

Selections from PortSide New York programs with

PS 676, the Red Hook Neighborhood School

December 2018 through June 2019

Sponsors include:

Hughes Marine
O'Connell Family Foundation
Red Hook Container Terminal

These programs are funded in part by the "Cultural After-School Adventures" (CASA) program of the Department of Cultural Affairs, secured by our Councilman Carlos Menchaca. He introduced the Principal of PS 676 to PortSide and jump-started this fruitful relationship.



THIS PROGRAM IS SUPPORTED, IN PART, BY
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DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS IN
PARTNERSHIP WITH THE CITY COUNCIL.

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Priscilla Figueroa
Principal

Karin Miller
Assistant Principal

March 6, 2019

Dear Carolina,

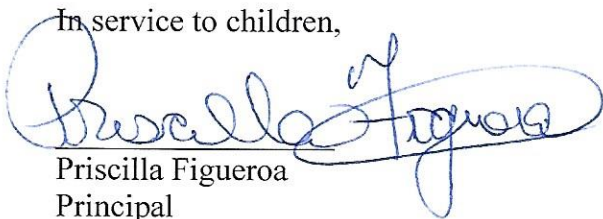
On behalf of the Red Hook Neighborhood School community, I would like to extend my thanks for all the hard work and dedication you and the Portside organization do to help engage our students in learning as well as strengthen school/community ties.

Since the beginning of our work together, there has been a dramatic improvement in the student engagement. Your infectious personality and passion for exposing young people to resources in their community has allowed our students to experience, talk about and share experiences in their own backyard. The students are finally taking pride in who they are, where they are from, and the school they attend.

Your loyalty to our school has been a key component in helping to change the view of our school as well as to help us achieve our school vision. By creating interactive presentations and facilitating innovative field trips, students are able to build background knowledge in many different academic disciplines.

On behalf of the students, teachers, administration, staff, and families I thank you for your continued support and look forward to our continued partnership.

In service to children,



Priscilla Figueroa
Principal

PortSide NewYork Programs with Red Hook's PS 676 December 2018 – June 2019

Document produced by PortSide NewYork

This school year [PortSide](#) began intense programming with [PS 676](#), The Red Hook Neighborhood School, a small K-5 school for 130 students who live in Red Hook public housing and shelters. After eight troubled years, the school is on the rebound with a new Principal, Priscilla Figueroa, and staff as of late in the last school year. In October 2018, PortSide began working with the staff to develop programs that speak to the students' needs, interests and prior experience good and bad. Programs started in December and evolved rapidly. In addition to teaching academic content, PortSide focuses on expanding the students' physical horizons and on affirming and giving voice to students who, in many ways, live in the blind spot of our society. The students and teachers are responding enthusiastically. As of June, 2019, the school is now considering becoming a marine and STEM themed school, the marine component resulting from positive experiences with PortSide. Here are some examples.

Reading

1st grade reading class comes every other Friday to read WaterStories and have waterfront experiences that bring the books to life. They often make art inspired by themes in the book that was just read.



The end-of-semester project we designed is to have the class write a collaborative book, have that printed in Red Hook, and take the students on field trip to NY Printing to get their books, see the collection of printing machines there (in effect a museum), visit the historic warehouse where this is located, meet a woman business owner and hear her hurricane Sandy story.

Putting students who are struggling to learn to read in the position of becoming authors empowers them and makes them feel literacy is an attainable skill. Plus, the project gives them voice.





The 1st grade reading class using binoculars after the book reading and art making.

We connect the real world to what is in the books by showing them ducks, geese, seagulls, ships, explaining tides, and more.



The bunk beds in the Tankerman's cabin are always popular.

We use them as an icebreaker; beds are a familiar thing in the unfamiliar world of a ship.

During their first trip to the ship, after an intro stint in that cabin, we bring the young students into other spaces.

A short, free romp in this cabin is now a fun intro to every visit.

At the request of the Principal, we created an Oysters Plus curriculum to introduce the students to the marine environment and animal life cycles using oysters as a focus. This curriculum helps prepare them for the 4th grade science test which is pivotal in their educational assessment – and introduces them to the harbor as an environmental asset.

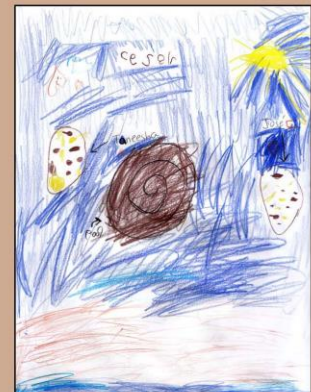
We had to develop custom curriculum since the local standard, the [Billion Oyster Project](#), is targeted to grades 5 and above, and because these students start with limited experience of the waterfront, nature and science topics. For example, at the start of our work together, they did not know what a seagull is, though they live in a waterfront neighborhood with seagulls, and they did not know what oysters or shellfish are. We introduced them to shellfish, the environmental evolution of this area from marsh to industrial center, to the related evolution of pollution and environmental decay, and the Superfund clean-up next to Red Hook in the Gowanus Canal, incorporating advocacy projects about littering and sewage discharge. We used local seafood restaurants to show live lobsters, and learn how people eating oysters decimated them in NYC's harbor. The students illustrated a story we wrote about two Red Hook oysters in the 1st grade whose summer adventure will be cleaning up the Gowanus Canal, and they are making a field trip to the publisher to receive a professionally printed, bound copies of the book which will also go to the local public library and the school.



Next, the people dug up the Gowanus marsh and made a canal with tall walls. Gone was the beach, gone was the nice marsh grass that used to blow in the wind above the happy oysters sucking and spurring the water. Gone were the long-leg water birds standing in the grass telling stories about their flying trips. And worst of all... do you know what was worst of all?

Poo! Turds! Caca!

The people were dumping that in the water!



From the ships, from the tugs, from the factories and from huge pipes that went straight from their houses right to the water.





Music

2nd grade music class came to our ship for a music discovery experience. PortSide created a “Tanker Gamelan.” Striking marine hardware hung from cords in the fidley made beautiful tones, and their jam turned into a rendition of Jingle Bells.

You can hear them [here](#) and [here](#).



“Green Team” Transportation Advocacy & Travel Experience

The Green Team is a select group of 3rd, 4th & 5th graders.

Green Team project #1:
NYC Ferry advocacy. They will do outreach about NYC Ferry to Red Hook NYCHA residents.

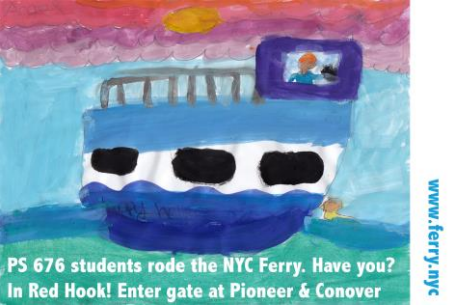
They will learn how to give a survey, tabulate survey results, interview members of the community, present their conclusions to government in the form of the President of the EDC.

Green Team rides the NYC Ferry

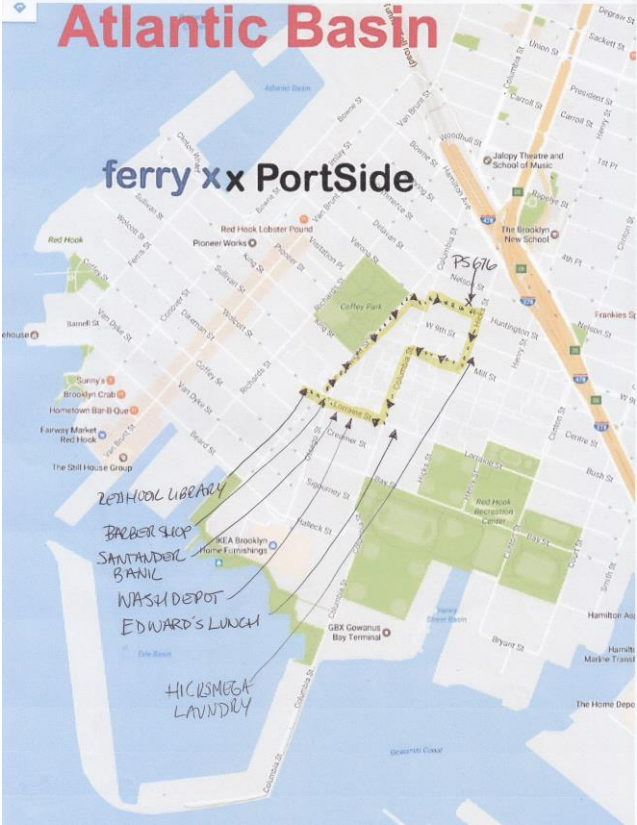


Next, the Green Team makes art about riding the NYC Ferry

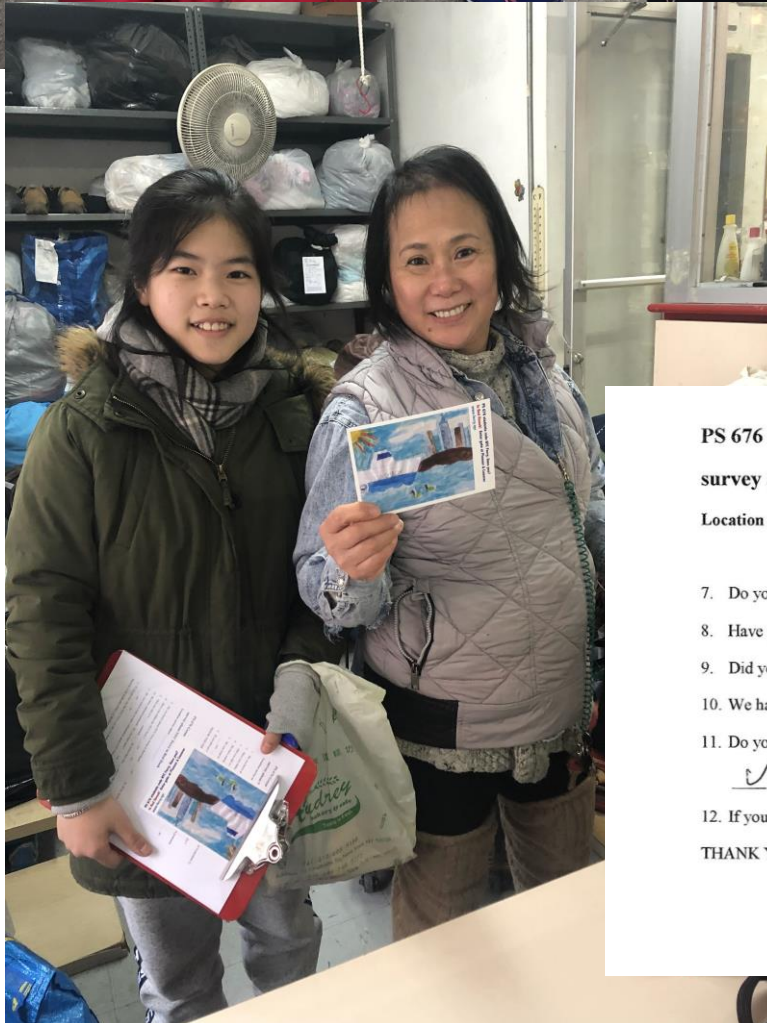
PortSide staff then turns the art into 2,000 outreach postcards. The students deliver some of these to local businesses and the library, and take surveys of adults. Later, we will make banners with more student art and hang those around the community.



Outreach: survey and post card distribution: PortSide and the Green Team went to multiple sites in Red Hook to ask adults in English, Spanish and Chinese to take a survey. The questions covered topics such as: Do you know about the ferry? Have you ridden it? What kind of trip did you take? Would you be willing to help with outreach by sharing the postcards? Adults were overwhelmingly interested in answering and helping out and about half of them were not aware of the NYC Ferry in Red Hook.



8 sites were visited including Hicks Laundry, Edward's Restaurant, Santander Bank, Wash Depot, Barber Shop, Red Hook Library and sidewalk canvassing.



PS 676 Green Team & PortSide NewYork

survey about NYC Ferry in Red Hook

Location survey taken: Washdepo

- 7. Do you know about NYC Ferry being in Red Hook? ___ yes no (if no, go to question 5)
- 8. Have you ridden the NYC Ferry? ___ yes ___ no
- 9. Did you ride it to ___ commute ___ go somewhere fun ___ just to ride the ferry?
- 10. We have outreach postcards. Do you want some? ___ yes ___ no
- 11. Do you want to help us share information about NYC Ferry? We will give you more postcards
 yes ___ no
- 12. If you did not ride the NYC Ferry yet, do you think you will ride it now? yes ___ no

THANK YOU FOR HELPING US WITH OUR SURVEY!

Summary of the answers to the survey questions:

22 surveys were completed at 8 places, in 3 languages: 4 Spanish, 2 Chinese and 16 English

Question	Yes	No	No answer
Do you know about NYC Ferry being in Red Hook? (if no, people went to question 5)	11	10	1
Have you ridden the NYC Ferry?	8	11	3
Did you ride it to commute: 5 go somewhere fun: 7 just to ride the ferry: 4	See answer at left	See answer at left	See answer at left
We have outreach postcards. Do you want some? * Explanation: One woman could not see. One woman was in a bad mood.	16	2 *	4
Do you want to help us share information about NYC Ferry? We will give you more postcards	16	6	
If you did not ride the NYC Ferry yet, do you think you will ride it now?	16	1	5

The outreach exercise rapidly and significantly increased the students' social and presentation skills. They went from close to terror at the first stop (a Laundromat near their school) to enthusiasm at the third stop (the Wash Depot).

Their confidence increased so much that the students were very comfortable presenting during the next installment – bringing the information to government – when they presented to the President of the NYC EDC and EDC staff in a room with a very imposing conference table.





STEM: Simple Machines

We brought our Simple Machines expo to PS 676.

During two hours of after-school programming, all the school's students cycled through. First Kindergarten and 1st grade, then 2nd and 3rd, then 4th and 5th. This was a total hit with students and staff. We also stayed for the two hours of "Family Night."

To show how this set up works, here is a video of the Simple Machine Machine in use at another school

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZn_VhEtle8

The student at left is still talking about the bosun's chair and wants to do it again on the Mary A. Whalen.

PortSide has a training program on our ship with Local 806 (Bridge Painters) of District Council 9. In photo below, four of their union members worked at this event (the three men in back at the left and far right).



Rigging is still predominantly men's work, so it was really noticeable, and positive, to see how much the girls felt comfortable with and excited by the idea of tools and moving heavy things.



Tall ship sail to the Statue of Liberty

As a capstone educational project and end-of-school bonding experience for PS 676, PortSide arranged a free sail on the tall ship CLIPPER CITY for the whole school. We plan to make this an annual tradition. It aligns with the #MakeSailingBlackAgain element of our African American Maritime Heritage program. We sailed to the Statue of Liberty and back. This trip expands physical horizons since many students move in a small orbit that includes public housing, the school and two local parks, since family travel is rare. For most students at PS 676, PortSide provides their first boat experiences – first on our tanker MARY A. WHALEN at the dock – and their first sailboat experience via this field trip. Many students saw NYC has a harbor and archipelago for the first time, they got to steer the boat and raise sail (which provides an empowering sense of mastery on a big ship), learn about the different kind of ships we passed (containership, tugs, barges, ferries, etc.) and have the uplifting joy of sailing for an hour and a half. The harbor is NYC’s largest open space and is a great way to get away from NYC’s intense urban pressures.



Inculcating school pride: t-shirts & passports

To build pride in a school that is on the rebound, PortSide designed and produced Green Team t-shirts.

Broadening horizons

Many students rarely leave the neighborhood, so all 125 students in the school get a PortSide “Passport to the waterfront.” This heightens awareness of a larger world, makes them think of themselves as travelers, memorializes their travel experiences, and gives them a credential they are proud of.





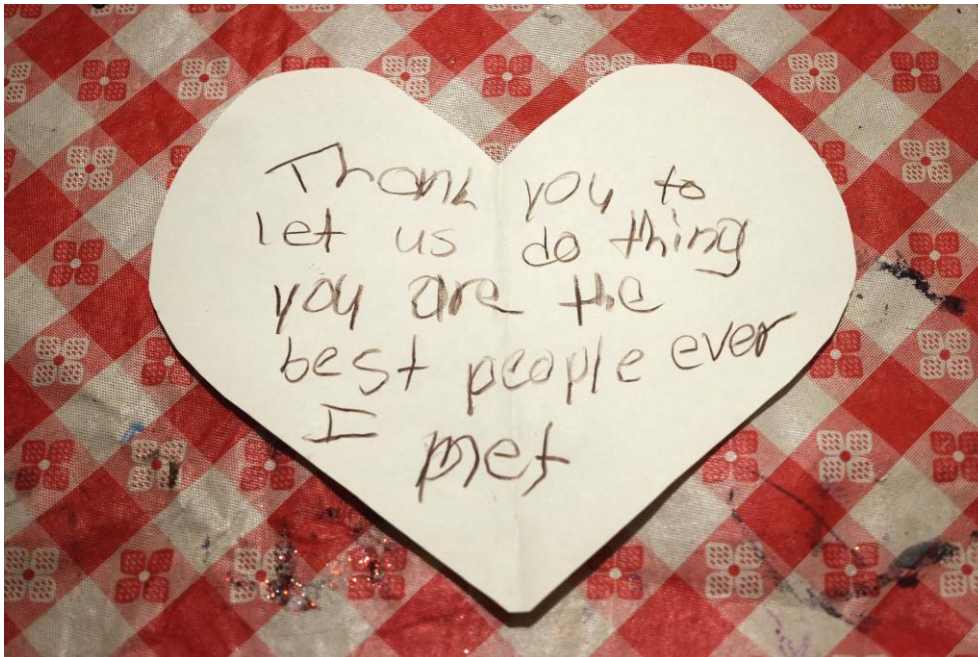
The act of getting the passports stamped is a very popular ritual.



The passport stamp that represents meeting our ship cat Chiclet is a hit!

Community spirit

In December, the Principal's Council came to our ship MARY A. WHALEN to make holiday decorations. We hung these inside our ship so that attendees of the Red Hook business holiday party would see them and become more aware of the school. We also spoke about PS 676 during our remarks as an effort to better connect the school to the Red Hook community and steer resources to the school.



Ship cat Chiclet

Our ship cat Chiclet is a beloved feature of visits to the MARY A. WHALEN. When our staff visits PS 676, the students always ask how she is doing.



More to come!

PortSide and PS 676 staff are working together to create programs for each grade for next school year, including special history programs for the 3rd, 4th and 5th grade.