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Fireburn Heritage Uses NEH Grant to Develop Cultural ABC Book with Local Students

Fireburn Heritage's Angela Bryan highlighted the organization's collaboration with local third graders to create an ABC book reflecting USVI culture. NEH funding has also supported their artist residency at the Caribbean Museum Center for the Arts.

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During Wednesday's Virgin Islands Humanities Showcase, Fireburn Heritage presented the audience with an update on how they have been using grant funding from the National Endowment of Humanities, administered through the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands, to assist their work.

Founder and Executive Director Angela Bryan spoke about the organization's efforts in creating a culturally-relevant ABC book in collaboration with local third graders. "We're working with Father Marco School, Alfredo Andrews, as well as Ricardo Richards," Ms. Bryan said. The organization worked with Dr. Olasee Davis to take the children outside on several educational hikes, with the idea being that items sparking their interest could be incorporated into the book. "We selected him because he knows every plant, every tree, everything," said Ms. Bryan. "We wanted to expose the children to that so that they could take in that knowledge and be outdoors and have that opportunity to touch and feel and to learn," she continued.

The hope is that, after the children acquire this new information about the environment around them, their ingrained cultural associations may change to reflect a more local way of life. "A is no longer for Apple...we're going to look at it and we're going to see a beautiful green Avocado," Ms. Bryan declared. She said that inspiration for the project came from musing about "what would I have appreciated when I was in elementary school?" Many of Fireburn Heritage's projects and programs are "based on what I did not have" growing up, Ms. Bryan disclosed.

Funding from NEH has also allowed Fireburn Heritage to expand its work during their stint in the artist residency program at the Caribbean Museum Center for the Arts. "It has been such a huge blessing," Ms. Bryan exclaimed, as she says the grant has allowed them to "expand on the original plans of what we were doing there."

The Consortium's short series featuring presenters at Wednesday's Virgin Islands Humanities Showcase will continue in subsequent articles.