Learning about History

In partnership with experts at the New Bedford Whaling Museum, sixth grade students learned about the rich legacy of whaling in our city, and how history was constructed and interpreted. They also learned the significance behind our school name.

OSS refers to Sister Sailors, a few bold, brave, and ground-breaking women who joined whaling voyages that often lasted years. Sarah Rose, Curator of Education at NBWM, shared presentations to the entire school on Sister Sailors and the role of women in whaling at sea and on land.

“Working with the museum has been tremendous,” said Ariana Wohl, Humanities teacher. “We are fortunate to collaborate with such generous and knowledgeable professionals who help us make teaching and learning authentic.” The instructional unit New Bedford in the World hinged on this essential question, “How have history and the environment shaped our community?”

The theme of sixth grade Humanities is Know Your World: How do people adapt to their environment? As students Jenna Lewis and Emma Cranford explained,
Senpai & Kohai

In Japan, a senpai is a mentor or senior, and a kohai is the protégé or junior. This foundational relationship is common in education, sports clubs, informal social clubs, as well as in business. In other parts of the world, we use words such as Bigs and Littles, or Mentors and Mentees. At OSS, the big sister–little sister partnerships create opportunities for older students to develop leadership skills while supporting and welcoming younger students— they lead by example and infuse OSS culture and behavior in an organic, inclusive way. Sisters share field trip groups, take turns at a special lunch table, and provide support at academic presentations. And sometimes they just hang out at recess together.

“We notice when sisters sit together at community meetings,” said Head of School Sarah Herman. “We look for ways to enhance and deepen these partnerships.”

Eight graders Rebecca’s little sister is sixth grader Karla. “When my little sister comes to me and asks for advice, it’s important that I take the time to communicate with her and build trust,” said Rebecca.

“When the sister relationship extends beyond OSS it’s really powerful,” said Secondary School Coordinator Laurie Knight, noticing alumna Beatrice Oyen ’14, a sophomore at Milton Academy; congratulating her little sister Mia on her acceptance to Tabor Academy.

At OSS, we are all teachers, and we are all students. We believe this deeply and look to practice it daily. Students help each other with homework during evening study hall, work in problem-solving teams in class, and community meeting conversations offer opportunities for teachers to learn from hearing students’ ideas. Teachers also mentor one another and this year, Ms. Ariana Wohl and Ms. Sara Winnick are working together as a collabora- tive Humanities teaching team. They are informed by their depth of experience as summer camp counselors and their shared belief in experiential education. Both are accomplished academically and hold degrees from Brown University. They have productive conversations during their carpool to work from Providence, and most important, they observe one another’s lessons, share ideas about instruction and work together on curriculum design and planning. Ms. Wohl grew up in Northampton, MA, and earned a Master of Arts in Teaching in Secondary History and Social Studies. Ms. Winnick is from New Haven, CT, and has a BA in History and Education.

Ms. Wohl and Ms. Winnick

At OSS, we are all teachers and we are all students. Master of Arts in Teaching in Secondary History and Social Studies. Ms. Winnick is from New Haven, CT, and has a BA in History and Education.

Q: How would you characterize your collaboration? “Ms. Wohl brings a lot of teaching experience and acts as my mentor. She encourages me to offer insight and bring fresh, creative ideas. We both approach humanities from a social justice framework. We also look at social studies through lenses of environmental and political science, as well as ethnic and gender studies,” said Ms. Winnick.

Q: What do you love about the curriculum? “Our hope is that OSS students become incredible critical thinkers – specifically around inequality, injustice, and justice. In a world where we need more tolerance and justice, analyzing literature and historical events like slavery and the Holocaust enables students to develop the courage and confidence to become agents of change. You need to know about the past to be an informed citizen today and tomorrow” said Ms. Winnick. “Teaching thematically propels student learning; we go more deeply into content as we work on skill and habit development. We create space for students to pose questions and independently make creative choices in their work,” added Ms. Wohl.

Q: Why is Sustained Silent Reading so important? “Research shows that kids develop their reading and writing capacity through extended time with eyes on paper. The best thing one can do to increase reading performance is to spend time reading accessible books that kids choose and love. We also use the time to structure reading groups for students who need more support. Students and teachers are talking more about books…there is a passion for reading at OSS! We have a vision to expand the SSR program and increase the variety of reading partnerships, exploring poetry and other genres. We really enjoy growing our culture of reading,” explained Ms. Wohl.

Q: How will presenting portfolios help students learn? “We both teach public speaking and integrate the skills and practice into humanities classes. Presenting portfolios is one more way students show their skills by synthesizing their knowledge. Portfolio presentations are really about students owning their own process of learning through reflection,” said Ms. Winnick.

Q: What do you love about working at OSS? “The girls! They are inspiring!” “We focus on building a strong culture of literacy at OSS. We want every student to develop her own unique, powerful written and spoken voice. Having the intellectual freedom to design a rigorous curriculum is so rewarding.”

In Continued Pursuit of Excellence

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Science teacher Ms. Mitchell has just been accepted into a week-long summer program at MIT designed to help her infuse engineering into her middle school science curriculum. She has also been invited to spend a week in Monaco practicing strategies for bringing environmental studies into her teaching. She is lined up for a busy summer, and her students should anticipate an inspired year of teaching!

Head of School Ms. Herman is proud to share that she has been awarded a $50,000 scholarship for the Lynch Leadership Academy’s year-long instructional leadership program at Boston College in the Carroll School of Management. Programming begins this spring, flows into the coming academic year, and will provide Ms. Herman with further training as she guides dynamic growth at OSS.

Nadia Tavares, one of our magnificent rising 8th grade students, will be spending her summer at Westover School and Brown University. She received full scholarships to participate in these amazing residential opportunities, and both will allow her to have fun and be inspired while continuing to advance her academic skills and college focus.

Learning About History

In May students installed an exhibit, Through Our Sister Sailors’ Eyes: Youth Perspectives on Whaling, in the museum’s San Francisco Room. Our girls had the rare privilege to experience parts of the museum not usually available to visitors, from stepping below deck on The Lagoda to going “behind the scenes” in the exclusive artifacts storage area.

“2016 is a pilot year for this curriculum, and we look forward to strengthening our partnership with the Whaling Museum,” said Ms. Wohl. Teaching partnerships like this are one of the many benefits an OSS education provides during formative middle school years when experiential education is particularly valuable.

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Below: original student artwork; Felicia and Isadora at the New Bedford Whaling Museum.

Partnerships

by Sarah Herman, Head of School

Cooperation, collaboration, community and teamwork are all ideas that come to mind as we prepare this edition of Sylvaque, focused on the theme of recognizing and honoring partnerships.

Partnerships provide the fuel that keeps our humble yet powerful school gliding forward. Collaborative initiatives among teachers, students, teachers, volunteers, community members, extraordinary institutions and our generous supporters are the very partnerships we are celebrating in this issue. We hope that you will savor and delight in the spirit of teamwork as you turn these pages.

I am so grateful for the privilege of spending my days serving as Head of School for an organization that is so deeply committed to the collaborative spirit. Because of the generosity of all who support OSS through gifts of time, goodwill, intellectual capacity, endless efforts, financial support and benevolent concern, our school is a vibrant place actively and intentionally incorporating vision, opportunities, possibilities with many caring, dedicated and creative people. Our hope is that this publication will inspire you to spend even more time participating in our welcoming community, grounded in partnership.

Looking forward to seeing you or hearing from you soon.

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Secondary School Update

T
do this spring, two of our eighth graders have ac-
cepted full scholarships to St. George’s School and Tabor Academy. Bishop Stang accepted all eight applicants
and awarded scholarships to three students. “We feel so proud!”
exclaimed Ruth Kheir, parent. “We are so grateful for the amazing
education at OSS!”

Our ambitious and determined girls also applied to Bristol
County Agricultural High School and Greater New Bedford
Regional Vocational Technical High School, both of which con-
sidered record numbers of applications. Portsmouth Abbey, St.
Andrew’s School, Lincoln School, Milton Academy and Moses
Brown also received applications from OSS candidates. City on
a Hill, school choice programs at Old Rochester Regional High
School and Dartmouth High School have also been explored.
New Bedford High School continues to be a compelling option
for some of our students.

The OSS secondary school program offers access to opportuni-
ties at a broad range of schools. Every effort is made to help our
students find the school that will best fit and serve her academic
and career goals. “It’s all about finding the best match for our
students and their families,” said Secondary School Coordinator
Laurie Knight. “We are fortunate to have excellent relationships
with so many schools.” These terrific outcomes illustrate the
theme for this publication—the power of partnerships.

Class of 2012 Senior Dinner

At the second annual Senior Honor Dinner on March 15, 2016, OSS eighth graders interviewed the Class of 2012 about their
high school experiences and aspirations. Students and alumnae
did presentations and shared a wonderful night of OSS grati-
tude and spirit.

OSS opened in 2008 with fifth and sixth grades. By 2015, our
first graduates headed off to college. We are proud
that 100% of our alumnae are in high school and college,
and all are continuing to “make OSS waves.”

Rabiet Dasher ’11 is a member of the National Honor So-
ciety and graduated in the top 10% of her class at Voc Tech.
Rabiet is currently a freshman at UMass Dartmouth on an
Endeavor Scholarship which covers all of her college costs
including tuition, room, board and books. Rabiet maintains
her strong connection to OSS, and she volunteers here
weekly.

Jarynette Gonzalez ’11 graduated from the Lincoln School
with a 3.6 GPA. Jary was awarded the T. James Hallam Music
Award and will be studying voice at Berklee College of Music

Ronni Mak ’12 graduates from Wheeler this spring and has
been accepted, with scholarships, to Bates College. She is
so excited and said “At OSS I learned to use my strengths to
push through challenging situations; and that prepared me
for the rigorous academics at Wheeler.” Like her older sister
Carissa ’11, who graduated from Wheeler and is studying
engineering at UNH, she is sailing into a promising future.

Tampson Tavares’12 is graduating from New Bedford High
this spring. She took eight Advanced Placement classes and
was a member of the National Honor Society. Based on her
MCAS scores, she qualified for the John and Abigail Adams Scholarship. In the fall, she’ll be studying accounting at
Salem State University.

Trinity Monteiro ’13, currently a junior at Tabor, is truly
thriving and has just published a moving article in their
weekly. It reflects on the impact schools and mentors have had on her success, and OSS is honored to
have been home to two of her important mentors.

This spring, the Class of 2012 will graduate from Wheeler
School, Masters Regional Academy, Greater New Bedford
Regional Vocational Technical High School and New Bedford
High School. Four are members of the National Honor
Society, several took AP classes, others were named to their
school’s Dean’s List, and five of them played varsity sports.

We are so proud of their continued achievements and grate-
ful that they continue to inspire our current student body.
Our Class of 2012 applied to these colleges and universities:

Bates College
Bentley University
Boston College
Boston University
Bridgewater State College
Bristol County Community
Butler University
Curry College
Dallas Baptist University
Gordon College
Johnson and Wales
Lasell College
New York University
Northeastern University
Ohio Northern University
Roger Williams University
Salem State University
Southern New Hampshire University
St. John’s University
Stonehill College
UMass Dartmouth
Wagner College

Above, left to right: DeDee’16
and Shay’16 will both be attend-
ing Voc Tech, and Mariiah will be
attending Bishop Stang.

Left: Mariiah ’16 will be attending
Dartmouth High School and Tampson Tavares’12
will be attending Salem State Uni-
versity. Below: Class of 2012 with
former teacher Kristina Dolce.

Right: Class of 2012—from left

to right: Ronni, Tashi, Khyleigh,
Krystal, Stanna, Jaeliana,
Dalymac, Tampson, Aliya, Molly,
Carollan (not pictured Melissa
Olejarz). Below: Savannah ‘15
is currently a freshman at Tabor
Academy.

Right: Class of 2012—from left

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Community Core: Building Character and Leadership

Come to a community meeting at OSS, you will immediately notice something unique. Fingers snap in unison as the “Tool of the Week” is observed through positive recognition of individuals’ successes in our Community Core Tools, such as Being Inclusive, Taking Initiative, and Being Gracious.

Young faces light up with pride at having been acknowledged for something truly meaningful.

Staff and students articulate how a person in the community has embodied the specific social-emotional tools needed to build a safe and strong community, and young faces light up with pride at having been acknowledged for something truly meaningful.

For the past three years, the Community Core program has provided training, curriculum, and ongoing professional support to the OSS staff in developing the social and emotional literacy of students. During each year with an immersive experience at Driftwood Camp in Northfield, NH, students are exposed to the tools and philosophy needed to create a caring community full of authentic leadership when they return to school.

Community Core has provided school staff with professional development on how to use what we call the “gray areas” as a training ground to build these imperative life skills. Gray areas at school are the hallways, the lunchroom, recess areas, and even classrooms. They are the areas where students must often practice interacting with each other, and we’ve learned that these are the areas where community either grows and flourishes or begins to break down depending on the attention paid to them. Both staff and students at OSS are able to quickly recognize when the tools are being positively put into practice in these gray areas—be it inviting a little sister to join a four-square game, holding a door open with a welcoming smile, or being willing to engage in a difficult conversation before their conflicts arise.

Students are motivated to build character, knowing their efforts will be recognized and celebrated throughout the school day;” says teacher Lesley Stevens.

OSS is a leader in a movement that is calling on schools to make social-emotional literacy a priority. This year students meet in small advisory groups twice per week, once to learn and reflect upon the Community Core Tool of the Week, and the other to practice using the Tools through fun, interactive games and activities. Students understand that after each engaging activity, they will be given a chance to debrief and reflect on how well they treated their peers, how they showed their strengths and leadership, and how their attitudes affected their performance of the task.

This self-reflection is also a major component of the Core Connections writing class and several other class offerings at OSS.

This comprehensive approach to building a stronger, healthier, more inclusive school setting has given OSS students the courage and confidence to take risks, ask for help, strive to be their best selves, and develop the ability to recognize that each of them plays many important roles in the community as a whole.

For Left: Ella, Kaillan and Carlyn at the New England Aquarium field trip; Left: Emma at Haskell Garden; Below: Deidrea and Jaylanne experiencing the “Augumented Reality Sandbox.”

What is CPM?

At OSS we use a math curriculum called CPM. College Preparatory Math. CPM is a Common Core-aligned curriculum designed to encourage students to grapple with concepts on their own and with their peers before turning to their teacher for help; the teacher is a facilitator of learning rather than a deposit of knowledge. Our teachers support students as they work, and honor the thinking and investigative process. Our teachers support students as they work, and honor the thinking and investigative process.

Through a “spiraled curriculum,” each topic is revisited many times, while connecting to other topics. If something is not clear to students the first time around, they have more chances to build understanding as the school year continues.

Since August, our math teachers have participated in more than 25 hours of training with a master CPM coach. As Ms. Rapoza explains it, “We have learned how to create study teams to equalize access to content in the classroom, and to help our students thrive when working cooperatively with others.” According to seventh grader Marlowe Tavares, there are advantages to the CPM approach. She says that she likes “all the word problems; they might be challenging, but they help me learn.” She also likes working and learning in groups better and with a broad smile explains that “CPM math has made me feel more comfortable being uncomfortable about math.”

www.oursistersschool.org

An OSS Mother and Daughter Team

In 2008, Jocelina Pires decided to take a chance and send her daughter Tashiana to OSS, which had been founded only the year before. Tash built strong study habits at OSS and became a real achiever.

“My mom and I have always worked together as a team. Now we can see the results of the seeds planted at OSS. I learned how to talk to adults, like our morning speakers and other school visitors. I wasn’t intimidated at New Bedford High and am ready for college. Being in an all-girls environment was empowering. This school taught us to face and overcome challenges.”

Jocelina and Tashi
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Photography: Virginia Sutherland and OSS Staff

Mission Statement:
Our Sisters’ School’s mission, as an independent, tuition-free, non-sectarian middle school, is to educate and inspire economically disadvantaged girls from the New Bedford area. OSS empowers girls to step into the future with valuable life skills and a mindset of achievement and excellence by providing a safe, supportive, and academically challenging environment.

Why “Our Sisters”?
During New Bedford’s storied past, it was uncommon for women to go on extended whaling voyages. These “Sister Sailors” were seeking precisely what our brave young “sisters” of New Bedford are seeking today in the classrooms: to sail beyond familiar horizons, and to explore unknown oceans of adventure for growth, learning and accomplishment.

SUPPORT THE OSS ANNUAL FUND
Your generosity makes it possible for OSS to provide an extraordinary education to our motivated and deserving young girls. Make a gift today at oursistersschool.org, or contact Georgie Goulding, Director of Advancement, at ggoulding@oursistersschool.org or 508.994.1255 to discuss the different ways you can help OSS.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

- Festival of Arts and Student Achievement
  Thursday, June 2 – Family Night
  Friday, June 3 – Public Invited

- Car Wash: Sunday, June 5, 10:30 am-2 pm, at OSS

- Graduation Ceremony
  Wednesday, June 15, 6:30 pm, at the Whaling Museum
  Invitations extended to alumnae and families

- Last day of School: Thursday, June 23