people
She fought in wars, was a spy and nurse
So people would be more equal*

Harriet Tubman Freed My People

*by Lanaisja "A.J." Jackson, Ra'lon Ray, Devyn McDonald, and Kennedy Mosely
with assistance from Carl Brown and Olivia Howard*

*Y'all know Harriet Tubman?
She freed my people
A few traits to mention:
she was brave, true, and regal*

The Aunties of Mt. Pleasant Acres took a stand
In 2012, they bought more than 100 acres of land
To make sure Harriet's story would stay alive
To this day, her legacy continues to thrive

In 1849, Harriet went underground
And guess what amazing thing she found?
The path to free her people
Because they were feeling down
She said the Underground Railroad will set us free
If you want to escape, come follow me

*Y'all know Harriet Tubman?
She freed my people
A few traits to mention:
she was brave, true, and regal*

To get free, we follow the light
The North Star is always bright
And it was simply a glorious sight
To see us fighting for freedom every day and night

The Aunties showed us love
Welcomed us with open arms
They fed us fresh fruit
And showed us around their farm

On the land where Harriet's parents once lived
Is a tulip poplar that has so much to give
When it comes to Harriet Tubman's history
This Witness Tree's surroundings are revolutionary

*Y'all know Harriet Tubman?
She freed my people
A few traits to mention:
she was brave, true, and regal*

CHAPTER 14

Hustlaz to Harvesters

Editor's Note: Mushin 'Boe Luther' Umar and Wallace Kirby are the co-founders of Hustlaz to Harvesters. Boe Luther spoke to the students in person over the summer and was considered one of the most compelling guests.

Hustlaz to Harvesters

by Heaven Hammond, Ra'lon Ray, and Devyn McDonald with Assistant Carl Brown

If I were Hustlaz to Harvesters, I would see cell walls and inmates clothed in orange jumpsuits. I would see my reflection in the mirror and a call to change, for a better life. I would see the orange from the jumpsuits turn into orange from the sunset that now radiates peace and calm over our urban garden.

If I were Hustlaz to Harvesters, I would hear the doubts from people who don't really know me, people who judge me based on my past. I would also hear the supporting cheers from people in my community who advocate for a land created to serve.

If I were Hustlaz to Harvesters, I would smell the fertilizer that nourishes my crops, such as kale, broccoli, tomatoes, hot peppers, bell peppers... all types of greens and berries, which I use to nourish my community.

If I were Hustlaz to Harvesters, I would taste the fruit of my labor, the hard work and dedication that I and so many other people have put into ensuring this land can and will be used for its people. I would taste the fresh produce we grow to feed our community.

If I were Hustlaz to Harvesters, I would touch the hearts of people in my Northeast D.C. community, who are so grateful for all the work that we have done to create agro-entrepreneurial opportunities. I would touch the minds of people in my community, inspire them to make even more changes that will allow our community to grow and thrive.

If I were Hustlaz to Harvesters, I would love being able to make such a huge and positive impact in my community. I'd love the love I receive from my friends and family for being a pillar in this world.

CHAPTER 15

Anacostia River Boat Tour

Editor's note: A perennial favorite for students is the boat ride up and down the Anacostia River. Although our students live within a short walking distance of the Anacostia River and Anacostia Park, none of them had ever been on a boat ride on the river or, like many of us, knew the river's history. That it once was 40 feet deep, and that the mainstem runs 8.5 miles, from Bladensburg, Maryland to the Potomac River in D.C. That it got its name from the Indigenous Nacotchtank people who thrived in the area until colonization efforts began in the early 1600s. That it was fishable and swimmable and crystal clear. That it was home to dozens of varieties of aquatic life. That industries and ordinary residents from around the city were allowed to dump trash there until murky, unswimmable, barely fishable became its identity.

But in recent years, groups like the Anacostia Riverkeeper and Earth Conservation Corps with a cadre of volunteers have been cleaning up the river, hoping to return it to a much cleaner, healthier existence, where wildlife can once again thrive.

This past summer, the ride began at Navy Yard at the Southwest Waterfront and continued north toward Bladensburg. Led by the Anacostia Waterkeeper, students were lulled into calm, peaceful states as they got to see Southeast and Southwest D.C. from different perspectives, floating under bridges, catching sight of herons in flight, ducks bobbing on the waves, people working along the river, imagining new futures for the river and themselves.

Many thanks to our volunteer boat captain, Captain Jay, and Trey Sherard, the Anacostia Riverkeeper.



CHAPTER 16

Fred Tutman, The Patuxent Riverkeeper

Editor's Note: *Our students were unable to visit Fred Tutman and the Patuxent Riverkeeper's Office in Upper Marlboro, Maryland. But knowing of his outstanding work in the D.C. region to bring about environmental justice, we thought it was critical to include some of his story and accomplishments here. The students did get to hear from Mr. Tutman through a series of YouTube videos he produced.*

Fred Tutman's family has farmed and fished along the banks of Maryland's Patuxent River since the 1800's. Fred was named for Frederick Douglass, the 19th century abolitionist. The Tutman family continues to operate a farm in Prince George's County within walking distance of the river.

Fred is also the founding Patuxent Riverkeeper and serves as a community watershed advocate for Maryland's longest and deepest intrastate waterway. The organization has worked on a wide range of issues and watershed problems in its 21-year history. The group was pivotal in overhauling the state's approach to regulating stormwater runoff, led a historic legal case that created new rules to reinforce citizens' standing to bring conservation legal cases in state courts, and obtained a landmark consent decree with a wastewater utility that happened to be the largest such settlement in Maryland's history. As a grassroots organization, Patuxent Riverkeeper often responds compassionately to calls for help from people and communities in its service area who are not generally included in environmental outreach.

Patuxent Riverkeeper strives to reconnect people and communities to the river while championing the environmental needs of underserved and disengaged communities. Fred also happens to be the only African-American Waterkeeper in the nation and a former Board member of Waterkeeper Alliance which is the licensing body for all Waterkeepers internationally. – *Brief bio courtesy of Fred Tutman*

"We, as Black people, have been unable to tell our stories because other people are so eager to tell them on our behalf. I prefer stories of liberation rather than of servitude. We have much richer and more expressive stories. We are resilient people, with a heritage of stewardship and reverence in natural spaces and places. Nature, I think, is infinite and we become infinite through our soulful transactions with her. When outdoors, I am certain of this."

– Fred Tutman, Patuxent Riverkeeper, written for Nature Forward's Taking Nature Black Conference e-book, *Belonging: Black Americans in Nature Photography Project*. Learn more at natureforward.org/download-belonging/



Student Reflections on the Patuxent Riverkeeper

Sweet Water

by Keon Hopkins

Fred Tutman is a riverkeeper who used to ride tobacco wagons down the street near the Patuxent River in Upper Marlboro, Maryland. When he got tired, he would go to the stream nearby and drink its sweet water. But now the old stream looks like an abandoned ditch. Mr. Tutman is working hard to restore and clean the river; he wants the old sweet river that he used to drink from to come back to life again.

His organization, Patuxent Riverkeeper, also hosts a camp where they teach kids to connect with the environment and have fun by kayaking and making clay pottery. Mr. Tutman is a community servant who is dedicated to helping people of all generations learn how to better protect the environment.

Fred Tutman and the Environment

by Kaishon Champ

Fred Tutman is an environmental worker who goes by the title “Riverkeeper”. This means he mainly works on problems that impact the quality of water for humans, animals, and plants – all living things. He has said that “too many trucks, leaking sewage pipes, dirty water,” and too much bad air worsen the atmosphere for communities.

Tutman wants to give communities near the Patuxent River in Maryland the opportunities they deserve to be healthier. He defines environmental justice as “justice for the people and the planet”.

In my opinion, Fred Tutman is one of the best riverkeepers in this area and learning from him can lead us back to where our environment was before all the pollution.

Cleaning up the Patuxent River’s Environment

by Harold Harris

Fred Tutman is a riverkeeper. He said the stream near the Patuxent River used to be sweet. He used to ride a tobacco wagon up and down the road as a child and stop to taste it. But water pollution by industries nearby had changed the sweet water to bitter. He also said the air is bad, and trash is everywhere along the river and a nearby park. He’s working with the community to make the park, streams, and river cleaner, so all living things can have a better quality of life.

The Patuxent Riverkeeper Highlights Environmental Injustices

by Mandell Bellamy

Fred Tutman founded the Patuxent Riverkeeper in 2004 to highlight environmental issues and social inequity.

He has worked to keep the Patuxent River’s water and nearby streams clean. In a YouTube video, he talks about how he wants to get rid of toxins in his community.

Specifically, he wants to clean up air pollution, water pollution, and get rid of trucks that bring pollution near the river so that he and the community can help maintain a healthy environment.

We need to support riverkeepers like Fred Tutman who are fighting hard for justice.

CHAPTER 17

Praise Poems

A Praise Poem for Heaven Hammond

by Heaven Hammond

In Heaven's world where words take flight,
poems bloom like stars in the velvet night
With ink-stained fingers and a curious mind,
she embarks on adventures of every kind

Through verdant forests and rushing waters she explores,
the secrets that they keep in the great outdoors
Each new discovery is a gem to behold
Expanding her horizons, enriching her soul

Check out this Praise Poem for Heaven Hammond

From the whispers of ancient trees so tall,
To the melody of waves that softly call,
She listens, absorbs, and captures it all
From tales big and bold to those remarkably small

Check out this Praise Poem for Heaven Hammond

Her vocabulary a tapestry spun with threads
Of wonder woven in colors from yellow to red,
Of words dancing and dazzling upon her page
Painting awesome landscapes for every age

In the realm of literature where imagination reigns,
She finds solace from life's mundane strains
Writing poems has become her sweet refrain;
A sanctuary where fantastic dreams remain

My Praise Poem

by Kaishon Champ

Kaishon ventured forth on untraveled roads.
With courage in his heart, a spirit partly bold.
Through valleys deep, and trees way up high,
He ran from his fears and reached for the sky.

Fear may sing a scary song,
But the strength within keeps growing strong
With every trip he's taken
It got easier to be unshaken.

The world expanded before his eyes,
And each day he waited for a new surprise
Adventures called, and he replied.
Though sometimes frightened, he told himself
He won't die.

So here's to journeys yet to come.
To fears fought and victories won.
He dared himself,
Now the world unfolds
Kaishon is walking with new tales to be told.

The J-40 program gave him brand new experiences.
To be fair, he can't say it was a coincidence.

A Praise Poem for me, Ra'lon Ray
by Ra'lon Ray

This is a praise poem for me, Ra'lon Ray.

I enjoyed the experiences that I had this summer,
all the dozen or so field trips we went on.
Even though it was super-hot, reaching 100 degrees sometimes,
I showed up and I endured.

This is a praise poem for me, Ra'lon Ray.

I have enjoyed writing so that I can be a contributing author to my first book.
Even though it was sometimes hard to start and hard to finish,
and I was often the author of my own distractions,
I pushed through. I got out of my comfort zone
and did things I had never done before.

This is a praise poem for me, Ra'lon Ray.

I went kayaking and got wet when I didn't want to.
But, honestly, it was fun.
I went to Great Falls, Maryland, saw the waterfalls and hiked the trails.
Even though I got tired from the heat and sat down, I got back up; didn't give up.

A Praise Poem for A.J.
by Lanaisja "A.J." Jackson

This is a praise poem for A.J.

From my experience here over six weeks in the summer of 2024,
I learned about the different parts of D.C., like Ivy City, and compared it
to our Anacostia neighborhood. They have a history of environmental
injustice. I also had a lot of fun traveling, being inside a kayak for the first
time, climbing rocks, and hiking, doing so many things for the first time;
that makes me courageous. This summer also took us to farms and we
tried different foods; that makes me adventurous.

This is a praise poem for A.J.

Before the UDC-Anacostia-Justice40-Nature-Wise summer program,
I didn't see myself going outside, staying outside,
especially in 100-degree heat, and traveling hundreds of miles around the region.
This summer, I mostly planned on being asleep and in the house, cozy, comfortable, chill –
but instead I got to go to new places, see new things and meet new
people. That means I trusted myself to do something different for me.

This is a praise poem for A.J.

One of my favorite experiences was getting to meet Mr. Boe, of the Hustlaz
to Harvesters program, which helps returning citizens work in the
environment. He inspired me because he showed us that we can still help
improve our communities regardless of where we come from.
So in the end, this program was fun, and I would recommend it to others.
I am very proud of myself because I was able to let go of just chilling
at home and get out of my comfort zone.

This is a praise poem for A.J.

Southeast D.C. Kids – Our Praise Poem

by Harold Harris, Keon Hopkins, Genora Gray, and Mandell Bellamy, with assistants Price Holman, Olivia Howard, and Alex Arispe-Fernandez

*Hello world!
Good morning, neighbors and friends
This is a praise poem
coming from Southeast D.C. kids*

We came, we saw, we went in and out of doors
During the hottest summer yet, the year 2024
We touched, we smelled, we tasted and heard
We laughed a lot, and played around with words

We let go of beds,
our friends and our families
to venture into new places,
hoping to avoid calamities

While kayaking on the Little Patuxent
Some of us felt a drip, drip, drip
Water sliding down our legs
As we tried to keep our grips
But keeping it real, the water was mostly shallow
We had no trouble holding on to the plastic paddles
There was no threat of drowning as some might have thought
Just teamwork, adventure, and something new being taught

The trails of Great Falls, Maryland, were flush with leafy trees
The sun burned so hot, we could almost see steam
We saw the falls glistening and misting the air,
Majestically splashing their refreshment everywhere
Water dashed and tumbled over huge black rocks
Some of us had the guts to climb to their tops

We hiked Rock Creek and Malcolm X Park
Learned of its protest history during times that were dark
We toured Ivy City, thanks to Empower DC
And learned about environmental injustice to a sad, shameful degree
Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens was what you might call rife
With ponds, marshes, and lotuses that gave us life

We crossed the Chesapeake Bay Bridge and that was scary
With all that water, no need to tarry
Took a hayride across Harriet Tubman's family land
To feel the Witness Tree with our very own hands
The Aunties said all people are born free
Harriet led them out of slavery

Mr. Jordan told us of the fight to save Oxon Run Park
And we saw how in Southeast, The Well is making a beautiful mark
We applauded the work of the Hustlaz to Harvesters program
And the riverkeeping legacy of the Patuxent's Fred Tutman

John Francis taught us how silence can be power
And that harmonizing with nature allows justice to flower

We are buds bursting; leaves thirsting
Roots running deep; Wild, restless and cannot sleep
Pushing, pulling, overcoming tribulations and trials
Like rivers, we keep roaming mile after mile
During the six weeks, some of us lost people we loved
Had to fight the pain and keep our heads looking up
So we congratulate ourselves for making it this far
Still rising, and shining, like the luminous stars we are

CHAPTER 18

We, the Young People, for the Environment

Editor's Note: As a member of the Outdoors Alliance for Kids (OAK), Conservation Nation is proud to advocate for equitable access to the outdoors for children. In September 2024, our friends at OAK hosted an amazing Hill Day for Anacostia students. The following is a blog post written by those students and shared on the Conservation Nation website.

We, the People, for the Environment: Southeast Youth Raise Their Voices on Capitol Hill

by Carl Brown, Environmental Educator for Conservation Nation, and Anacostia students Ikia Pyles, Kaishon Champ, Harrold Harris, and Marcus Williams

“New people, new beginnings” were apt words of reflection shared by students from Southeast D.C. after spending a transformative day with Conservation Nation and the Outdoors Alliance for Kids on Capitol Hill.

The four remarkable students who joined us for this day were participants in the Justice40 Summer Internship program at Anacostia High School run by the University of the District of Columbia and the U.S. Department of Interior, a program that Conservation Nation and Literacy Consultant Caroline Brewer, founder of Nature-Wise, have been honored to collaborate on over the past two summers.

Highlights of the day included an advocacy training from the Outdoors Alliance for Kids at the Sierra Club headquarters, a visit to the office of Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton to participate in a congressional meeting to advocate for passage of the Expanding Public Lands Outdoor Recreation Experiences (EXPLORE) Act, a tour of the Capitol that included time observing the Senate floor, and participation in a listening session for the National Nature Assessment at the Natural History Museum.

Throughout the day, our students got to experience the rush of being on Capitol Hill, putting in more than 11,000 steps! They were able to share their perspectives and experience from the summer internship program with congressional staff and were able to read poems and essays about nature exploration they helped author in 2023 in the book, *Through My Anacostia Eyes: Environmental Problems and Possibilities*.

At the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, the students actively participated in roundtable discussions to provide feedback on various chapters of the National Nature Assessment, which is a project of the U.S. Global Change Research Program. The assessment takes stock of U.S. lands, waters, wildlife, and the benefits they provide to our economy, health, climate, environmental justice, and national security. The students spoke confidently with Dr. Phillip Levin, Director of the National Nature Assessment, and asked poignant questions about environmental justice and the role of youth in the development of this project.

We are grateful to our friends at the Outdoors Alliance for Kids for organizing such a special day for the students. We were also grateful to be joined by Anacostia High School's Government teacher, Mr. Edmonds, who shared his appreciation for “the opportunity of exposure for our inner-city youth to be able to experience these aspects of politics and having their voices heard.” We were so proud of our students for speaking their truth confidently and observing how much the congressional staff and environmental leaders valued their participation.

On the bus ride back to school, the students reflected on their experience and how much they enjoyed meeting new people, receiving inspiration from seasoned professionals, observing political leaders working and talking to constituents, sharing their own ideas, answering questions, and discovering new opportunities. They told us that they would be interested in talking to decision makers again, and we are already working on making that happen!

“I felt like my perspective was really important to them,” said senior Ikia Pyles.

The day was best summed up by our partner, UDC's Anacostia Ambassador, Xavier Brown, who said, “It was good to see students tap into what they learned over the summer. They showed up and showed out on behalf of the environment.”

CHAPTER 19

Favorite Field Trips

Rock Creek Park

by Lanaisja “A.J.” Jackson

My favorite field trip was to Rock Creek Park because we got to split up into groups and explore different parts of the park on our own. My group went by the rocks and tried climbing them. We also tried to skip rocks in the water. We were excited to throw rocks in the ponds. We took nice pictures and had pizza afterwards. Everyone had a good time.

Being in this program, I learned that you need to get out of your comfort zone because, if you don't, you're going to miss out on a lot of activities and learning opportunities. The people we met and did the program with, such as Mr. Brown, Ms. Brewer, Carl, Olivia, Price, Alex, and my favorite, Mr. Minor, pushed us to do our best. Even though we gave them more than enough attitude, they still tried their best with us and I appreciate them for that.

Anacostia River Boat Ride

by Devyn McDonald

My favorite field trip was the boat ride, because I was interested in learning about the Anacostia River. I enjoyed the experience. I felt a nice, cool breeze on that hot day as we rode up the river. I learned that the Anacostia River has a lot of history. Because of pollution by industries along the river, the water isn't very clean, but the river does have turtles and ducks.

Harriet Tubman Museum and Educational Center

by Kaishon Champ

My favorite field trip during this program was when I visited the Harriet Tubman Museum in Cambridge, on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. I enjoyed it because I had never been in that part of the state before.

I also learned way more about Harriet Tubman's life than I was ever told, such as how she saved a boy's life as he ran to escape slavery, and how that put her life in danger. I also learned how she helped support the abolitionist and women's voting rights movements.

I met many kind people that day on the Eastern Shore, such as “The Aunties” who gave me information on how to better protect the environment and give more ecosystems a future.

Kayaking

by Harold Harris

My favorite trip was kayaking. I had fun. It was something new, something I had never done before. Before getting on the water, I was nervous. But it taught me to try new things. I would recommend kayaking to other people.

Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens

by Antwan Allen

My favorite trip was to Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens because I learned about how the garden is essential to the ecosystem. For instance, I learned that a certain type of beetle comes through and eats the plants and they turn yellowish with holes in them, and the bees pollinate other plants. I can use this in my life when someone is talking about ecosystems or I am learning about other ecosystems.

Our Harriet Tubman Day on the Eastern Shore

by Genora Gray

My favorite trip was when we went to Maryland's Eastern Shore. My absolute favorite part of that trip was the bus ride and going over the Chesapeake Bay Bridge. I also liked the Harriet Tubman Museum and Educational Center in Cambridge and learned more than what I already knew about her, such as that she had epilepsy. This trip was my favorite because the historical facts everyone provided us with were interesting.

Kayaking

by Ra'lon Ray

My favorite trip was kayaking because I had so much fun, even though at first, I didn't want to do it. We were in the middle of the woods and when I was about to put the life jacket on, I saw a spider crawling on the life jacket and I was like, oh, naw, I don't do bugs! The kayak instructor told me not to worry about it; that he would make sure I got a clean one and he assured me that he would protect me from the bugs. So, I was like, OK. I didn't like that we had to take our socks off to wear the boots. I got on the kayak with my friend, A.J., and our feet got wet. When we went to sit in the kayak, our legs and behinds also got wet. But overall, the trip was fun. One way I can use this in my life, as an asset, is learning to face my fears and to just go along with trying something new.

Rock Creek and Nature

by Ikia Pyles

Two highlights from this summer were, first, when we were hiking at Rock Creek Park and I got to climb the rocks in the middle of the stream, and second, just being out in nature, seeing the different environments, from urban parks and forests to waterways and gardens.

Ivy City and Exploring Harriet Tubman

by Ziyah Givens

Two trips I connected with the most were the first trip to Ivy City, hosted by Empower DC, and the second-to-last trip to the Cambridge, Maryland area. At Ivy City, I learned about a community I had heard of for eons. On the Eastern Shore, I discovered even more impactful information about Harriet Tubman, born Araminta Ross. We met African American "Aunties" who gave us a tour around their land, which was previously the homestead of Harriet Tubman's parents.

The writing experiences I had during these six weeks were very interesting, including learning how to produce different types of poems. Ms. Brewer was exceptionally helpful, talented, and thoughtful during these writing sessions.

The Biden Administration White House

by Ri'chard Wheeler

The White House was my favorite trip because I was gone most of the summer and missed a lot of field trips. At the Eisenhower Executive Office Building, I got to see what people in important positions do and where they hold their press conferences. I got to tour the big building and I was impressed by how kind our guides were to us.

Anacostia Park Skating Rink and Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens

by Mandell Bellamy

My favorite field trips were walking to the skating rink and our tour of the Aquatic Gardens because they both were peaceful, and didn't have too many people around. The Garden was colorful, and I learned that there is a fish whose job it is to kill larvae before they're born.

Harriet Tubman Museum and Educational Center

by Heaven Hammond

My favorite field trip was the Harriet Tubman Museum and Educational Center in Cambridge, Maryland. I learned a lot of useful knowledge I could use in the future, such as about her being a spy in the Civil War and becoming one of the most famous Black inspirational people to ever be known for her heroic acts.

The Museum Director, Linda Harris, told us about Harriet being hit in the head with a two-pound weight because she refused to stop an enslaved Black boy from escaping. It was her first act of resistance in pursuit of freedom, showing her willingness to protect and help other Blacks. It showed us an example of her being selfless.

CHAPTER 20

Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens

Editor's note: At Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens, National Park Service Intern Val MacIntyre not only provided us with an enlightening and invigorating tour but also spoke to our students about their work as an intern with the NPS and studies in environmental science at Howard University. Kenilworth is 700 acres of special. The students knew and felt that instantly as they laid eyes on and absorbed the sensation of floating water lilies and statuesque pink and white lotuses filling ponds as nearly as far as the eye could see. Kenilworth is the only national park site in D.C. devoted to cultivated water-loving plants and the only urban wetland. It holds more than 45 ponds, a boardwalk that allows for travel over streams, deeper into the cattail-filled wetlands, marshes, and fields. Closer looks at abundant wildlife, such as the great blue heron and painted turtles are among the sweet rewards. Kenilworth is a top birding site in nation's capital, where 250 species of birds have been spotted cruising through the air, chilling and trilling in the trees, and searching for meals in the grass. We are grateful to the Friends of Kenilworth Gardens for maintaining the space so beautifully for all visitors to experience year 'round for free.

Where Lilies Bloom

by Kaishon Champ

In a pond where lilies bloom
Fish swim softly in murky liquid rooms
Water whispers tales of old,
Stories in its ripples told
Green fronds sway in gentle flow
While the moon casts its silver glow
Peaceful, quiet, calm, and free
Now imagine more of this, for you, for me.

This is the life of the Aquatic Gardens.

Icons of Beauty

By Winter Collins

In the heart of DC, where dreams take flight
Two icons of beauty shine so bright
Kenilworth Gardens and the Anacostia River
Personified as players, they are sure to deliver

Kenilworth and Anacostia form a team so serene
Big blossoms and greenery create a heavenly scene
Personified, they move and dribble with grace Bringing smiles for miles to every face

Birds, fish, ducks and lotus flowers
Add to their diversity, hour after hour
Personified, they form a green team that's strong
Provides habitat where wildlife can know they belong

So let the game of basketball as nature inspire,
As Kenilworth Gardens and the Anacostia River conspire
To bring joy and serenity, like a perfect play
In the natural world of DC, let's relax and stay

CHAPTER 2 PHOTOS
Names, Nature, Beauty



CHAPTER 3 PHOTOS
Ivy City/Empower DC



CHAPTER 4 PHOTOS
Malcolm X Park/Rock Creek



CHAPTER 5 PHOTOS
Potomac River/Great Falls



CHAPTER 6 PHOTOS
George Pointer, Black Sailor on the Potomac



CHAPTER 7 PHOTOS
Appreciation for Southeast D.C. Community Activists



CHAPTER 8 PHOTOS

Kayaking Haikus



CHAPTER 9 PHOTOS
The Well at Oxon Run



CHAPTER 10 PHOTOS
Baltimore's Stillmeadow PeacePark



CHAPTER 11 PHOTOS
John Francis, The Planetwalker



CHAPTER 12 PHOTOS
If I Were Frederick Douglass



CHAPTER 13 PHOTOS
Harriet Tubman Museums and The Aunties



CHAPTER 14 PHOTOS
Hustlaz to Harvesters



CHAPTER 15 PHOTOS
Anacostia River Boat Ride



CHAPTER 17 PHOTOS
Praise Poems



CHAPTER 18 PHOTOS
We, the Young People, for the Environment



CHAPTER 19 PHOTOS

Favorite Field Trips



CHAPTER 20 PHOTOS
Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens



Summer Internship Staff













