

The Virgin Islands Consortium

St. Croix Students Participate In 3rd Annual Litfest And Book Fair

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ST. CROIX -- Junior high and high school students on St. Croix gathered at the University of the Virgin Islands' (UVI) Albert A. Sheen Campus Great Hall to share their literary works as budding writers and to hear from the pros in the opening session of the Third Annual Virgin Islands Literary Festival and Book Fair on Wednesday, April 19, D.O.E. announced Tuesday.

An official opening, including a presentation by featured speaker, author Bernice McFadden, was part of the first day of the three-day Literary Festival. McFadden, a writer of nine critically acclaimed novels, presented on the topic "Young Adult Literature: Using Experiences to Colour Your Story." Ms. McFadden lives in Brooklyn, NY and was a

recent finalist for the NAACP Image Award.

Students' participation in the opening of LitFest included a presentation titled, "How Anansi Brought the Stories Down" by the St. Croix Educational Complex Drama Club and Class under the direction of Rainella Labadie and presentations of poems, prose and songs facilitated by Dr. Sharon Charles, assistant principal at Claude O. Markoe Elementary School. Later that day, students participated in workshops on "Writing Calypso Lyrics: From Imagination to Stage," conducted by Antiguan Lyricist and Author Dorbrene O'Marde and facilitated by Crucian Calypsonian King Derby; "Creating Caribbean Sci Fi Tales" by Science Fiction Author Tobias Buckell and facilitated by Dr. Patricia Harkins-Pierre.

Program Chairman for the Virgin Islands Literary Festival and Book Fair Alscess Lewis-Brown was ecstatic that the event has been successful during its short existence. "It is our hope that each year the VI LitFest will continue to probe new ideas, stimulate the imagination, and offer new opportunities for writers to hone their craft, while making strides towards becoming one of the most unifying cultural events in the Virgin Islands, the Caribbean and the world," she said. "Besides offering a space for bibliophiles to purchase books and for writers to deliver and share, our festival is focused on exposing our community to the talent of regional and international artists, scholars and authors – established and emerging."

On the second day of LitFest, April 20, a team of award-winning Virgin Islands' and Caribbean authors visited schools to engage students in culturally relevant, interactive literary workshops. At the Elena Christian Junior High School (ECJH) Historian and Author Sele Adeyemi, a St. Thomas native, enlightened more than 50 students on their African heritage and identity during a lecture in the school's cafeteria. Quoting from the book, *The Depth*, written by Randall Robinson of Virginia, who now lives in St. Kitts, Adeyemi read, "One does not know the West Indies (Caribbean) unless one knows Africa." The author then highlighted instances of African culture prevalent in Caribbean culture, particularly in the vocabulary. He said using the term "dem boys" in a sentence is an African method of pluralizing "boys." "Gongolo" (millipede), "tutu" (feces), "mumu" (stupid), Bamboula (traditional dance), "obeah," "cocomacaw" (a stick) and "cocobay" (leprosy) are some interchangeable African terms used in the islands, Adeyemi pointed out.

The traditional instruments used while performing Quelbe music, the official music of the Virgin Islands, are similar to those used in some African cultures, such as the wash pan, maracas, squash and triangle," Adeyemi explained. The historian also discussed riddles, proverbs and games of contemporary times that were inherited from African heritage.

At the end of his presentation, Adeyemi solicited this question from eighth grader, Ladaiya Dunbar, "Why is it important to learn about our African past?"

"Because it is part of our identity," Adeyemi began. "We are tied to a place (the African continent) with the most minerals. It is the richest continent in the world with its mineral mostly used by other peoples."

Facilitating the presentation, ECJH eighth grade teacher Julie Deterville elaborated on the question. "You should live your lives like you are descendants of royalty, rather than

the descendants of slaves," she said. "You should know that you have a rich history of royalty." Adeyemi authored the book *Engaging Freedom's Journey* in 2006. He has been professor of history at the J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College in Richmond, Va., for the past 10 years.

Playwright and Calypso writer Dorbrene E. O'Marde presented to students at the John H. Woodson Jr. High School on April 20 and focused on the method he uses to create catchy lyrics. "Ideas come from all sort of things and you have to be open to these ideas," he said. "I may get ideas standing up in the supermarket, but the creative writer simply doesn't repeat what he sees, but produces it in a way that become attractive to a wider audience. Writing is all about words--that's all we have."

O'Marde, an Antiguan citizen, has written many successful Calypso hits for his country's singers. He is the author of *Send Out Your Hands* (2013) and *King Short Shirt: Nobody Go Run Me – The Life and Times of Sir Mac Lean Emanuel*.