

THE ARMENIAN **MIRROR- SPECTATOR** SINCE 1932

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ARMENIAN HERITAGE PARK INSPIRES *GEOMETRY AS PUBLIC ART*



Geometry as Public Art: Telling a Story, the innovative curriculum sparked by Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, its design and key geometric features that tell the story of the immigrant experience, is being implemented this school year at nine elementary schools including seven Boston Public Schools (BPS) and two private schools.

EdVestors, dedicated to "... meaningful education that prepares every Boston student to activate their power and shape their future", is providing the funding to support round trip bus transportation to/from Park and teacher training. The curriculum aligns with two of EdVestor's

key initiatives with the Boston Public School- BPS Arts Expansion and Zeroing in on Math. “We are excited to work alongside you and see how this project continues to blossom and impact students,” comments Alia Verner, Director of Strategic School Support, EdVestors.

Beginning this school year, *Geometry as Public Art: Telling a Story* is being implemented in 4th grade classes in the following Boston Public Schools – Harvard-Kent Elementary School in Charlestown, Higginson-Lewis K-8 School and Nathan Hale Elementary School in Roxbury, Josiah Quincy School in Chinatown, The Hurly School in the South End and The William Monroe Trotter K-8 School in Dorchester. For several years prior, the curriculum was piloted by the teachers in their 4th grade classes at The Eliot K-8 Innovation School, BPS in the North End.

A Boston Public School (BPS) Partner Program, *Geometry as Public Art: Telling a Story* was developed by the 4th grade teachers at The Eliot K-8 Innovation School in collaboration with several educators among tyFriends of Armenian Heritage Park. The Friends is an initiative of the Armenian Heritage Foundation, sponsor of Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway. The Foundation’s Board is comprised of representatives from Armenian-American parishes and organizations within the Commonwealth.

The key intent of *Geometry as Public Art: Telling a Story* is to spark awareness of geometric shapes and their creative expression of ideas and thoughts expressed by the geometric features of Armenian Heritage Park that tell the story of the immigrant experience. In doing so, engages students to learn about and share the experience of the first person in their family to come to this country. Many students realize this discovery for the first time; for some, sharing their own experience. All are building common ground, a key theme of the Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway.

The spark to develop the curriculum was the comment of a young student during the visit with her 4th grade class from The Advent School on Boston’s Beacon Hill. That visit was soon after Armenian Heritage Park opened in 2012. Several years earlier cultural organizations and ethnic communities were provided the opportunity to develop and fund a parcel on what was to become the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway with the Central Artery relocated underground. Parcel

13 was to become Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, a gift to the City of Boston and Commonwealth from the Armenian American community.

“He’s talking about me” whispered the 4th grader as Don Tellalian, AIA, the Park’s architect/designer was speaking about the significance of the annual reconfiguration of the Abstract Sculpture.

Annually, the Abstract Sculpture, a split rhomboid dodecahedron made of stainless steel and aluminum, is reconfigured. In early Spring, a crane lifts, pulls apart and reconfigures its two halves to create a new sculptural shape. This is symbolic of all who left or were forced to pull away from their country of origin and came to these Massachusetts shores, establishing themselves in new and different ways.

The significance of the annual reconfiguration of the Abstract Sculpture, a shared experience, resonates with so many people. “*Public Art ... permanent and alive...*”, wrote Joanna Weiss in The Boston Globe 2015. In much the same way, the Labyrinth, circular winding path paved in grass and inlaid stone, celebrates life’s journey. The two features are connected by the waters of the Reflecting Pool upon which the Abstract Sculpture sits, washing over the sides and reemerging at the Labyrinth’s center as a single jet of water, symbolic of life and rebirth. The Inscription etched on the Reflecting Pool includes that Abstract Sculpture is dedicated “to lives lost during the Armenian Genocide of 1915-1923 and all genocides that have followed...”. Etched around the Labyrinth’s Circle are the words - Service, Science, Commerce and Art - in tribute to contributions made to life and culture by all.

The Park’s design with its geometric features is sparking discovery, curiosity and delight while uniting and connecting through a shared experience, the immigrant experience and building common ground.

Geometry as Public Art: Telling A Story is engaging students to tell their own, their families’ or ancestors’ immigrant experience, prompting the realization that most all peoples come to this country from somewhere else. The multi-disciplinary curriculum creatively integrates geometry, art, language and social studies while promoting cross-cultural understanding and respect.

“The three thoughtfully planned lessons take educators and students on a path of self-discovery and storytelling, intertwining interactive classroom lessons and the hands-on nature of visiting the Park. The culmination of celebrating the immigrant experience is as heart-warming and thought-provoking when the students share proudly their I AM Poems at the Park,” comments Morgan Atkins, former Coordinator of Culture and School Climate, The Eliot Innovation K-8 School, a Boston Public School in the North End.

The student’s I AM Poems told in the voice of the first person in the student’s family who came to this country is a powerful, insightful culminating activity of the three-part curriculum. A geometric illustration and portrait of the individual accompanies each poem.

Successfully piloted for several years at The Eliot K-8 Innovation School, the comments of 4th grade educators reflect the curriculum’s intent, impact and value. Brianna Greene, curriculum team leader remarks, *“This curriculum is an exciting and engaging way for students to learn more about their family heritage and reflect on the American immigration experience. The curriculum is a wonderful way for teachers to learn about and better understand their students and students to learn about one another.”* Roxanne Emokpae comments, *“The pride just exudes from my students as they draft and revise their ‘I AM’ Poems; being able to dive deep into their family’s arrival to America is so worthwhile.”* Alyssa Kotsiopoulos shares, *“Implementing the curriculum in our classrooms at the beginning of the year is a great way to welcome students to 4th grade and to introduce our larger social studies immigration unit.”* Emily Roberts remarks, *“The curriculum is a great opportunity for students to spend time with their families, learning the story of their own culture and experience and sharing that experience.”*

Teachers are incorporating walking the labyrinth as a class, symbolic of their collective journey. They are also introducing the benefits of walking the labyrinth to quiet the mind and practice mindful meditation.

During the pandemic, the curriculum was adapted for remote learning with a video, *Join us! We’re on our Way to Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway.*

Upon completion of the curriculum this past year, several 4th grade students from The Eliot K-8 Innovation School with Brianna Green, 4th grade teacher met via ZOOM with older adults representing the ABCD North End Senior Center in the North End to share their I AM Poems, geometric illustrations and portraits of the first person to come to this country – the culminating activity of the curriculum. This was the pilot for *Geometry as Public Art: Telling a Story – The Intergenerational Project*, a collaboration of Age Friendly Boston, Andrea Burns, Director; The Eliot K-8 Innovation School and Friends of Armenian Heritage Park to prompt and encourage intergenerational connections with a sense of purpose by engaging and energizing students and older adults. Sharing what unites and connects us enhances the quality of life and experiences for both generations.

Boston City Counselor Julia Mejia who participated in the pilot shared, “I love this...and would like to be a part of making it happen across the city. This is part of our collective healing. I was moved by the beautiful poems I heard today. As an immigrant my heart was full”, Janice Marino, retired Principal and teacher commented.

“Wow, the experience of hearing the young students beautifully share their I AM Poems brought so much hope for our future as an inclusive society. Although each student had a unique heritage there was commonality in the journey. They are mature beyond their age!”, shared Laura Bilazarian Purutyan, STEM Mentorship Consultant, “The imagination, empathy and mysterious wisdom of our youth will save us, if we listen to them.”

Nearby each school, implementing the curriculum this fall, is a senior center to prompt this intergenerational initiative. One center is the UMass Boston Osher Lifelong Learning Center.

In addition to the Curriculum, Programs at the Park are developed by the Friends of Armenian Heritage Park offered in collaboration with The Greenway Conservancy, City of Boston, Boston Public Schools, arts, historical and community organizations, engaging all ages coming together on common ground. Celebrating What Unites Us! offered in collaboration with Age-Friendly Boston, each month highlights the cultural heritage of many residents of the City and Commonwealth. Prior to the pandemic, an individual shared his/her immigrant experience in front of the Abstract Sculpture. Many walked the labyrinth, and then to a kitchen nearby where a chef prepared a signature dish for all to enjoy for lunch and conversation. The initial three year

series was in collaboration with former The Kitchen at the Boston Public Market, Boston Public and funded by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts. During the pandemic, the series was offered virtually in collaboration with Oldways, a food and nutrition nonprofit.

The Welcome Reception for New Citizens at the Park following their Naturalization Ceremony at historic Faneuil Hall is always a highlight. Faneuil Hall is also the setting for the Park's Najarian Lecture on Human Rights. The setting at Faneuil Hall is in tribute to the New England women and men – intellectuals, politicians, diplomats, religious leaders and ordinary citizens - who, beginning in the 1890s at Faneuil Hall, heard the eyewitness accounts of the atrocities taking place against the Armenian minority of the Ottoman Empire during the First World War and spoke passionately about the urgent need for intervention. Philanthropists nationwide raised over \$100 million in aid, considered America's first international human rights movement.

Programs at the Park are planned by the Friends' Programs Planning Team, each responsible for a key program and/or initiative. 2021 Team, to date, includes Kristin Asadourian, Andrea Burns, Susan Deranian, Tom Dow, Catherine Minassian, Dr. Armineh Mirzabegian, Rita Pagliuca, Katrina Piehler, Tsoleen Sarian and Ann Zacarian together with the Curriculum Team - Jason Behrens, Manneh Ghazarians and Barbara Tellalian. Reviewers of the Curriculum were Joseph Cahaly, Diana Topjian and Chiara Meghigian Zenati. Elizabeth Cahaly and Tom Cahaly developed the video, *Join us! We're on our Way to Armenian Heritage Park*.

For further information about the curriculum, please email hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org or call 617.803.8785. For the schedule of Programs at the Park, please visit ArmenianHeritagePark.org.