

“MAKING THE CARIBBEAN CONNECTION”

This exhibit is about the connection between the City of Salem and the Dominican Republic. It has been designed by Salem middle school students ages 11-14 years who are immigrants from the Caribbean island. Funding was provided through a grant from the National Park Foundation, the official charity of America’s national parks. The National Park Foundation and Essex Heritage wish to thank L.L. Bean, DISNEY, the Anschutz Foundation, and the Ahmanson Foundation for their generous support of the America’s Best Idea program.

**“It is a magnificent program,”
Jasmine (6th grade)**

The exhibit is part of a program directed by the Essex National Heritage Commission in partnership with The House of the Seven Gables. Essex Heritage received a 2012 America’s Best Idea Grant from the National Park Foundation for Making the Caribbean Connection. The program focused on recent immigrants to this region and on uncovering the shared history of Salem and the Caribbean – through immigration and trade.

“My best experience was when we went to the Custom House. My favorite was when I locked the door!” Kevin (6th grade).

During the summer, students met at The House of Seven Gables to learn, in Spanish, about their heritage and historic

connections between this city and the Caribbean region. In the fall, another group of students met in an afterschool program at the Bowditch Elementary School. The America’s Best Idea Grant program is inspired by the critically-acclaimed Ken Burns documentary about the history of The National Parks: America’s Best Idea.

“It’s a very nice program and you learn things that you have never heard before,” Ines (7th grade)

The America’s Best Idea grant program funds park projects designed to connect diverse, under-engaged populations throughout the United States with their national parks in innovative and meaningful ways. Essex Heritage manages the Essex National Heritage Area, a 500 square mile region affiliated with the National Park Service and partners with the National Park Service at Salem Maritime NHS and Saugus Ironworks NHS.

“I like that we got to learn about our heritage,” Luis (6th grade)

The purpose of Making the Caribbean Connection is to build stronger connections by engaging local youth in uncovering the untold stories – past and present – between their homeland islands in the Caribbean and the historic sites in Salem which have interacted with the islands for centuries.

Over the course of six weeks, the program engaged 12 middle school students in a summer program based at The Gables with visits to the Salem Maritime National Historic Site, Peabody Essex Museum and the Salem Public Library. A second program was held after school at the Bowditch Elementary School in Salem, MA. During the second phase of the program, students were more fluent in English because most of them had been born in the United States. Students explored historical themes, as well as personal themes of being Latino, cross-cultural relationships, and family perspectives on the process of adapting to a new country.

With support from educators and NPS interpreters, the students presented their research and writings to inform and educate the NPS, The Gables and Essex Heritage staff on their findings. The goal was to identify the stories and themes that most engage and connect Latino youth with Salem and use this information to expand educational and interpretive programs at Salem Maritime, The Gables, and within the National Heritage Area, thereby making the interpretive and educational programs more relevant to this largely underserved population. This project will be on display through mid-February, 2013.