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P.S. 48 students

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STUDENTS GET A LESSON IN ARCHAEOLOGY

*Students from P.S. 48's English Language
Learners program will be conducting
research in Joseph Rodman Drake Park in*



Hunts Point. Drake, the 19th century poet, is buried there, along with his family members. Archeologists believe a slave burial ground was located just south of the cemetery, a history that was unearthed by students from the school three years ago.

By Chasity Fernandes () / May 3, 2016



(https://brie.hunter.cuny.edu/hpe/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/IMG_13552-e1462254719559.jpg)

P.S. 48 students, with the aid of archaeologist Jessica MacLean, help conduct research in Drake Park.



On a recent sunny Wednesday afternoon, a group of P.S 48 students skipped outdoors for their afterschool program. Sunlight hit their brightly colored sweaters and big smiles, and the small group of less than 20 were visibly excited to be doing something out of the routine.

They carefully crossed Halleck Street with the help of their teachers to find Jessica MacLean, an archaeologist from Columbia University, waiting for the kids in an unlikely place: this afternoon, the students would be working in a cemetery.

The students –who all attend the school’s after school program for English Language Learners — will be conducting research in Joseph Rodman Drake Park, in the burial ground (<https://brie.hunter.cuny.edu/hpe/2010/12/02/hunts-points-mystery-graveyard/>) where Drake, the 19th century poet, and members of the Hunt family – for whom Hunts Point is named – were buried in the 1700s and 1800s. Archeologists believe a slave burial ground was located just south of the cemetery, a history that was unearthed (<https://brie.hunter.cuny.edu/hpe/2014/01/24/students-uncover-secret-of-drake-par/>) by students from PS 48 in 2013 as part of a local history education project.

Twice a week, the kids will make the park their after-school classroom and become part of the effort to record the neighborhood’s history.

“I wish I could do it every day,” said fourth-grader Jean Nunez. “It’s more fun than what we do in class.”

MacLean split the children into groups of four and assigned each group to a headstone to study. The students will classify every headstone, figure out the names of the buried (often times large chunks of the headstones have deteriorated due to weather and time), take measurements, transcribe, map and document each one and report on condition or conservation efforts. The data they collect will be organized and checked by MacLean and recorded and used by the New York City Parks Department. It will also be used on the website hpsbg.weebly.com where there is more information on the project.

“By studying the headstone, they’re actually learning a lot more than they even realize,” said MacLean. “It’s more than just archaeology and classifying the headstone. There’s history, geology and even a little math there too.”



Since February, students have prepared for the project by doing research in class until the weather got warm enough to get a little more hands-on. The students studied the history of the site, including the history of Drake, a name that P.S. 48 shares.

The P.S. 48 South Bronx Intensive English after-school program focuses on accelerating English language acquisition by developing content knowledge and introducing students to career pathways. Teachers hope this activity will engage students in a way that they get to learn without even realizing how much they are learning.

“The project touches on all parts of curriculum, and most importantly, it’s outside,” said Justin Czarka, who has been teaching ESL for 10 years. “We hope to keep the project going after this year.”

Students are just as excited as the teachers about the work they are doing, and aren’t at all scared by being in a cemetery.

“It’s like being in a public playground!” said second-grader Edgar Galeana-Garcia with a wide smile, gesturing to his group working loudly behind him.

“I like this project. It’s helping me learn a lot of stuff like when the people died and what their headstones say,” said Christopher Estrada, a third-grader.

Students will be getting down and dirty until May, when they hope to have a complete recording of the site.

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