

NYC Thru Their Eyes

New York Daily News, *Nicole Lyn Pesce*

15 June 2008 - These public schools deserve a big apple. More than 500 students from 20 schools spent the past year studying "Immigration and Identity" under a new curriculum created by global education nonprofit World Savvy.

The teens probed issues of self and settlement with xenophobia workshops and culinary tours of Chinatown before creating artwork to express their new perspectives.

Their collages, sculptures and photographs are on display through Friday as part of the Global Youth Media & Arts Program (MAP) Festival in the NYU Commons Gallery at 34 Stuyvesant St.

"New York is obviously just the best place in the world to look at issues of immigration, and I knew that this theme in particular would really resonate with schoolchildren here," says Victoria Restler, World Savvy program manager.

"The youths are given an opportunity to look at their own identity and move on from there to explore how immigrants are represented in their own neighborhood."

Nahid Sultana, 17, from Flushing International High School, saw her city differently after taking a "7 train field trip" from Main St. to Times Square.

"We looked at what cultures are represented on that train and got to interview some people," says Sultana, whose photos and personal essay are on display at NYU.

"I tried to show more of New York life: How do we live with other people?"

World Savvy's progressive blend of arts and education was also a perfect fit for Bronx Theatre High School, which uses theater to enrich the curriculum.

"So many of our students are immigrants or children of immigrants, and this program really allowed them the opportunity to discuss that in a positive way," says school co-founder Elizabeth Dunn-Ruiz.

Bronx Theatre students produced their own play examining how immigrants can often feel disenfranchised.

The play, says Dunn-Ruiz, "gave kids an opportunity to share positive and negative experiences that have happened in their lives."

"I think we definitely are a melting pot," says Samantha Carty, 17, a Bronx Theatre 11th-grader who emigrated from Jamaica. "There are good differences that each of us brings to the table, and we all have so much in common through those differences. If we knew more about each other, I don't think there'd be room for a lot of the ignorance that we see in today's world."