

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Storytelling Academy Students Give Debut Performance At Art On The Town

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ST. THOMAS -- The Virgin Islands Department of Education Division of Cultural Education debuted the talents of students participating in its Storytelling Academy at Art on the Town held Saturday, February 4 at Roosevelt Park on St. Thomas.

Students from the St. Thomas-St. John district and instructors from the St. Croix district performed before an attentive audience seated under trees and on park benches. The Academy teaches students the art of cultural storytelling in the Virgin Islands oral tradition.

Under the leadership of Master Storyteller Yohance Henley, Cultural Education's community outreach manager, Jikelle Michael, an 11th grader at Ivanna Eudora Kean High School, performed "Mr. Lenaman and the Jumbies." Jikelle's story took listeners on a wild and humorous ride, complete with jumbies in cornfields and more. In the end, she explained that the moral of the story is although receiving help from others is good, "sometimes you just have to do it yourself."

For his presentation, Bertha C. Boschulte Middle School 7th grader Alikai Fleming-Haywood performed "Anansi and the Jahbless." The tale featured popular folkloric spider, Anansi, boasting and being up to his usual antics while weaving a funny tale replete with life lessons. Alikai said the story's moral is, "If you talk big you have to do big."

The youngest performer of the group took the stage last. Ervin Dorsett II, a Bowsky Elementary 5th grader, performed "Takoma and the Mosquitoes." The moral of the tale, Ervin said, is "Know who you're asking for help."

Mr. Henley said the students learned the stories within the space of two weeks or less.

The Storytelling Academy meets every other Saturday on St. Croix and St. Thomas and is taught by experienced culture bearers. For students interested in participating in the Storytelling Academy, contact the Division of Cultural Education at (340) 773-1095.