

From  
**Anacostia**  
with Love

*An Environmental Journey*



By Anacostia High School Students  
Edited by Caroline Brewer

# Table of Contents



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First Printing

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4	The Partners
4	Dr. Ronald Mason, Jr.
5	Xavier Brown
6	Acknowledgements
7	Editor's Note – About the Book
10	The Students
12	La'Georgia Callaham
16	Quadir Cottoms
20	Orlando Douglas
24	Sebastian Frederic
28	Harold Harris
32	Malachi Hill
36	Lawrence Jefferson
40	A'yonna Lewis
44	Eric Odom
48	Naeem Porter
52	NaQuan Shepherd
56	Aaliyah Thompson
60	Xavier Yates
64	Field Trip Experiences
66	The Classroom
68	Anacostia Courtyard and Rain Garden
70	Anacostia Library
72	Dix Street Gardens
74	Eagle Harbor, MD
76	Harriet Tubman on the Eastern Shore (The Aunties, Blackwater, and UGRR Visitor Center)
80	The Hydroponics Lab
82	Indigo
84	Library of Congress
86	Oxon Run Park
88	Patuxent Riverkeeper
90	Roosevelt Island
92	The Well at Oxon Run
94	UDC-Nature-Wise Program Staff



**Dr. Ronald Mason, Jr.** is a tenured professor at the University of the District of Columbia David A. Clark School of Law. During his 40 years as a higher education executive, he served as president of the University of the District of Columbia, the Southern University System, Jackson State University, and as Senior Vice President and General Counsel of Tulane University. During his 17 years at Tulane, Mason also served four years as the federal executive monitor of the New Orleans Public Housing Authority. Prior to higher education, Mason worked as Executive Counsel to the President at the Southern Cooperative Development

Fund.

Mason established the Martin Luther King Week for Peace at Dillard, Xavier and Tulane Universities and founded the Tulane/Xavier National Center for the Urban Community. He founded a K–12 teacher training partnership, the Mississippi Learning Institute, at Jackson State University. He created an initiative housed at Southern University titled the “Five-Fifths Agenda for America.” It is a demonstration project with the goals of bringing truth to the conversation about the relationship between America and Black men, increasing the number of college degrees among Black men, and increasing the number of Black male teachers. While at the University of the District of Columbia, Mason established the Developing America’s Workforce Nucleus (DAWN) project, to rethink public education and increase the production of diverse, business ready talent from poor, Black and brown communities.

Mason served under three presidents on the White House Board of Advisors for HBCUs, and on the Thurgood Marshall College Fund (TMCf) Board for 15 years. He is the recipient of numerous awards, including Educator of the Year Awards from TMCf and NAFEO, the Alumnus of the Year Award from Columbia College of Columbia University, the Medal of Honor from the City of New Orleans, and The Martin Luther King Lifetime Achievement Award from Tulane, Xavier and Dillard Universities. He received his B.A. and J.D. from Columbia University.



**Xavier Brown** is Director of UDC (University of the District of Columbia) DAWN (Developing America’s Workforce Nucleus) project. Brown is UDC’s “boots on the ground,” supporting the environmentally-focused Anacostia High School redesign and driving UDC’s overall education partnership efforts with the Department of Energy and Environment (DOEE), the schools in the Anacostia High School feeder pattern and other schools in Ward 8, the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), and community leaders and residents in Ward 8. Brown also serves as the Anacostia Ambassador in the Urban Waters Federal Partnership (UWP). The

UWP is a nationwide program with partnerships in 20 different cities around the U.S. and the Anacostia River. Brown got his BA from North Carolina A&T and his MS from the University of Vermont. He was a Robert Wood Johnson Culture of Health Leader and Black Justice fellow.

**Anacostia High School** was built in 1935, with additions made from the 1940s through the 1970s. Kenneth Walker is the current principal. The mission at Anacostia is to empower students to rethink systems and structures by promoting integrity, social equity, and economic prosperity for all learners through challenging, hands-on, collaborative learning experiences. Anacostia emphasizes leadership, aiming to equip students with the



skills to address societal challenges. The school believes its students are stewards of their community and encourages them to actively contribute to the revitalization of their neighborhoods and beyond.

## Acknowledgements



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You are promises kept and you are promising. You are the warmth of a summer sun; the melody of moonlight. You are hope and you are harmony. New birth and poetry. The source of healing and transformation. You are spring blossoms and freedom songs. You tear down walls with your laughter and open palms. For all of this, and so much more, we thank you. We clap our hands in praise to you. There is no book without you and your sensitivity, your special insight and your creativity. There is no book without your brilliance and perseverance, without your love for Anacostia and your deep appreciation of the Black experience. We hope you will forever celebrate your contributions to this new and unique work.

To Dr. Ronald Mason, Former UDC President and founder of the DAWN (Developing America's Workforce Nucleus) project, under which this summer internship program, in collaboration with Nature-Wise, was made possible, and DAWN Director Xavier Brown, please accept our deepest appreciation. Your thoughtful, compassionate, and extraordinary leadership has been the source of life-changing growth and accomplishments for the students. A special, heartfelt thank you to UDC President Maurice Edington for his enthusiastic support of this program and to Anacostia High School Principal Kenneth Walker and staff, including NAF Director Chisa L. Williams, for providing warm and generous hands-on support to the students and our team. What a gift this program is to the young people of Anacostia High School and to all adults who are fortunate to get to know and engage with them.

Thank you to the summer staff: UDC's Dr. Eric Harris, UDC Program Associate for Project Based Learning and former Hydroponics Lab Leader Jacob Campbell, UDC intern Aissata Berry, Classroom Teacher Ashton Minor. Thank you for being with us on our many field trips, for encouraging and offering guidance as the students reflected on their journeys through parks, fields, forests, gardens and farms, around waterways and trails, meeting activists, advocates, and environmental stewards. Much appreciation to UDC staff Donte Brooks and Lakecia Williams, who have supported the students since the fall of 2025, and who helped them finalize their poetry and prose and launch this book.

A huge thank you to professional photographer Robin Sherman and book designer Bea Jackson for being on the team to make this book as visually stunning as possible.

Finally, deepest appreciation to all who hosted us on field trips and visited us in the classroom, generously sharing your time and talents with our students and staff.



photo by mfieldsphotography

**From Anacostia with Love** is a book about stitching stories, y'all, and about how a select group of Anacostia High School seniors answered the call. It's about picking up needle and thread and the fabric of our lives and creating something we've never before seen. Creating something that holds a world of meaning. Creating something that comes from our hearts. Creating something that, ultimately, is a new work of art. Creating something that comes, in this moment, from as deep as we're willing to go. Creating something that became yes after a whole lotta nos. These young people were often resistant, but don't get it twisted, they just didn't know their brilliance... or, their capacity for resilience. Stitching environmental stories is like stitching a life. It's full of joys, pains, jubilation and strife. So we held up mirrors... so that they (and we) could see clearer.

Our nature stories were often stitched from small fragments and pieces; sometimes they appeared ragged, defeated. And yet those moments that popped up like Jack-in-the-box with a surprise, opened closed eyes, inspired hoots and gasps, hollers and laughs, nods to Black success and overcoming, history that warmed our hearts and kept us yearning. Those moments pushed our fingers to keep on weaving and keep on believing in what we were about to do, for ourselves and for you.

The youth, they learned how to rise, just a little higher. They learned how to burn a hotter and hotter fire, so that they could live to stitch another day. Find more joy in who they be, make time for words and word play.

Whether these students choose careers in environmental fields or not, their voices matter. They know that they are one with nature and will forever be. On top of that, they are residents, citizens, and members of the global environmental family. We need now and forever the benefit of their wisdom, wonder, and critiques. We are indebted to them for all the ways they helped us learn, grow and think. And this is just the tip of the iceberg.

It has been my great pleasure as the founder of Nature-Wise, which blends literacy with outdoor exploration and the fun theory, to partner with UDC and Anacostia High School and be a part of our students' journey over the summer, fall, and winter. Please enjoy this book, and let us know how it affects you.

Left: Group photo of Anacostia interns and Patricia Plummer holding a Harris Hawk at Oasis Reserve.



# The Students





# La'Georgia Callaham

My name is La'Georgia Callaham. I'm 18 and a senior at Anacostia High School in Southeast Washington, D.C.

My current job is being a student intern with the UDC-Nature-Wise program at Anacostia. I would describe myself as "caring."

One thing people don't know about me is that I participate in multiple sports, such as cheering, basketball, and track.

My childhood celebrity crush is Jason Momoa.

The person I would trade places with for a day is Donald J. Trump so that I could reverse all the damage that he has done as president.

My favorite luxury is Gucci Flora or Prada Paradox perfume.

My favorite book is *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. After watching the Harry Potter movie, I wanted to read the book. But I don't have a favorite movie. I like all the movies I watch.

My greatest accomplishment in life is overcoming family challenges and developing positive traits and habits for myself, such as attending school regularly and working harder in class so that I can graduate.

I listen to music to get my mood back together or go to sleep. Going to sleep helps me forget about everything I stress about when I'm awake and don't have anybody to talk to.

My biggest goal professionally is to become a lawyer. My biggest goal personally is to be financially and mentally stable.

## Nature and Me

What you don't know about nature and me is that we have a love-hate relationship.

I don't like in the summertime when mosquitos behave like demons and bite me and when the sun gets so hot it surrounds me like an oven and bakes me.

I don't like the cruelty of spring because I have bad allergies that cause me to sneeze and make my eyes water and make me look as miserable as a grumpy old man.

I don't like the winter because it can be overly cold. Once I go outside, it feels as if I'm wrapped in a coat of ice and my fingers are going to freeze off.

I don't like the fall because it starts to get cold and crisp, and that feels like cruelty knocking on my door.

What I do like about summertime is that when it's near 100 degrees, the feeling of being in a cool swimming pool is refreshing and relaxing.

It helps me get away from the enemy of the too-hot sun. I also like the cookouts where I can eat all the seafood salad I want, and taste multiple varieties of cold, sweet fruit.

During spring, I like seeing the different flowers grow. They are like friends that I want to keep close. And I also like watching and listening to the rain and thunder because it helps me escape from family issues.

What I do like about winter is that it's around my birthday. I also enjoy buying gifts and drinking hot cocoa.

What I like about fall is the variety of colors of the leaves: the burnt orange and red leaves, brown leaves as well as the hints of green.

## Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens

The UDC-Nature-Wise summer interns went to Kenilworth Aquatic Garden for a self-guided tour of the national park's water lilies, lotus flowers, and other wildlife.

I was able to see the lotus flowers and noticed the different stages of growth they were in. Some hadn't bloomed yet. They were white with their petals closed. Some were at peak bloom and others were fully bloomed. I learned that blooming describes the entire period when lotus flowers are opening and closing each day, while peak bloom refers to the specific point in that period when the maximum number of flowers are open and at their most vibrant in terms of color and smell.

I also noticed the different shades of pinks of the lilies, and how some were a vibrant deep pink at the bottom and then the top was a soft, light pink.

I saw a lot of greenery, although I see a lot of greenery every day. This greenery was different because it included much more than just grass that we walk on. These gardens held tall grass and other plants around the pond. The air smelled fresh, like bouquets of flowers. The flowers were oddly tall – taller than me, as tall as a WNBA player, it seemed. And the plants were in water instead of a drier platform, such as grass and soil.

When we walked on the gray wooden boardwalk, we could see how a lot of the plants were dead because of the excess buildup of mud. They were brown and the leaves were ripped. That was a sad sight.

Overall, walking through the aquatic gardens felt different and more refreshing than any other park I'd been to. It was calming and I would go again.

## Bittersweet Limbo

We went to Anacostia's courtyard to see the greenery  
But trees and grass were not the only scenery

I felt beige and black rocks underneath my feet  
I tasted an apple from off that big apple tree

The apple felt smooth and cool like it would be a treat  
But when I took a bite, it turned out to be bittersweet

Then all of us interns started to cheer for A'yonna  
Seeing how low she could limbo was an honor

Everyone chanting, everyone clapping  
Showed how much out in the sun really happened

I went under the stick, with my head first  
I didn't want to end up having to being nursed

Throughout the game, everyone's happy  
But then I felt a nasty bug fly up and attack me

Yardstick limbo is over, now time to go  
Everyone put on their best wiggling show





# Quadir Cottoms

My name is Quadir Cottoms and I am a 17-year-old senior at Anacostia High School, born and raised in Southeast, Washington D.C. I live with my grandmother. During the school year, I work with the hydroponics team at Anacostia High School.

One word to describe me is "helpful". My childhood crush was Toni Braxton, an American R&B singer. I love the amazing way she projects her voice in her songs, and I love the song she wrote for her sister Tamar, "All the Way Home," because I can relate to it relationship-wise and because of the steady, on-beat pace.

My secret talent is acting and writing scripts. I wrote three scripts and performed all three of them during an afterschool program. If I could trade places with anyone for a day, I would pick Chris Brown, because he's a unique dancer and I enjoy dancing.

My guilty pleasure is horror movies, such as *The Conjuring*, starring Patrick Wilson.

My favorite luxury is my late father's black and red Armitron watch, which was one of his favorites, and my late grandfather's braided camouflage army bracelet. Since they both passed, I have become their owners and wear the watch and bracelet each day.

One thing that most people don't know about me is that I only open up to those that I trust. My favorite book is *Knuffle Bunny* by Mo Willems because of the imagery and the story of a little girl who lost her bunny in the washer. It's a funny story and I have lost a couple things in the washer, so I can relate.

My favorite movie is *Brightburn*, which is about a kid-version of Superman, who is evil. I like it because it is action-packed.

My greatest accomplishment has been completing my first summer job at a hotel in 2024.

My dream job is to become a high school guidance counselor. My biggest personal goal is to own a SRT Redeye Hellcat muscle car or a BMW i8.

I grew during this summer because I was introduced to a lot of interesting careers during the field trips, such as gardening and farming at Dix Street and with "The Aunties'" farm on the Eastern Shore, Mount Pleasant Acres Farms. It gave me ideas about how to enhance my work in the hydroponics lab.

## Nature and Me

What you don't know about nature and me is that I like planting in soil. I find working with soil soothing because it has a playdough texture. I believe it's worth bringing up because some people find gardening and working with soil to be calm and soothing.

I work with soil often because I work with the hydroponics lab at Anacostia High School by growing plants and maintaining them to make sure they are healthy and growing correctly. I also get community service credit for working in the hydroponics lab. I work in the lab before, during, and after school.

One of my favorite plants to grow there is kale because it grows quickly. The kale takes a few months to grow. The type of kale I have grown in the hydroponics lab is Lacinato kale.

What you don't know about nature and me is that I have two rottweilers. Their names are Sparkle and Gemini. They bark at everything. Gemini likes to run outside and chase squirrels, while Sparkle likes to stay closer to home. They like to go on car rides. My older cousin is normally driving. Gemini likes to stick her head out the window and bark at the drivers of the cars passing by. Their ears flop in the wind. I like sitting in the back and looking out the window with them.

At home, they like to sniff out the plants and eat fruit, such as watermelon and mangos, outside in our family's garden.

As I'm walking my dogs, I see worms in the soil. I don't like worms because they contaminate the food we eat but I still appreciate what they do for the soil, such as improving drainage, bringing in more oxygen to the soil and creating space for plant roots.



Quadir and Mr. Minor kayaking on the Little Patuxent River at Oasis Reserve. Candice Autry and her team at the reserve led our students and staff on a tour of the Little Patuxent.



# Orlando Douglas

My name is Orlando Douglas. I'm 15 and I'm a rising sophomore attending Crossland High School.

I was born in Hyattsville, Maryland and I now stay in Bowie, Maryland with my dad, stepmom and five siblings. I describe myself as "friendly."

My celebrity crush is Latto because she is beautiful and I like how she carries herself.

My secret talent is that I'm good at games. I have been good at games since I was little.

The person I would trade places with is NBA YoungBoy because his music just brings me peace. My guilty pleasure is that I sing NBA YoungBoy in the shower.

My favorite luxury is that I own multiple pairs of designer clothes and shoes.

One thing people don't know about me is that I am very quiet and stay to myself. My favorite movie is *A Silent Voice* because the movie is sad and I feel like I have a connection with the main character.

My greatest accomplishment is me getting my first job as a co-author this summer. My biggest goal professionally is to become a boss and own my own business. My biggest goal personally is to have a great credit score.

I stretched myself by joining the UDC-Nature-Wise summer program and learned a lot of new things.

My favorite field trip was when we went kayaking on the Patuxent River. The water was calm, and it looked really pretty in the sunlight. I liked how peaceful it felt being out on the river. It was fun and different from anything we normally do.

My favorite writing lesson was when we wrote a poem about the limbo. I liked how we got to be creative. It helped me think in a new way. The poem made writing feel fun and free.

## Nature and Me

My coach always said to persevere in life, to never give up, especially when we were playing against the referees and other teams. And even during practice, when we were doing bear crawls, sprints, or running hills.

He said to persevere through the itchy grass after getting tackled, falling, or tackling someone; through the injuries, the pain, the broken bones, and the changes in weather.

The weather would vary from blazing hot and the feeling of my feet on fire, to the sweat on my eyebrows pouring down like heavy rain, to being so cold to where I'm imagining my fingers might snap off.

But nature gave me comfort; the sun's warmth on my skin, the soothing sound of the rain, the fresh air brought by the soft and cool wind, even shivers from the cold reminding me that I'm alive.

And my love for the sport kept me going. The sound of cleats brushing against the turf; the bumping of shoulder pads against one another; helmets going clack, clack, clack! gave me a rush.

Although nature can make the sport challenging, being tenacious like my coach teaches us helps keep me fueled all four quarters of the game. Even when I'm cold and hungry, hot and tired, wet and anxious, itchy and irritated, I remain undefeated.



## How low did we go doing the limbo?

I bend down, my hands touch the ground.  
My feet move slow, with hardly a sound.  
The courtyard is tight, trees rising tall,  
apples and figs, some ready to fall.

Chalk on the ground, soft and dry,  
mixed colors in shapes spell Anacostia High.  
Dust lifts gently with each breeze,  
coming from feet, from chalk, from leaves.  
I hear the chatter, clapping, and cheers,  
challenges, laughter, close to my ears.

The smell of apples floats through the heat,  
While fig leaves twist and shade my feet.  
Dark green above, the shade feels low.  
I duck down slowly, beneath the yardstick I go.

My back bends first, knees stay tight.  
I slip underneath, holding the height.  
Close to the earth, I feel the quiet, the still,  
Heart beats faster, the moment is real.  
The world stops spinning, just for a breath.  
Play comes to a halt, no fear of what's next.



# Sebastian Frederick

My name is Sebastian Frederick. I'm 16 and in the 12th Grade at Anacostia High School. I live in Washington, D.C. I live with my mother, stepfather, three sisters, and brother. I am a Nature-Wise summer intern, a program sponsored by UDC.

My celebrity crush is Brandy Norwood.

A hidden talent I have is that I can code and I have coded a webpage for my school's robotics team.

If I could switch places with anyone for a day, I would like to switch places with Dr. Strange, a fictional comic book character who is high in the mystic arts, a protector of Earth, and has his own sanctum.

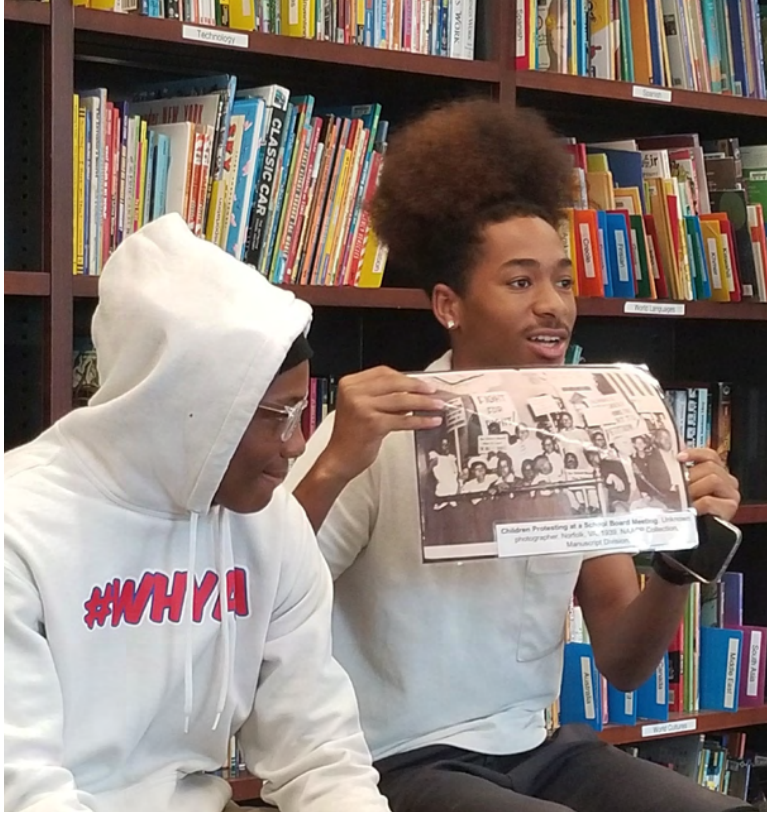
My favorite luxury in life would be having a great credit score because it determines whether you can receive loans to buy cars and houses. It can even have an impact on you getting a job.

What most people don't know about me is that I like to be alone. My favorite book is *Poverty* by Matthew Desmond. It teaches the reader about how poverty is created and sustained, that it's not an accident.

My favorite movie is *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. It has very cool graphics and includes a series of deadly challenges in the quest to discover the best wizard. Although Harry Potter is not old enough, his name is submitted for the challenge.

My biggest accomplishment is staying in school when I had every reason to quit. My biggest goal professionally is to become a lawyer, while my biggest goal personally is to freely express myself. I grew this summer by taking initiative and experiencing new environments, such as attending a conference of national affairs held at Appalachian State University.

My favorite field trip was kayaking because I got to flow with the river. I learned how to navigate in various ways, such as moving back and forth while also steering left and right. I also learned to think by reading the river's movements, noticing patterns and being in sync with my boat paddling partner. I also met new people and saw an amazing bird. It was a grayish-brown Harris hawk that had been rescued and was missing a few talons.



## The Library of Congress, Full of History and Awe

One of the things I remember during our visit to the Jefferson Building at the Library of Congress was hearing gasps, voices full of awe.

We started our tour in the center of the first floor, a big space with tall pillars, decorated with all kinds of art. It was a beautiful sight and yet with all the people, and sounds, and different things to look at, I felt overstimulated.

The Main Reading Room reminded me of a chapel. It held 16 bronze statues which pay tribute to men who symbolized different aspects of life, such as religion, history, art, philosophy, poetry, law and science.

I saw murals everywhere.

We ended our tour in the Youth Library, where the librarians provided lessons on the Civil Rights Movement. By looking at photos, news articles, and watching a film, we learned about the Civil Rights Movement, and a protest over how Black teachers were getting paid less than white teachers during the 1960s. I spoke up and gave a presentation about what I had learned through newspaper articles, which are considered primary sources. Primary sources are an important way for researchers to share history. The Library of Congress is a great resource for primary sources.

If I had the opportunity to go again I would, because I know that I could learn even more.

## Nature and Me

Nature is not controlled but is a force that is wild  
 For example, the chaos in nature from death  
 can cause you to lose your inner child.  
 In the 9th grade, my grandmother passed unexpectedly.  
 I felt as if I was falling into a rabbit hole of tragedy.

Since birth, my siblings, grandmother and I, had been living with each other.  
 She raised all of us like a mother.  
 Soon after her passing, I left DC to move to Baltimore  
 How I wish I could go back to before...  
 As I went to live with my father, I felt like I was drifting.  
 I thought it was a place where I could avoid the pain and suffering I was resisting.

Over the course of time, I realized that all life had to end.  
 My mind began to ease, and I found something beautiful in learning to wend.  
 I began to see far beyond grief and found serenity.  
 I've started growing a plant, which was such a huge necessity.  
 At Grounded Cafe, I discovered the philodendron  
 Which marked the journey of nurturing I am now upon.  
 Every Wednesday morning, I water her once a week.  
 "Ahem...." Sorry, I've gotten really personal and it's becoming hard to speak.

Taking care of Beatrice, as I call her, has been a breeze,  
 From the long, windy vines to the heart-shaped leaves.  
 I like to imagine the more I grow,  
 Beatrice, my philodendron, does also.

## I'm Like a Meteor Shower

Like all things in life, nature is a force to be reckoned with  
 I embody the traits of a meteor shower  
 It is unpredictable and constantly adapting to circumstances I do the same

A meteor shower carries about 50-100 meteors per hour  
 They are bright, fireballs of energy  
 I am the same

Most things die in the dark  
 I shine in the night, during dark times  
 I might begin like something small, like a grain of sand  
 But as I fly through darkness, I expand into an intense, inescapable light  
 Like a meteor shower



# Harold Harris

My name is Harold Harris, and I'm a 2025 graduate of Anacostia High School in Southeast D.C., where I was born. I am the middle child with two siblings, an older brother and younger sister. I am also the father of a now 9-month-old son, named Legend. I am a happy and hilarious guy. My summer supervisors say I'm "affable."

One of my biggest challenges in high school was participating in a mock trial when I was in 11<sup>th</sup> grade. I was on the public defender's side. You had to know what you were talking about, pay attention, listen for objections. I went over what I needed to say with my classmates. There were eight of us. We worked as a team. I had to prepare 22 questions for two trials. We had a month to get ready. We came in second place. I felt relieved afterwards.

My biggest challenge now is being a father. I wake up in the middle of night, which is probably the hardest part, and give him a bottle. I'm a playful person, so I already knew how to take care of him. The only thing I had to learn was how to put on the diaper. I play with him, throw him up in the air, shake his legs, tickle him, play blocks with him. I read books to him during the day and at night. I trade off caring for him with his mother. I work during the day, part-time, and I'm also in school at UDC, majoring in HVAC. It's a blessing to become a father, just watching him grow up, change, develop, hearing his first words.

My special talent is that I am a comedian. It shows up mostly when I talk to my friends. My favorite movie is *The Lion King*, because of the life lessons. My favorite book is *Animal Farm* by George Orwell because it's so relevant to what's happening in society today and how dictators can take over weak-minded people, and how we as a society need to overcome those challenges.

One thing most people don't know about me is that I calmed down a lot after freshman year. People also don't know that I like to use colored pencils to color coloring pages, such as those featuring anime.

My greatest accomplishment so far is that I graduated high school and I have a healthy baby boy, despite the odds against me. My next goals in life are to be a great father to my son, buy a house, earn certification to become an HVAC specialist and own an HVAC business.

The summer helped me grow and stretch. I matured and helped mentor some of the new students through the writing and field trip experiences. I joked a lot last year but, this year, I wanted to be an example for others.

## Nature and Me

This year with my relationship with nature has been limited. I leave the house, come to the summer internship, and walk back home.

Last year, though, I was doing a lot outside with the UDC-Anacostia-Nature-Wise internship.

I went to a lot of places – different parks, farms, and forests. I met new people, such as the Aunties on the Eastern Shore, a park ranger at Anacostia Park, and an activist at Oxon Hill Park, where we got to taste blackberries off the bush. I did things I never thought I would do, such as kayaking, hiking, and writing poems. I enjoyed it. I was glad I tried new things, and got out my neighborhood.

After my job from 10 a.m. – 3 p.m., I had football workouts from 4 p.m. – 8 p.m., so that kept me outside even more than usual.

I went on a boat ride up the Anacostia River. There was a cool the breeze hitting my face on the journey. It felt good. The tour leaders told us about the history of the Anacostia River.

I went to the Eastern Shore, and met two women elders, called “The Aunties.” They live and now farm on the land Harriet Tubman’s parents once lived on. Another woman, Linda Harris, ran the Harriet Tubman Museum in Cambridge. She told us about the history of Harriet Tubman and sang us freedom songs.

I traveled across rivers, some seemed as big as an ocean.

During this past summer, I crossed the bridge from a boy to man. High school is now under the water. The water is full of emotion, some sadness and a little joy. Overall, it’s bittersweet. But I’m on to new beginnings, just like nature.



Harold at the Aunties Farm on the Eastern Shore helping to plow rows for planting beans.



# Malachi Hill

My name is Malachi Hill. I am 18 and a senior at Anacostia High School. I was born and raised in Washington, D.C. I live with my mother, my little brothers Tre and King, and my little sister, Journee. My oldest sister lives on her own and comes around sometimes.

Most people don't know that I'm shy. I'm not the type to post myself too much. I tend to stay to myself and keep my circle small.

If I could describe myself with one word it would be "grind." I want better for my life. I refuse to sink into a hole or not expand on my connections. I want to be great, instead of falling into the negative statistics the world has for every Black man.

My hidden talent is that I can swim really well. I have been like that since I was 12.

My childhood crush was Coco Jones. I loved how beautiful she was, plus she's dark-skinned. I truly loved how she learned to be herself as a lot of challenges were being thrown at her.

If I could switch places with someone, it would be Fred Warner because he is everything I want to be. He's a good linebacker in the NFL and is known throughout all of football. I would love to see the game through his eyes for a day.

My guilty pleasure is that I love food. I mostly love fast food, but if I could get some seafood, or even ramen, I would love it.

One of my favorite luxuries would be a big house on a lot of land. A big part of getting the land would be passing wealth to generations behind me and creating a good for life them, so that they might better withstand hard times.

My favorite book was *The Magic Tree House*. It's a book about two kids, a boy and girl, going into this tree house that they found in the forest. It took them anywhere they wanted to go. I liked it because it expanded my imagination. I don't have too many favorite movies but if the movie has a meaning and a purpose, I will love it.

My biggest accomplishments so far are getting first place in the District of Columbia Interscholastic Athletic Association in wrestling and first team all-state in football. My biggest personal goal is to win the Gravy Bowl. Hopefully that will get me the offers I want to go to a good college on a full ride.

This summer, I put myself in places I where I was uncomfortable and was still able to keep pushing. That made me a better person.

## Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens Awakens My Sense of Touch

At Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens, I feel.  
Under my feet, I feel the bumpy, rocky roads of the paths around the gardens.

At Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens, I touch.  
My hands touch plants and feel how healthy they are, so healthy that they feel unreal.

At Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens, I handle.  
I handle the bark of a tree as it flakes and breaks off, seeming weak.

At Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens, I feel.  
I feel the hairiness of a cattail, hairy like a beard, but softer, fluffier,  
and how firm it is outside but somewhat squishy inside.

At Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens, I touch.  
I come across the bald cypress tree and touch its cones.  
They feel and are sort of shaped like walnuts, rough and bumpy.

At Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens, I handle.  
I handle the petals of the sacred lotus and they feel like little pillows.

At Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens, my senses are awakened.

## Limboing Under A Warm Sun

In the Anacostia courtyard with my peers  
Seeing the pretty blue sky  
And the yellow sun beaming  
Enough to grow a garden

Green plants, tan rocks, and black dirt all around me  
I spot other interns laughing, smiling, and clapping  
Hard enough to shake the earth

It's time to play a game called Limbo

Everyone bends backwards or down  
And goes under the limbo stick  
A basic beige wooden yardstick  
Kidnapped from a classroom for our fun

To play a game called Limbo

Some of us fall to the ground  
Moaning in pain because of our knees  
I'm an athlete so I have to protect my temple  
Can't be shy or lazy about it

To play a game called Limbo

In in the end  
We all make it under the stick  
Laughing, smiling, and clapping  
To win at a game called Limbo

## Nature and Me

When I was young, nature was all we had. Back in the day, nature was how we found fun ways to entertain ourselves, to create bonds that seemingly couldn't be broken. Nature showed me there is more to life than what's in front of you, from the drugs being sold in the streets and, sometimes, put in my face to the violence from my Black people killing each other.

I saw nature as a beautiful thing, the water shining from being kissed by the sun's rays, the butterflies fluttering around me, the grass being tall and willowy, moving with the wind and, of course, the sunsets. And ever since, I respect and appreciate the environment with my whole mind and body.

When I was a kid, my family was known for the cookouts, for everyone just having a good time being outside as the kids played with each other wrestling, throwing a football, running around.

My favorite part was when we all got together at my grandma's house and ate. Eating deviled eggs, cornbread, mac and cheese, ham, and collard greens, basically anything my aunties and grandma cooked, was special. There were always about 12 pans to choose from. The sweet taste of their stuffing and the mac and cheese, which was extra cheesy, made me feel like I was in heaven. Reflecting on the feeling of eating food with my family during those backyard cookout days is warm and comforting. It not only makes me happy. It makes me feel like I'm a kid again.

Moments after taking part in the feast, I would look around and see everyone talking and smiling. I realized that this is what life's all about -- family and love, and nature bringing all of us together.

When I wasn't at cookouts, I found myself at grandma's house with my younger cousins. We would take turns riding my two-wheel black and green stunt bike. I kept falling and messing up my knee, but I always got up and started playing again. That's when I began getting tougher and realized nothing was that serious... until that alcohol hit my bruises. Haha. I loved riding my bike, riding through the wind, seeing the birds, racing the birds, and glancing at the trees as I flew past them feeling like nothing in the world could stop me.

I think nature has presented an opening for my life, a path I will always follow that includes respecting the Earth and always being curious about the environment. Today, I love walking the Anacostia trails and the trails around Oxon Hill. I mainly walk with friends. But a walk by myself? I love it because it gives me peace of mind. Taking in all the things that you can take in outdoors, including sitting with my family on the porch in the summertime, allows me to enjoy the wonderful world I am in, thanks to nature.



# Lawrence Jefferson, III

My name is Lawrence Jefferson, III. I am a 17-year-old Southeast D.C. native. I have a sister and brother who are both 16 years older than me. I live with my grandmother and uncle.

My current job is as summer intern with the UDC-Nature-Wise program with the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP).

I would describe myself as “evolving.” I would describe myself as evolving because I have grown and matured a lot during recent events and during the internship as well. I learned that plants and wildlife are just like humans and have different colors, patterns, and growth rates.

My guilty pleasure is 1980s-1990s-style anime. This is my guilty pleasure because anime is highly underrated, and, in my opinion, this unique art style of the past isn't discussed enough.

One thing people don't know about me is that I see myself as an introvert from time to time. I like some people but not everyone. It's not how I was raised that makes me like this. It's just who I am. My favorite book is called *Wolves of the Beyond* written by Kathryn Lasky, a book about a wolf cub born with a twisted paw and his journey of survival. I like this book because the cub is left to die by his mom and is rescued by a mother bear who had just lost her cubs to a pack of wolves. That's not something you would expect to see in real life or even in the animal world. It made me want to keep reading.

My favorite movie is *Big Hero 6*, because the character Baymax was my favorite. Throughout the movie, he learns how to be more human and develops emotions.

My greatest accomplishment is my progress as a wide receiver. I have grown over the last three years. I understand the game more and am more confident in my abilities. When I was a freshman, I would drop one pass and allow that setback to get in my head. But I now understand that I'll have more opportunities to be successful.

My dream career goal is to play as a wide receiver in the NFL for the Buffalo Bills. An additional goal is to become a fiction author. I'd like to write a book so good it gets animated or turned into a TV show. My biggest goal, personally, is to build confidence, not only in my abilities, but in myself, and reach a mental state where I believe no matter the weather or time or the day, I can adapt to any situation. After I adapt, I can get in a groove and relax.



## The Aunties and Harriet Tubman's Parents Gave Me My First Farm Experience

Right before my senior year, I experienced my first time on a farm ever. It was on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. The experience was great. It was like stepping into a world that's always been there but the high-rises and city lights blocked our view.

Being on Mt. Pleasant Acres Farm in Preston, Maryland was a serene, peaceful feeling. At times, the only sound was the sound of spotted lanternflies and bees buzzing past my ears.

"The Aunties" are Black women elders who own the farm. They have plenty of knowledge about farming and stories to tell. They invited us to help plant crops, such as lima beans. I'd never planted any crop before, so I learned a lot that day, such as how to know when your fruits and veggies are healthy and how to keep insects away.

The planting process involved creating an irrigation system, which is more efficient than other ways of keeping your farm watered. We had to cut long strips of drip tape, tape used for the dripping system. A dripping system is an efficient way to preserve water waste and concentrates mainly on the soil which is great for suppressing weed growth.

It was blazing hot while we were out there cutting the drip tape, having to walk up and down the newly planted crops to make sure the length of the drip tape was as long as the garden's rows. We cut the drip tape eight times to match each row, which was several yards long.

While picking up the drip stripes, the heat that they had absorbed since they were black, was intense. But the experience itself of being outdoors, working on a farm with my fellow interns at the UDC-Nature-Wise program, was fun. I felt free.

Aside from the Aunties, what made the farm really special is the history. Harriet Tubman's parents lived on this farm. She helped them escape on the Underground Railroad that carried them to Canada and freedom.

The farm runs alongside a forest which is where Harriet would meet other freedom-seekers who wanted to escape on the Underground Railroad. In the forest is huge, tall poplar tree called the Witness Tree, because of how long it's been there and all the things it has witnessed. We went to see it and take pictures in front of it. I think I'll always remember it and my first day on a farm.

## Friends, Fright and Awkward Stances

In the Anacostia courtyard, with dragonflies and wasps alike,  
flying around, filling my intern peers and me with so much fright

We clap to a beat, then chant, chant, chant  
We limbo under the yardstick with awkward stances

The stick got lower and the chants got louder  
We proceeded to limbo across painted concrete flowers

With green leaves in my peripheral, bending under the stick,  
I silently scream, "Stay low!" and navigate the trick

As we bend under the sky, sun gleaming bright,  
birds in the distance were taking flight

As I made it past the stick, I stood up tall  
Completely in shock that I did not fall

The fear, the laughter, the heat on our skin  
Was proof that coming out here was worthwhile  
I'd do it again

# A'yonna Lewis



My name is A'yonna Lewis. I am 17 and was born in Southeast D.C. and now live in northeast with my brother and my mother.

I am currently a part of M-Street Youth Advisory Council. The council's primary goal is to provide a platform for youth voices to be heard on issues relevant to their lives and to contribute to the well-being of the DC community.

I would describe myself as "poetic" because of how I let my words and feelings flow on a piece of paper. I didn't know I could write until I was at a very low point in life and believed my problems would be a burden to people.

My secret talent is that I can solve puzzles. A person I would trade places with is Bill Gates so that I could donate money to low-income housing .

My favorite Luxury is Kurt Geiger and one thing people don't know about me is that I like to disassociate from time to time. I have my own world in my head.

My favorite kind of movies are military/army movies. I like them because of the action and combat on the battlefields.

My greatest accomplishment in life will be finally being able to say "I got it on my own."

My biggest goal professionally is to have my own restaurant and my biggest goal personally is to save up my money. This summer helped me explore my horizons , my mind, and change my perspective on life.



## The Limbo Showed Us a New Way to Bond

We gathered in the Anacostia courtyard to play a game  
Some of the interns thought it was lame

I was the first one in the limbo line  
Patiently waiting for my time to shine

Everybody clapped to a beat for me  
Cheering as I showed how flexible I could be

“How low can you go?” interns wanted to know  
As little as I am, I didn’t have to go that low

Playing that rhythmic game helped us bond as one  
It showed that writing about outdoors through a dance can be a whole lot of fun

## Nature and Me

What you don’t know about nature and me is that I find comfort in rainy weather. I find comfort in storms because, somehow, they make my nerves feel better.

The calming yet exhilarating feeling I get hearing the thundering clouds and the rain gives me a sense of comfort when my mind is experiencing its own turbulence.

My life is like nature in ways I love and feel challenged around. I struggle to understand why life can’t just always feel like spring, full of flowers and warm breezes.

I am a spring child and I want that kind of environment in my life because one minute I feel like a fulfilled, nurtured soul who wishes her dreams take her on a successful road.

The next minute, my mind becomes a maze flooded with seemingly endless battles when I try to stay sane. I’m constantly wondering, “When will the confusion in my mind change to something peaceful?”

Summertime is usually an era of healing for me, as I seek peace after dealing with those things that once tried to break me.

A person once told me, “You can’t expect to go on to the next chapter if you keep rereading the same pages.” That stuck with me because I saw how I kept putting myself in a wild, unproductive loop. It was like being in a jungle unable to find my way out.

During summer, I know the sun will always shine and that its glow will touch me, warm me, and let me know that I, too, can beam after dark nights.

## First Time Kayaking

I feel dirty  
In wet shoes  
Tight helmet  
Wonder, “Do we really need this?”

We walk a trail  
Single file line  
Stepping over ditches  
I say to myself,  
“I won’t miss this.”

We get in our kayak  
I am relaxed and laid back  
Praying silently, saying,  
“I hope I don’t end up trapped.”

I see the crown of trees over the river  
I hear our people coming together  
Paddling the Little Patuxent in sunny weather  
I smell the earthy air

I touch the cool water  
that leads to something bigger that’s farther.  
I feel the warm breeze

I’m convinced that kayaking is my thing  
I realize it is fun  
I don’t want to be done



# Erick Odom

My name's Erick Odom. I'm 17, and I go to Anacostia High School in D.C. I live with my mom, two sisters, one brother, a stepbrother, stepsister, and my stepdad. Right now, I'm working through the Marion Barry Summer Youth Employment Program and am a part of an internship called UDC-Nature-Wise.

If I had to describe myself in one word, I'd say I'm quiet. I never really had a childhood celebrity crush or any secret talents, and honestly, I wouldn't trade places with anybody for a day because I love being myself.

My guilty pleasure is definitely music, and I like nice stuff like Canada Goose coats. One thing most people don't know about me is that I'm a follower of Christ. My favorite book is *The Holy Bible*. It's really the only one I enjoy reading.

As a kid growing up, I loved playing basketball in my community. But there was a lot of gun violence in my neighborhood, called Clay Terrace. I avoided certain parts where people had gotten shot and died. When I was 10, my mother moved our family away from the neighborhood to get us away from the violence. She wanted us to go the positive route in life. To help me stay on the positive route, my mother would not let me go back to my old neighborhood, especially after a young girl, Makiyah Wilson, was killed by stray gunfire from four teens who were said to be gang members.

I kept myself from hanging around other kids that might try to influence me to do bad things. I even played basketball and football to keep myself out of trouble. I also started to read my Bible and that changed my mindset. I started living my life out as Jesus lived his life out. I knew I had to honor my mother and father.

At one point, I was angry with my mother for not letting me go around my old neighborhood. I missed playing with my peers on the basketball court and us laughing, and running around chasing each other. I never told her I was angry. A Bible verse helped me to let go of the anger. It's Joel 2:13, "Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity."

My biggest accomplishment so far has been building a real relationship with God. Professionally, I just want to keep growing and building my skills. I am focused on becoming a U.S. marshal. Personally, I'm focused on trying my best, and making sure I have a plan for what I want to do.

## Nature and Me

When I was young, I used to go to a park in my neighborhood. It had no name, at least it didn't have a sign that told us its name. There were no trees, just apartment buildings surrounding the playground.

I remember going down the orange plastic slide, and the purple swirly pole. I remember playing on the basketball court with my peers from the neighborhood. We'd just wait until someone would shoot the ball, watch it come down and get the rebound. Then, it's the next person's turn to shoot the ball.

I also went to camp there in a big building with a blue roof. As soon as you walk in, there are picnic tables all round and a second floor where computers and desks were set up.

My neighborhood also had a "candy lady" who lived near the playground. Whenever I had 50 cents, I ran to her doorstep and knocked on the door, but sometimes the door would not open. Kids lined up outside her house, eager to buy candy, all hyped, playing around, giggling in the line and around the park.

My neighborhood was originally called Richardson but changed to Clay Terrace. On summer days, kids would be running around smiling and laughing, happy to be outside. But they also would run in and out the house, chase each other around the courts. Grown-ups were cracking jokes, laughing hard. Some people would be in their cars listening to loud music.

Teenagers would be chasing each other with fireworks, hollering, screaming. It was one team versus another team. I, myself, would be laughing, running, and hiding from them -- in the house, or to certain hiding places, such as behind the few trees away in front of our buildings, or inside the camp. I enjoyed those days, absorbing the hot sun on my skin, even though sometimes I felt like a burnt piece of bread.

I was in elementary school when we moved away from Clay Terrace. I know a lot of people who didn't live there only knew about the stories of crime and gangs that they read about in the newspapers or heard about on TV. But Clay Terrace was where I spent time with nature, with the sun, the fresh air, warm breezes, with friends, laughing, playing, and running around. I miss it and I miss being around people I grew up with.

## Time with the Aunties, On Their Ancestral Farm

My first time going to a farm was when our UDC-Nature-Wise internship took us to Mount Pleasant Acres Farms on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, owned by two Black women elders, Paulette Greene and Donna Dear. They call themselves "The Aunties." Everything grown on the farm is organic.

As soon as I stepped off our air-conditioned bus, I felt the hot July sun on my city skin. We were greeted by the Aunties. Paulette did most of the talking about their history and the history of the land. They own 140 acres, part of which Harriet Tubman's parents once lived on, and were rescued from by her in 1857. This was my first time hearing this story about Harriet Tubman, her parents, and being on her ancestral land.

Then we got a tour by a young woman named Jennifer. This was my first farm tour. Jennifer is one of the Aunties' nieces. She led us to the orchard first. It had all kinds of new berry bushes, whose trunks were being held up by tall sticks and white plastic wrapped around them. She told us about the different vegetables, fruits, and plants they grow. Then we went over to an area of the farm where they wanted us to make rows to plant beans. I worked with other interns to make rows. Auntie Paulette told us to make sure we made the rows straight. Afterwards, I helped make holes to plant the lima beans.

This was my first time planting lima beans, planting anything.

For dessert, the Aunties fed us ripe red watermelon.

This was my first time eating watermelon fresh from the soil.

It was also my first time seeing the Witness Tree, which was near the edge of the forest in the back of the farm.

To get there was another first -- my first time piling into an open trailer in the back of a small red excavator with a bed wide enough to hold 15 people. We were driven across the farm, past the tall grass. I saw bees trying to zip into the back of the truck and heard other interns playfully screaming.

The Aunties told us that the Witness Tree was a secret place where Harriet Tubman asked people to meet her to escape slavery through the Underground Railroad.

And now, I will be attending college at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, near the Aunties' farm. University of Maryland Eastern Shore was the first college I was accepted into.

I guess all these firsts mean I'm now a part of history, too, like the Aunties, and Harriet Tubman.



# Naeem Porter

My name is Naeem Porter. I am 18. I live with my parents in Washington, D.C. I am senior at Anacostia High School.

Last summer working as an intern with UDC-Nature-Wise at Anacostia was an enjoyable learning experience.

One word I would use to describe myself is "aware" because I notice things most people don't.

What a lot of people might not know about me is that I'm way more understanding than most people.

I wouldn't want to trade places with anyone because I want to make the most of the life I have been given.

I don't have one favorite celebrity.

My favorite book is *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*.

My favorite movie is *Get Out*.

My greatest personal accomplishment in life so far is making it out of Philly and turning 18.

My greatest accomplishment as a student so far is passing and finishing all of my AP classes.

My big career goal is to make a medical device that saves thousands of lives.

My big personal goal is to become wealthy and take care of my loved ones.

## Nature and Me

I was asked when do I notice trees. When I notice trees, the trees are tall and in clusters.

I know some of their names by their leaves, such as pine trees with their pine needles. When I think of the tree I notice the most, I think of winter, and I see pine cones all over. But there are many other trees and other seasons, of course.

I sometimes lean on these trees, whenever I need shelter from the rain, or shade, or sometimes I just want to lean on a tree to appreciate nature. I sometimes sit underneath trees when I'm reading outside, having a picnic, and when I'm just chilling. These trees are in my neighborhood, and they were in Fayetteville Park, around the corner from where I used to live in North Carolina.

Sometimes I pick up leaves in the fall and examine them, checking out the different colors. I look at the shape and see that it comes from a different tree, such as a maple or an oak. I notice that trees are always giving, so that means we should be more appreciative of our natural environment. The seemingly small, everyday things shouldn't be taken for granted.

## Sights and Sounds of Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens

We interns arrived at Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens on a warm summer morning. We had a choice of trails. I walked through a trail to my right, noticing right away the lotus flowers, ranging from 4 feet to 7 feet tall. Some were hot pink and some of those still sprouting were as white as snow. The lotus flowers had taken over the ponds and their edges in the front of the park by the dozens.

I saw dragonflies hovering around and landing on the lotuses. Some had orange in their wings. Others had shimmery green and blue. I also saw them flapping above the murky pond water.

I saw what looked like teeny tadpoles swimming in the motionless brown-colored water that was underneath the gray wooden foot bridge we crossed.

I heard the trail's gravel rumble underneath our footsteps and get louder as the pick-up trucks were driving by. I heard the sounds of cicadas and crickets buzzing as I took my time walking along the trails.

Although Kenilworth is a fairly quiet place, overhead I heard the sounds of helicopters flying as we crossed back over the foot bridge.

Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens awakened my senses in new ways.



Xavier Brown, Xavier Yates, and Naeem Porter explore Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens.



# Naquan Shepherd

My name is Naquan Shepherd and I'm 17 years old and a senior at Anacostia High School. I was born and raised in Southeast, D.C., with my mom, two sisters, and niece.

Here at the UDC-Nature-Wise summer internship, I learned about different career paths available in the D.C. region and got opportunities to engage with people in those fields. I gained knowledge and experience in organic farming, hydroponics, and electric fishing. Many of the trips touched on preserving nature and even the Civil Rights Movement, which the Library of Congress visit allowed us to dig into.

If I had to describe myself in one word, I would say "smart." I can consistently produce high quality work when I focus, and I can always find time to help my friends when they're struggling.

A secret talent of mine is programming in Java. It's something I've been putting time into learning, despite the on-and-off schedule I had with it.

If I could swap places with anyone, it would be someone rich so that I could send my family money.

A guilty pleasure of mine is sleeping in. Sometimes, in the summer and on weekends, I wake up as late as 1 p.m. A luxury and passion of mine is playing my X-box. Video games are a way I kick back and relax.

My favorite book series is *Calvin and Hobbes* by Bill Watterson, mainly because of the comedic and relatable approach he gives to the characters. My favorite movie is the new *Superman* movie, starring David Corenswet. The plot was simple yet very entertaining and the characters were played well and true to their comic counterparts.

One of my biggest accomplishments in life so far was going to the citywide Spelling Bee and showing up on TV.

A professional goal of mine would be either a successful career in IT or mechanical engineering. A personal goal of mine would be to improve my handwriting and hopefully make enough money when I'm older to get my mom a house.

## Nature and Me

What you don't know about me is that I feel very connected to nature. It's a relationship I've been nurturing since I was a young boy.

When I was in elementary school, my interest in the outdoors grew. Recess was the highlight of my days. Going outside after the boring stretch of time that was the rest of my school day to play on the slide, monkey bars, and games of tag brought me so much joy. The sun shining on my skin in the spring and summer, as well as the feel of the autumn breeze when I ran all increased the excitement of being outside every afternoon.

Often, after a significantly hot summer day, I'd come home with mosquito bites littering my legs or arms. A lingering effect from those days is that sometimes when I look at the sun, I forget to squint or look away quickly. It might have been my curiosity regarding outer space in my younger days that made it so hard to take my eyes off the skies. I'm working on doing better.

When the summer fully gave way to fall, my class still went outside, but less frequently. More times than not, we would stay inside as it got colder. The only time I would get to appreciate the outdoors was when I was home, on my own time. I'd usually satisfy that urge to go outside by taking small, monitored walks in my backyard. The crunch of leaves under my shoes was a sound I grew used to hearing. The sight of the normally green grass completely covered with brown and yellow leaves, which fell from the many trees surrounding the tall wooden white fence bordering each side of our backyard, was also familiar.

Another season that I enjoy is winter. Snow days that kept us out of school were, and still are, days of winter celebration for me. My mother made sure I was dressed for the snow. She wouldn't let me out the front door unless I had on my puffy white coat, boots, and wooly winter hat paired with matching gloves. Trekking through the snow, I usually would go out when a friend was already out, or with one of my two sisters that lived with me. We'd run in the snow, stopping to form and launch snowballs at each other when the snow was soft enough.

Spring was my least favorite season, mainly because of the rain. The pitter-patter of particularly heavy rain was a sound that I learned to tune out early on. And yet, something about steady rain attracted me. I would be glued to the window on numerous occasions, glass cool from the rain, and I would watch the outside, dark from the full clouds. White noise that I often tuned out also comforted me. It's one of the main reasons that, to this day, gentle rain helps me sleep.

All those childhood experiences are a big contributor to my outlook on the outdoors today. I now walk instead of catching the bus for short trips. When my little sister needs to be picked up or something needs to be grabbed from the store, it's typically me offering to go out and grab it. Whenever I see an unusually scenic sight outside, I might snap a quick picture on my phone and make it wallpaper. My favorite scenes are compelling shots of the sun or moon. They speak to me with their glow.

## Kayaking the Little Patuxent River

Kayaking  
My first time  
I didn't know what I was doing  
Halfway  
We got stuck  
Teamwork is hard to manage like this  
Drifting  
Nearing the checkpoint  
I step out, help unstick my friends  
Whoa  
The water chills  
My paddle dips, slips, and douses me  
Determined  
We push harder  
Until we finally catch up with everyone  
Relief  
At the end  
I tried kayaking Little Patuxent and succeeded



## Limboing Low

Surrounded by green foliage, we decided on a game  
We clapped to a rhythm, and chanted out names

One by one, we ducked, bent, and walked  
How to clear the limbo stick was quite the talk

Nearing the end, the bar had gotten low  
We had to be cautious and go a little slow

As the last interns went, we prepared to leave  
But outdoors wasn't over yet. We needed one last scene.

The Rain Garden!



# Aaliyah Thompson

My name is Aaliyah Thompson, and I am 18 years old and a senior at Anacostia High School in Washington, D.C. I was born in Atlanta, Georgia and moved here one year ago. But I now live in Southeast with my soon-to-be 4-year old son Aaron.

My current job is being a mother but I work part-time at Anacostia as a UDC-Nature-Wise intern and as co-author of this student publication.

If I had to describe myself in one word it would be “determined.” I chose this word because with all the obstacles life has given me, I am still determined to prevail.

As ironic as it might sound, my childhood crush was Luigi from Mario Brothers. My secret talent is my capability to learn and catch on to things quickly.

If I could trade places with anyone for a day, it would probably be Aaron. I would trade places with him so that I could see the world through his eyes and have a different perspective on everything.

One of my guilty pleasures is doing nails. I enjoy seeing people feel more confident, one step at a time.

My favorite luxury is going to the park with Aaron and playing with him. One of the pros of being a teen mom is not running out of breath or being too lazy to play.

My favorite book is *If He had Been with Me* by Laura Nowlin. I love this sad romantic tale because of the unexpected events that occur and the fact that you get the other person’s point of view in the second book.

My favorite movie is Disney's *The Princess and the Frog*. This movie is why my favorite color is green and my favorite animal is a frog.

My greatest accomplishment in life will be raising a respectful, successful young man.

## Kayaking: Chaos and Calm

Going slow  
On the river  
Hearing birds chirp  
Hearing frogs croak  
Bumping into everyone's kayak  
I'm nervous  
I hope  
I don't fall  
Into Little Patuxent  
Anxiety is killing me  
My partner's company  
Is like  
Calm, cool waters  
Shallow levels  
Enliven me  
Overall  
I'd do it again

## Kayaking Story Reflection

Before we went kayaking, I was nervous because I didn't know how deep the water would be. After we got to the river, and the instructors told us the water level wasn't that deep, that we could stand up in it and it might only reach our waists, I felt a bit better.

We put on our life jackets and water shoes.

I touched the cool, calm water of the Little Patuxent River. I could taste the bug repellent I sprayed over my whole body. I'm afraid of bugs.

I could smell the forest and flowers around me. And hear the different species of birds chirping and frogs croaking. I saw everyone one around me getting frustrated with the paddles. If you don't paddle correctly, in sync, your kayak won't move the way you want it to. It's a process.

But we made it to the other side of the river, and had to help pull the kayaks out of the water. Overall, I had a good experience, plus I enjoyed Ayonna's company. She was my kayaking partner. I would go kayaking again.

## Nature and Me

I'm from Georgia, where the peaches grow  
I like the heat but I love the snow

Summer is hot to the point I can barely feel the breeze  
Winter's no better walking down a hill, you might fall and hurt your knees

When I was younger, I played outside all day as the sun kissed my face  
I remember how much it was my favorite time, outside my favorite place  
I remember the refreshing fruits I use to crave  
Now replaced with hot drinks about which we rave  
Just like the seasons, people come and people go  
But unlike other people, I can never forget a soul

Through each season, I'm determined to wipe my eyes  
As Maya Angelou said, "Like air, I'll rise."

## Like a Tree

I am a tree  
I am the roots that grow deep  
The leaves that wave with the breeze

I clean the air you breathe  
Provide shelter for living beings

I am a deep breath  
When family and friends are stressed

I'm always here  
I never go anywhere

I am a tree



# Xavier Yates



My name is Xavier Yates, and I'm 16 years old. I was born in Maryland and now live in Washington, D.C. I live with my mother and currently work as a summer intern for the UDC-Nature-Wise program as a co-author of our book.

If I had to describe myself in one word, it would be "hardworking."

A big challenge I've had to overcome was saving my money because I often spent it quickly instead of setting it aside for later. I would save it to my bank account digitally and allow it to build up. I had to work hard to do that! I would make money by doing chores and by helping my grandmother with her catering business. I had to carry heavy items like chafers, buckets of silverware, which weighed several pounds, take out the trash, wash dishes, and clean up after each event.

One of my secret talents is drawing, and if I could trade places with anyone for a day, it would be President Barack Obama.

A guilty pleasure of mine is watching movies late at night, and my favorite luxury is buying designer clothes.

My favorite book is *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, because it gives me a powerful perspective on what life was like before the modern era.

My favorite movie is *Nobody* because it's exciting and full of action and it shows how to never give up when something bad happens.

One thing most people don't know about me is that I love traveling to different places like the Dominican Republic, Miami, Chicago, Turks & Caicos.

My biggest accomplishment so far is maintaining good grades. My professional goal is to become a neurosurgeon. Personally, I aim to have more financial freedom.

## Kayaking Conqueror

I see sunlight reflecting off water  
Water splashes on my body  
Every turn, every second  
It is cool  
I paddle hard, scared while pushing through each heavy turn  
Deep breath in  
Slow breath out  
First time kayaking - ever  
I'm on the Little Patuxent  
With Anacostia student interns  
Steering is rough  
But I leave a conqueror

## Whispers of Kenilworth

When I first arrived at Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens  
with the UDC-Nature-Wise program at Anacostia,  
I walked on a rocky trail. I laid eyes immediately on different species of plants.  
The plants, pink and dark green lotus flowers and creamy white water lilies,  
were sprouted up out of different ponds.

Syrup brown cattails, tall like torches on green stems,  
were reaching up out of the grassy areas next to the pond.  
The murky-watered pond was full of what seemed like  
tiny fish darting back and forth.  
I saw colorful dragonflies flying above the pond and plants.

Everywhere I looked around Kenilworth, nature was whispering some form of life.



# Field Trip Experiences



# The Classroom



Human Resources and Technical Writing Consultant Judith Ross helps Orlando Douglas work on his resume.





## Anacostia Rain Garden Triggers My Senses

by Sebastian Frederick

Outside the high school, near the bridge to the park  
We step into the small but mighty rain garden  
Built to absorb rainfall, limit flooding,  
filter pollutants, and attract pollinators  
I feel the relief of shade from the giant oak tree  
Hear the chirps of the birds flying from every direction  
Accidentally, I taste the dry brown bark of the giant oak  
I lay eyes on the ironweed plants while bees collect nectar  
And smell the freshly cut grass as it triggers me to sneeze



# Anacostia Courtyard and Rain Garden

## Sensing the Anacostia Courtyard

by Anacostia student interns

Out the door of our air-conditioned school  
The sky is wide and pearly blue  
I touch the rail, still cool and black  
See drops of water hugging blades of grass  
I taste the hot wind as it swarms my face  
Observe green bushes and trees competing for space  
I notice red brick walls stretching high  
Framing leaves that kiss up to the sky  
As if there were a thousand suns  
I'm feeling the intensity of July's heat  
And tiny, pebbly beige and brown rocks under my feet

I touch the prickly branches of the apple tree  
Feel the soft texture of the leaves  
Catch Mr. Brown plucking fruit from a branch  
I'm feeling bold too  
I bite the bittersweet green apple  
Tongue says this is something new  
I smell a scent akin to mist  
I hear bugs buzzing  
Birds up high, chirping  
Spy a bird bath overrun with what looks like tiny tadpoles  
swimming over blue and gray rocks  
Ugh! Could be mosquito larvae  
Seeing the colorful Anacostia sign on concrete through the middle of the greenery  
brings its red and blue emblem to my eyes  
I hear Sebastian and Lawrence scream, "Aaaahhh!"  
and run from the big flying bugs  
One looks like a wasp  
Sebastian says, "I don't know where I ran to. I just got away!"  
Maybe it's time to go back inside  
We all laugh



# Anacostia Library

Our deepest appreciation to Anacostia Branch Librarian Yvette Davis for inviting Anacostia High School interns to the library. They explored books and learned more about the research process and resources available to them as they go on their journeys to reflect and write about experiences in nature.



# Dix Street Gardens News Conference with Xavier Brown

by Erick Odom

## 1. What did you learn from the news conference?

I learned that building something meaningful like an urban farm takes vision, hard work, and dedication. Mr. Brown emphasized how important it is to stay committed even when there are setbacks, and how farming is more than just growing food. It's about growing community, opportunity, and hope.

## 2. How could his experience influence you to be an urban farmer?

His experience shows that you don't need a huge piece of land or a perfect situation to start. Mr. Brown turned an idea into action, even in the middle of a city. That inspires me to think about how I could start small, maybe with a community garden or even container gardening, and use it to feed people, educate others, and help my neighborhood.

## 3. Why is it key to be patient during the growth process?

Farming, like life, doesn't give instant results. Seeds take time to sprout, just like ideas and goals. Patience allows you to learn from mistakes, trust the process, and celebrate small progress without giving up. It reminds you that good things take time to grow.

## 4. What business idea could you create listening to Mr. Brown's experience?

I could start a business that combines fresh produce with education, such as a mobile urban farm that teaches kids and families about healthy food and how to grow their own. Another idea could be selling starter kits for mini-gardens in the city.



# Dix Street Gardens

## What I learned at Dix Street Gardens

by Xavier Yates

At Dix Street Gardens, I learned that confidence is key to gardening.

I need to make sure the environment is right so that I can nurture different types of plants and flowers.

At Dix Street Gardens, I learned that patience is key to gardening.

Patience isn't about waiting for a long time. It's about actively trusting the process, doing the work, and allowing time to do its part.

At Dix Street Gardens, in Northeast D.C., where they sow and harvest vegetables for the community, I learned that growth includes failure, frustration, yearning, and learning.



# Eagle Harbor, MD

Fred Tutman founded Patuxent Riverkeeper in 2004. As of 2026, he is currently the longest serving waterkeeper in the Chesapeake Bay region, and the only African American waterkeeper. Tutman has provided direct humanitarian, environmental health and environmental justice support to vulnerable communities including Brandywine, Lothian, Eagle Harbor, Savage, among many others. He led the students on a tour of the area around the office of the Patuxent Riverkeeper in Prince George's County, Maryland, and Eagle Harbor. Eagle Harbor is an all-Black community of 80 families on the Patuxent, which Tutman has supported as legal counsel in a number of cases involving environmental injustice.





# Harriet Tubman

## On the Eastern Shore at The Aunties, Blackwater, and UGRR Visitor Center

### The Aunties and Harriet Tubman's Ancestral Land

by Sebastian Frederick

I ventured onto the glorious Mount Pleasant Acres Farms on the Eastern Shore of Maryland with my fellow summer interns. There, I met two Black women elders, called "The Aunties," who have preserved the land and history of Harriet "Minty" Tubman. The whole farm stretched so wide, more than 100 acres, as if it could fit a bunch of pyramids. The Aunties, Paulette Greene and Donna Dear, told us stories about this ancestral land.

One of their assistants, Jennifer, gave us a tour of a section of the farm called Harriet's Footprint. It held a berry orchard with dozens of tiny new trees. Then they invited us to work to plant new crops. While I was working, using the hoe to dig up the weeded grass, the sun was blazing hot. But I, and the other interns, kept going. Eventually, we took a break. I caught sight of a fresh crop of watermelons, so big, so plump, so ripe. We were invited to dig into triangular pieces. They tasted as sweet as honey. As the juice dripped down my chin, delight filled me.

I also discovered something new, a green leaf that tasted sour and lemony, called sorrel. I also discovered a new creature, a caterpillar. But not just any caterpillar. This one had a coat so fuzzy and hairy, it resembled a tiny brown bear. I learned that its name is woolly bear caterpillar and it was in the larval stage of the Isabella-tiger moth. Somehow, I connected with the little critter. I picked it up with a leaf but could not hold onto it forever. So I let it go... but it found its way back and crawled up my shoe.

Our last great adventure was to take a ride across the farm to the forest at the edge. I sat in the trailer, hitched to a red excavator with other interns, feeling so free in the wind. I smelled nothing but the grass that was freshly cut by Donna on her tractor. It was invigorating.

The ride led us to the tallest tree in the valley. It appeared it could reach the heavens. It's called the Witness Tree for how long it has stood there and for how much it has witnessed. I could relate because on this hot summer day on the Eastern Shore, we, too, were witnesses.







# The Hydroponics Lab

## Seedling Journey Poem

by A'yonna Lewis

Mom and Dad decided to plant a seed, not knowing what would eventually sprout.

As a seed, I was placed in angry soil, so my roots became bitter.

The roots represent my emotions. Soaking in that angry soil made me hate everything.

And yet, somehow, I found enough nutrients to grow.

When I began to grow, I soaked in the sunlight and began to figure out how to let go of the anger and hate and be happy in life, with my life.

Loving myself and what life gave me allowed me to blossom into a rose.

My green stem and leaves represent what made me, what feeds me, and helps me thrive.

As I hold up my bright red petals to the sun, they represent the changed, beautiful me.

## Reflection on Hydroponics and Me

by Quadir Cottoms

Hydroponics is an artificial, soilless way to grow plants, which are potted in water. We learned in our hydroponics lab and in gardening that for plants to grow successfully they need water, light, nutrients, and adequate space.

Water is essential because it's one of the main food sources for humans, animals and plants.

As I think about what makes plants thrive, I know that for me to grow into a great person, I need a peaceful and calm environment, and sometimes an environment where I'm alone.

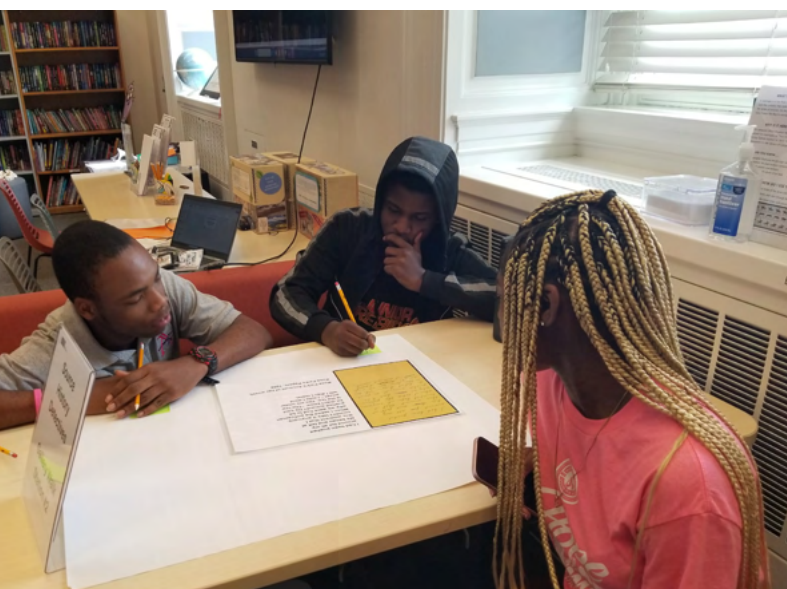
I can relate to hydroponic seeds because they need the same food sources as I do. What makes me different from seeds is that although they have tissues and cells, they don't have organs like me and other human beings.

# Indigo

Indigo (*Indigofera* plant), is an ancient crop found endemic to India (where it gets its name), Africa and China. Xavier Brown, Deputy Director of DAWN, introduced UDC-Nature-Wise interns to the crop over the summer of 2025, and led them in a tie-dye-making activity in the Anacostia courtyard, which the students thoroughly enjoyed.

"I'm a farmer," Brown said. "I'm into everything natural, including fiber plants. We grow indigo at Dix Street Gardens. With indigo, I wanted to close the gap between crops our ancestors cultivated thousands of years ago to now. I'm intrigued by the wisdom our ancestors had to be able to produce blue pigment from a green plant."





# Library of Congress

## Library of Congress' Massiveness Motivates

by NaQuan Shepherd

During our visit to the Library of Congress, I saw:

- Architecture inspired by European, Asian, and African culture
- Centuries-old documents displayed for all visitors to review

I heard:

- Videos playing as ambience, such as old jazz in an exhibit that held ancient tablets
- A speech by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on film in the research room

I touched:

- The foreign marble. It was cold, hard, and smooth
- Puppets in a room in the youth center. I also got "attacked" by a friend using one (lol)

I thought:

- About the many different primary sources we learned of, such as those featuring Rosa Parks and the N.A.A.C.P.
- What went into the ornate design of the Library of Congress

I felt:

- Motivated by the grandeur of the building, as well as the content I witnessed

I was inspired by:

- The amount of books there. It made me want to come back on my own time and look around more

## Library of Congress Inspires

by Xavier Yates

I saw the grand architecture of the Jefferson Building, especially the ornate ceiling in the Main Reading Room.

I heard the footsteps of its many visitors.

I touched the cool marble railings.

I thought about how much knowledge is stored in one place.

I felt emotionally connected to the history of the country through the original documents and manuscripts.

I felt proud to be in a place where ideas and learning are preserved for everyone.

I felt inspired by the exhibits about Civil Rights leaders and their handwritten letters and speeches.

I saw Thomas Jefferson's original library.

I thought about how many people have visited the Library of Congress before me, such as researchers, writers, and students and how I was now part of that legacy.

I felt motivated to keep learning and maybe come back one day to study something in more depth.

Many thanks to Monica Valentine and Alli Hartley-Kong at the Center for Learning, Literacy, and Engagement for preparing a special program for our interns.



# Oxon Run Park

Oxon Run Park in Southeast D.C. would not be the community jewel and resource that it is today without the advocacy of its longtime advocates. They provided a tour of the neighborhood park for Anacostia students during the summer of 2025.





# Patuxent Riverkeeper

*This summary of the Patuxent Riverkeeper is based on an interview with Fred Tutman and biographical information he supplied to the editor, who created the summary.*

Fred Tutman founded Patuxent Riverkeeper in 2004, and, as of 2026, is currently the longest-serving waterkeeper in the Chesapeake Bay region, and the only African American waterkeeper.

Tutman has provided direct humanitarian, environmental health and environmental justice support to vulnerable communities including Eagle Harbor, among many others.

During the summer of 2025, Tutman led Anacostia UDC-Nature-Wise interns on a tour of the Patuxent Riverkeeper, as well as of Eagle Harbor.

History is all over this region of the Patuxent River, which is the longest and deepest river in Maryland. Tutman's family has farmed and fished along the banks of the Patuxent River since the 1800s. The Tutman family continues to operate a farm within walking distance of the river.

History is at the Patuxent Riverkeeper's office, seated in the most rural part of Prince George's County, bordering Calvert and Charles Counties, boasting mostly rolling hills and farms. It's all over the historic building, the Nottingham School, that Anacostia interns got to see. Where it sits now is a middle passage memorial. This part of the Patuxent was a destination for ships carrying newly enslaved Africans.

Among many of his accomplishments as riverkeeper, Tutman:

- Founded an annual summer camp for youth in fence line communities with other partners.
- Established a visitor's center and club house on the banks of the Patuxent that provides more public access to the river.
- Serves as a longtime volunteer for non-profit and public interest causes in the region.
- Appeared in numerous news reports, educational documentaries, and public forums representing Patuxent water quality issues and conservation.
- Has 22 years of stewardship and advocacy for the public access Patuxent Water Trail and founded the Patuxent Roughnecks volunteer water trail maintenance team. Maintains the water trail web site at [www.patuxentwatertrail.org](http://www.patuxentwatertrail.org).

# Roosevelt Island



## Reflection on Roosevelt Island

by Orlando Douglas

The trees of Roosevelt Island could tell us about how life was there hundreds of years ago. They could tell us about the work the slaves had to do. They could tell us about the torture the slaves had to go through, and how bad the beatings were.

They could tell us everything that happened on that island and why, because people talk. People talk out loud even when they are alone, so if the trees could hear and speak, we would know about all the terrible stuff that happened to our ancestors on what is now Roosevelt Island.

## If I Were a Tree on Roosevelt Island

by A'yonna Lewis

If I were a tree on Roosevelt Island, I would tell a story about a woman who decided to explore nature while working in the Mason Mansion. She was enslaved and always had an urge to explore beyond what she was given permission to see. She knew that it wasn't right to hold people back from getting close to nature and feeding their curiosity, so she would sneak around at night and study different plants and insects.

She learned that certain plants can help heal wounds and sickness in the body. She believed it was important to teach her people about the scaredness and power of the land, when the colonizers weren't paying attention. She taught her people about remedies and recipes beneath the big trees on the island. And she showed her people that nature provides all sorts of good things for humankind, and these good things are free for all.





# The Well at Oxon Run

The Well at Oxon Run is an oasis in Southeast DC. It brims with fruits, vegetables, trees, flowers, and staff who make every visitor feel so much at home. Our students were inspired by the sights, sounds, smells, and tastes of this nature sanctuary and source of healthy food for the community.



# UDC-Nature-Wise Staff



JACOB CAMPBELL,  
High School Teacher  
and Summer Teaching Assistant



ASHTON MINOR,  
High School Teacher  
and Summer Teaching Assistant



XAVIER BROWN,  
Deputy Director of  
DAWN



CAROLINE BREWER,  
Founder of Nature-Wise  
and Lead Instructor



LAKECIA WILLIAMS,  
UDC C2C Academy Director,  
Fall/Winter/Spring Assistant



DONTE BROOKS,  
UDC,  
Fall/Winter/Spring Assistant



Left to right: UDC-Nature-Wise Intern Aissata Barry, NaQuan Shepherd, Caroline Brewer, Xavier Brown, Ashton Minor, Principal Kenneth Walker, and NAF Director Chisa L. Williams



The UDC-Nature-Wise program was blessed to visit the Aunties at their Mount Pleasant Acres Farm in Easton, Maryland twice. The second time was in September in celebration of Harriet Tubman's 175th Self-Emancipation Anniversary. It also was the launch of *Harriet Tubman, Force of Nature, A Biography in Poems*, written and illustrated by Caroline Brewer. The Aunties kindly treated Caroline, the students, and all of her guests to a cookout, and a tour of the pumpkin and watermelon fields, as well as of the forested area that's home to the Witness Tree. We are deeply and forever grateful!

