



Undeniable Evidence: How Teachers Understand Archaeological Discoveries as Inspiration for Local Curricular Revision



University of
New Hampshire

Elaine M. Marhefka and Meghan C.L. Howey

The Great Bay Archaeological Survey (GBAS)

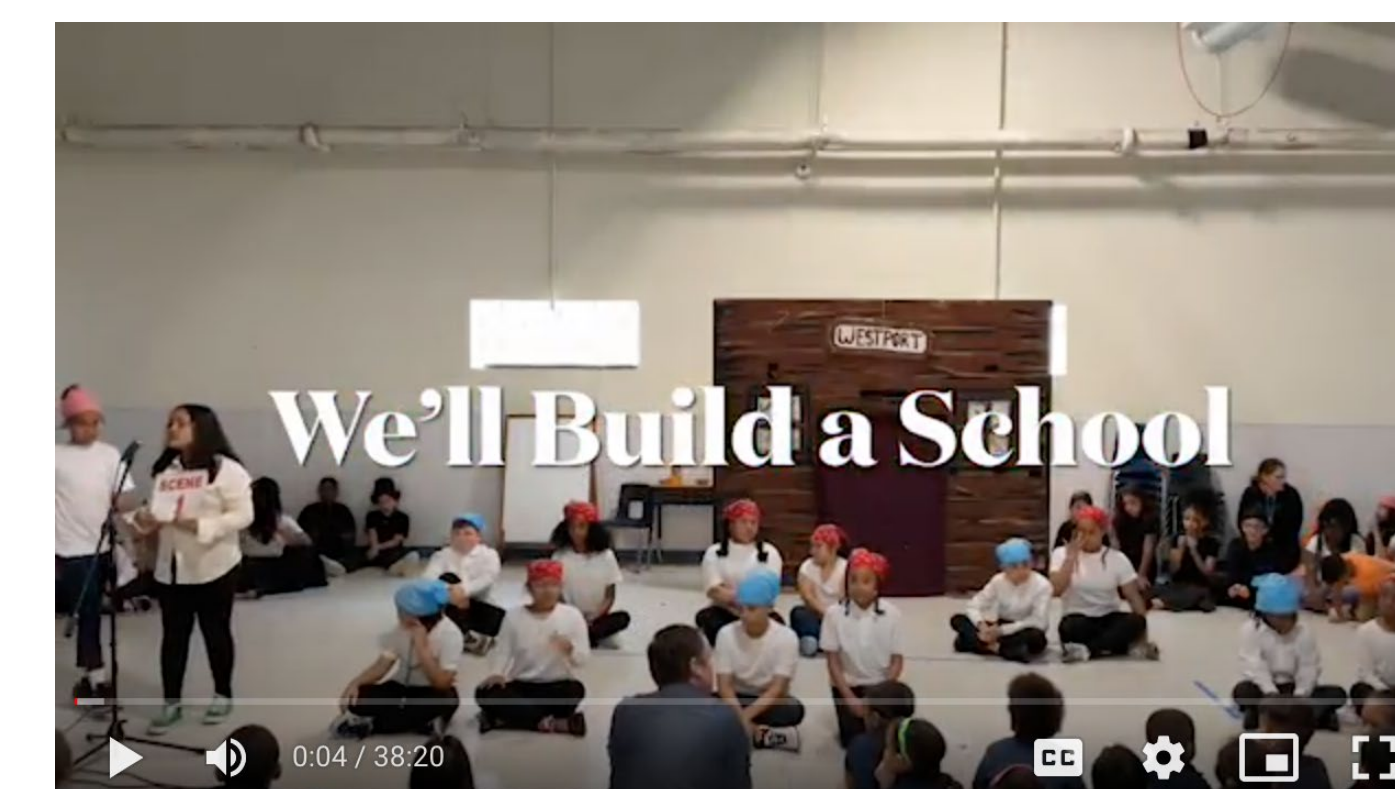
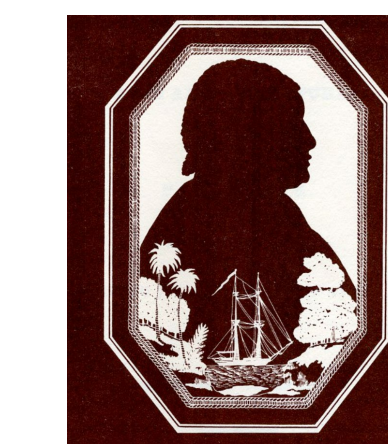


The Great Bay Estuary/P8bagok is a distinct estuary on the Atlantic Ocean. Abenaki/Pennacook peoples harvested and stewarded its high biodiversity for millennia. By the 17th century, the estuary was in New England's northern colonies, NH and ME, in Indigenous power-scapes, outside Puritan Boston, with New France accessible. Its ecology and frontier position make it an ideal place to study European global colonialism's shock. GBAS finds early colonial (ca. 1600–1750 AD) sites to that end.

GBAS is an interdisciplinary and community-engaged archaeological research program. Through archival research and the survey and excavation of colonial homesteads and meetinghouses, we show an early American story much more complex than captured in popular Thanksgiving tales. GBAS's interdisciplinarity includes long-term collaboration with an Education Specialist to help translate archaeological findings into meaningful K-12 curriculum.



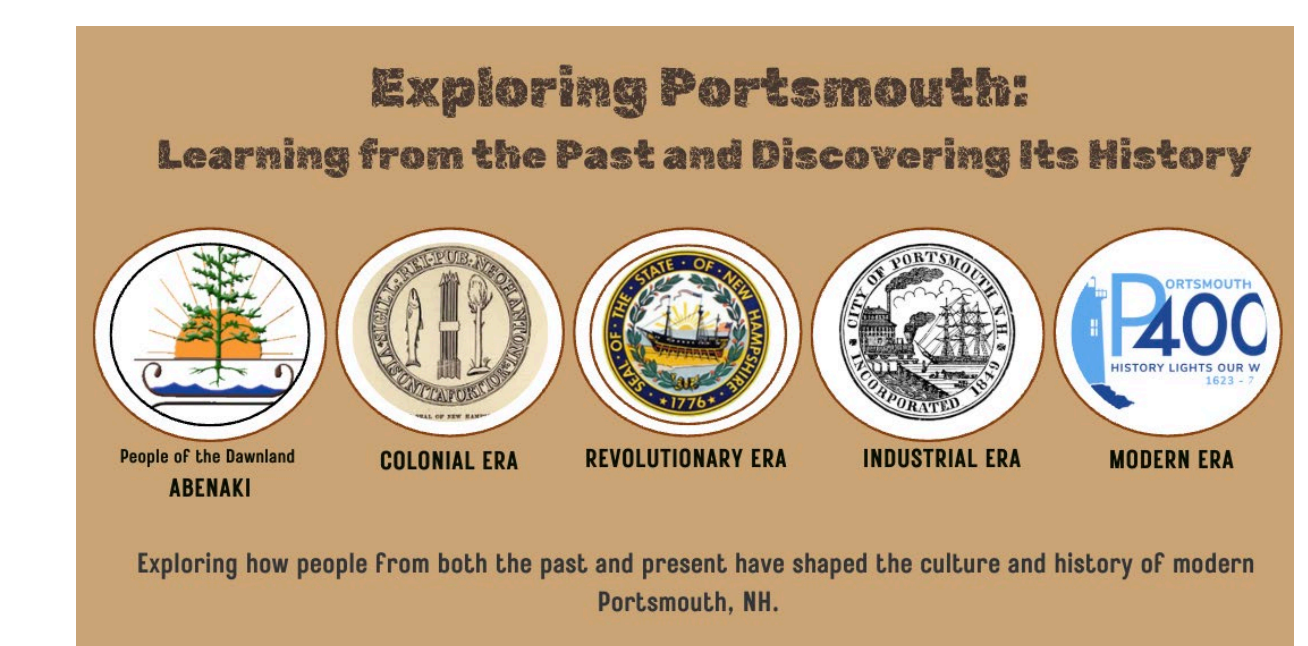
Local Curricular Revision Examples



A 4th grade teacher at Paul Cuffee School in Providence, RI has transformed how the history of the school namesake is taught, from new visits to a local museum, Cuffee-inspired silhouettes, and the play about Cuffee's determination to build an integrated school in the 1800s.



An elementary teacher at John Faulkner Elementary School in Stoddard, NH has created a program around "The Little Big Forest" doing interdisciplinary, place-based field trips into the woods in each season.



An elementary teacher at Little Harbor Elementary School in Portsmouth, NH has created a program focused on exploring Portsmouth's history that involves place-based fieldtrips and classroom materials now used across the whole third grade.

K-12 Teacher Summer Institutes

144*

In 2023, 72 K-12 educators participated in GBAS's summer institute funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities Landmarks of History and Culture, **From the Fragments: Places and People in Colonized New England**. *A new group of 72 were accepted for 2025, but DOGE cut all NEH funding April 2025.

13+

Dedicated teacher-leaders conducting participatory action research integrating their learning from the summer institute into their own curricular designs and revisions. The hands-on, place-based nature of archaeology offers visible substantiation of dynamic histories teachers can rely on, and students can understand.



Discussion and Future Directions

- Teachers from our NEH summer institute are successfully integrating their experiences with GBAS's archaeological findings into their own unique curricula in diverse educational settings.
- As educators continue to face headwinds around teaching the richness of our shared past, archaeological artifacts and primary documents carry a tangible significance that can be harnessed to illustrate and substantiate overlooked histories in the places students live and learn.
- Such place-based curricular revisions and innovations, while powerful, require support which, as evidenced by the termination of our program by DOGE, is increasingly limited. What will be left going forward in terms of support for efforts like ours at GBAS is very unclear.

Learn more about
From the Fragments:

