

JFYNet Podcast – February 2020 – Madison Park Tech Voc HS Grad, *Now the Educator*

with Settenah Wright, ESL Teacher and Greg Cunningham, Blended Learning Specialist

GREG: *Welcome to the second monthly podcast from JFYNetworks. JFYNetworks is a Boston based nonprofit provider of blended learning programs to schools. JFYNetworks blended instructional support programs, build skills and help raise individual and school performance measures.*

The JFYNet Blended Learning program provides online assessment and curriculum into the classroom and works with teachers to provide individual instruction to help students achieve measured, skilled gains.

This month, we hear from Settenah Wright, an English as a second language teacher for English Language Learning students at Madison Park Technical Vocational School in Boston. In celebration of Black History Month, Ms. Wright discusses how she is incorporating three great African American leaders who have a local connection.

Ms. Wright: I chose the most prominent ones because I know that as Americans, they know those black Americans like the back of their hands.

Greg: *How her experience as a Madison Park student helped prepare her to become an English teacher.*

Ms. Wright: It was in the eighties. I was actually a student here at Madison Park. I had a radio and TV vocation...

Greg: *...and how Madison Park in the neighborhood of Roxbury are the heart of the city of Boston.*

Ms. Wright: Roxbury is right in the middle of Boston, which is something that maybe a lot of people know or don't know. It's extremely central. You can get anywhere from here.

Greg: *Ms. Wright explains why she decided to focus on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X and Barack Obama, three dynamic leaders with local connections for her students.*

Ms. Wright: So, during the month of February in my ESL standalone class here in Madison Park Technical Vocational High School in Roxbury, we are studying three black Americans who had specific connections to Boston, Massachusetts, and we will be comparing those Americans in different ways.

It was tough to pick the Black History Month assignments because I could have chosen more. I could've chosen Reggie Lewis. I could have chosen Deval Patrick. I could have chosen several other black Americans with the connection here in Roxbury, that is just local information.

But I chose the most prominent ones because I know that as Americans, they know those black Americans like the back of their hands, and I want my students to be able to stay on that same path and have that same background knowledge as the American students.

So, I started with the with the major names, but I could do that because they had no knowledge, or they had no knowledge of the local history. I don't even know if the American students have it, you know. But I think eventually I'd like to be able to put it out on the bulletin board. And maybe some of

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the American students can stop and learn some of the information that we've been learning here about Roxbury and Black History Month. I could have chosen [Louis] Farrakhan. He's one also were very strong connections here. Melania Cass the street If you want to go into the women. Phyllis Wheatley, the first woman to publish a book I mean, there's I could just go on and on and on.

Greg: *Ms. Wright explains how Martin Luther King Jr lived in the same neighborhood and walked the same streets as both she and her students do today.*

Ms. Wright: And the first American, the first black American that we're focusing on, is Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his Time Here and experiences here in Boston, and one of the things that the students are learning are his personal address of where he lived, which was. He resided in an apartment at 397 Massachusetts Avenue in the south and part of Boston. And he did that as he was attending Boston University as a theology major, and he was studying to receive his PhD.

Also, he visited Roxbury in his time as well. Once he graduated, he visited Roxbury. He visited the State House because he wanted to speak against segregation, and he spoke against segregation in the Boston Public Schools, actually.

One major factor of his time here in Boston, besides him receiving his education here was that he met his wife here, Coretta Scott King, who was also a student. She was studying at the New England Conservatory of Music here in Boston, and they met through a mutual friend and got to know each other, and they decided to go to Alabama and get married. And then they returned to Boston to both complete their studies. And then after that, they closed up shop, went on back,

So. That was something to me that was really crucial to have my students who I need to know about American history and about black history, because they are not from this country, and I still actually have a few students who have never heard of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr They were not studying him in their countries before they arrived here. They're newcomers to the country. So, the information that they're receiving is something to me that is important to their learning, important to American history and important to local history.

Because this is where they live. This is where their families have chosen to settle. And there has been a lot of historical events that have happened in the places some of the places that they've probably frequented themselves, and they just had no idea. And I like to be able to give my students something that they can connect to. You know, if I say that he lived on Mass Avenue next to Mass at train Station, then that's something that they are very relatable to them. You know, they can pass by there, and maybe they can tell others about it as well.

Greg: *The education Martin Luther King Jr received at Boston University proved vital to his speaking and preaching skills during the civil rights movement. His connection to Boston University is very much apparent today.*

Ms. Wright: They have a really big on Commonwealth Avenue is every really big podium of him with his photo of himself in his cap and gown. That's one of the first things that you can see out there before you even enter. I don't remember what building is it, but I know that they have an entire room dedicated to his work, and the work includes his original writings. I think they are documents of his work there, a BU, his schoolwork. I know there's some of them are letters, and it's like a little mini

museum in there and you go in. And it has all his working in original handwriting, which I was explaining to the students that back then there were no smartphones. There were no laptops. You

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know, you had to do your work. You have to write it. There was a typewriter, but you know he was completing all his assignments in handwriting. It's handwritten work that's extremely authentic. That's not the computer. That's not a phone. That's not, you know, anything like an app, you know, this man was...these people were working for their degrees in that time period

So, I was explaining to them that backed then, a few years after Dr King finished, he donated a lot of his papers to the Boston University. And according to one of their recordings that I heard in his autobiography; he chose to do that because he felt that Boston University would preserve the work in the proper way. He felt that they would keep the work safe for himself and he wanted others to be able to come in and view his work, and that was authentic. And he knew that they would take very good care of it and that they would be able to showcase it in the proper way that was important to him. Nothing was going happen to it. And so, he that's why he chose to go back to the place that prepared him for what he was doing. That's that those were his words.

So, I love to be able to tell my students about that. You just never know who's going have your work, and you never know what impact is going have on others.

Greg: *The street on which Madison Park is located is called Malcolm X Boulevard. This was a significant factor when Ms. Wright decided to highlight his local connections for her students.*

Ms. Wright: And the second black American that we are focusing on is Malcolm X, and our school is located on Malcolm X Boulevard. And that's a reason why I chose the next black American to study to be Malcolm X. I've felt that also they needed to know the local history about his time here, where he lived.

He lived in Roxbury, on Dale Street. He was in Dudley Square very often, which is now Nubian Square is where he hung out. He did have a life of crime in the beginning of his young life. He served time in Norfolk, and it was inside there as he was serving his prison time that he started to connect with someone inside there who was a practicing Muslim and a member of the Nation of Islam. And they he told him about honorable Elijah Mohammed, and he sparked his interest, and by then he was cleaning himself up and getting more knowledgeable about himself.

And so when he got out, he had already had connections to meet the honorable Elijah Muhammed in person and start his journey, and he left, if I'm Not mistaken, left Boston by that point to go and pursue other things that they had planned for him at the Nation of Islam.

And so, I want the students to be able to take from that that there is a reason why their school's located on Malcolm X Boulevard. And there's a reason why there is a major park called Malcolm X Park in Roxbury, and that park is actually on Martin Luther King Boulevard in Roxbury as well.

And there are reasons why these names are here because, you know, they made an impact in a very small community, and there were a lot of people that are black Americans that maybe our senior citizens at this point they have firsthand experience of these things.

Also, Malcolm X was a person that got when he got out of jail, he spent time in the Nation of Islam a little bit here with the members here and would get his hair cut in Roxbury also adds my grandfather's barbershop, which was Beau Brummel, a Nubian Notion Inc. It had two names, and inside there that barbershop provided a safe space for a lot of the black Americans in that time period and Nation of Islam.

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Black Americans also that frequent in that place, to be able to get their haircuts, to be able to discuss things safely, to be able to bring their families there and just connect and network. And it was very much an institution there as far as civil rights, as far as you know, anything that was going on in the black part of Boston or residence in Boston who were black. There was a lot of information that got exchanged there, and everybody could safely come together there and talk and get together and then leave and, you know, see you next week or so you next every other week or whenever they came.

That was something that was also a part of his life. My grandfather actually cut his hair. Deval Patrick also used to go in there and get his hair cut by my dad. So, it was just a lot of times with between the mid-sixties on to about, I want to say maybe the early nineties where and Nubia Notion. But Beau Brummel was a place where a lot of the black Americans and males would come in there and gather and get their haircuts.

Greg: *Sometimes we are lucky enough to witness history. And Barack Obama's connections to Boston, Harvard University and to Roxbury have helped local residents experience history in the making.*

Ms. Wright: So, the next black American is much more present. And he is still with us, Barack Obama, and they are knowledgeable about Barack Obama, as far as I can tell, they're knowledgeable about him and I want him. I want him to know about his time here when he visited the Reggie Lewis Center at Roxbury Community College, and it was in connection of campaigning for that time Representative Markey, Ed Markey, and he was there to help him campaign for Senate.

One of the things that I want them to get out of that is that you know, they don't realize it. But I remember that day and they had everything blocked off that day right around here, around Roxbury crossing and around the Reggie Lewis. President, Obama came to Roxbury to be able to help someone get elected as a Democrat in the Senate because he was a senator himself, and he knew that the Senate needed to be with the president. And so, you know, we all know how that order goes on, and they chose Roxbury to be able to do that.

Today, you know Barack Obama now he's living in Martha's Vineyard, you know, he's a I think he really him into Michelle. Really, I believe they really like Boston, and they really like Massachusetts.

Aside from that, you know, I also speak about the places where they were educated where Barack came here, and he lived in Somerville. But he went to Harvard University. His wife went to Harvard, his daughter's at Harvard.

Greg: *This year, witnessing history for her students was as simple as the name change of a local square one, which more directly reflects the history and the culture of the area.*

Ms. Wright: My family's business existed in Dudley Square, now called Movie and Square. We had another business that was located there, and it sat there for 54 years. And so, in there, we also had a number of people who would come through there, and that place was not a barber shop. It was a gift shop in a convenience store And on that corner, it's right on the corner of Dudley and Warren Street and inside there we had many, many...We used to be 24 hours for years, and then eventually

we started to close after a certain time daily. But we were open every day, seven days a week. And so we were in business there for 54 years.

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Over time there we close our business there at that location, and an opportunity came up for a name change for the section of Roxbury that's that was called Dudley Square. And it was initiated by advocates of Roxbury to change that section of Dudley to Nubian Square, primarily because they...way we know that the name Dudley was very much associated with slave trade here in Boston and the Dudley name and the family name was just generational with that kind of transactions. I was going on here in Boston at that time.

And so when the our family's business was no longer located there, one of the names that they felt that would be a better name to represent the type of black Americans that have gone through their generationally and have businesses there was to change the name to Nubian square so that maybe 100 years from now, you know students or people would realize that there was an impact of people of African American descent who resided there who had businesses there, who bought their families items, who shopped there... Ah, we existed there. So today it's now officially been changed to Nubian Square. We voted on it. And the majority of the votes of the voters who exist here in Roxbury is what the City of Boston paid attention to, even though it was on the ballot for the whole city of Boston. The votes that came close or in Roxbury had a very high number of approval for the name change, which is why the name succeeded. The name change succeeded. So that is also some new history that I haven't told my students about yet. But they will learn that one day.

Greg: *Well, Roxbury is the heart of the city of Boston. Madison Park has always stood, is the heart of the Roxbury neighborhood*

Ms. Wright: They haven't had. The experience is that my family and I have had here, and they need to know you know, some of the history that has gone on here within Roxbury, the way that it used to be, the way that it is today, why these street names air here the way they are.

Also, Roxbury Community College, my father was one of the first part of the first class to graduate from there. It was not located over there where it is now, but he was in the first class and my uncle was in the second class. So, all around, Although I am academically preparing them to be able to succeed in their vocation and their professions and it academically, I am building in a lot of the local history that I hope that they will remember.

And you never know they might end up being employed around Nubian Square in their time. They might work on some construction projects there, and it would just really help build their connections. And they're English to know all these small facts that I'm teaching them here in class.

Roxbury is right in the middle of Boston, which is something that maybe a lot of people know or don't know. It's extremely central. You can get anywhere from here. Dudley is the most frequently used, transportation's in the entire MBTA. There are thousands and thousands of footsteps that passed through there, and that's the most frequently used T stop Dudley. No one would really think of that? But people pass through. They're not getting off. The bus is. But they're passing through there to be able to go wherever they're going.

And Ruggles is the most frequently used train station in the entire MBTA once again Roxbury. So Roxbury is extremely central. You get anywhere very convenient. And it has such rich history. Some of these are just some of the facts that I do tell my students also that, you know, look of where you are, where you're being educated, look at the value it was in the 80's, I was actually a student here at Madison Park. I had a radio and TV vocation. My vocational teacher was Mr. O'Brien and I had a

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very...the school at the time from Madison Park. Our school was really, really massive. Our school started at the O'Bryant, though O'Bryant did not exist there. They were in another location, so I took all my classes over in the what's now known the O'Bryant side. That was Madison Park and my vocation. I walked over here to this part of the building will be called Building Two for my vocation, and I went back and in the O'Bryant. That section was all academic and the red building was all bilingual and Building seven was on location. So that's the way that they had the sections divided.

I had an excellent experience here. It prepared...being on radio and TV as a vocation. I had to have proper English. I had to have proper grammar. I had to use it. We would get on the intercom in the morning and we would report some of the news from The Boston Herald. But we would only pick the first paragraph. My teacher would give us the newspapers and he would have us highlight the first paragraph of a story. And that was all we were last because we'll have a few minutes in the morning. And if you were going get on that microphone in that booth, you had to know how to read. You had to know how to speak articulately. You had to know how to use English. You had to have your strong English.

And my favorite subject here was English, actually, like, aced all I was...I don't know how I didn't end up in the AP class. I know. I think I got really nervous and my teachers were recommending me, and I was afraid I remember that because I was like, Oh, I don't know that sounded so intimidating to me. But I had teachers that were saying to me, "You know what? How do you What do you think about going to an AP English class?"

And so, it really prepared me for my job that I have today. I had excellent English teachers, had no idea I was going go into the field of education or in a field that was strongly related to English. But that was a talent that I had back then. And they nurtured that for me here, my English teachers here nurtured my talent for English, and now I'm teaching it as a language to those who need it, who have a very high need, which are the immigrants that we have here in Boston were very mixed here in Boston. We have a lot of different people from different countries, and I'm here to actually, now it feels great that I can tell my students that I was here and how in English was important to me here, even as an American. And here I am, giving it to you, and I'm happy to do that.

And I graduated at the age of 17 actually entered at 13. I was always a year younger than my peers here at Madison. So, I Yeah, I graduated and finished at 17 and stayed in Roxbury and started going to Northeastern.

Greg: *Ms, Wright considers herself extremely lucky to have attended Madison Park and owes much of her success later in life to the educational foundation established for her during high school.*

Ms. Wright: I found a lot of great success. I'm here, you know, being in a large environment. I was extremely introverted, but that was OK. I was fine here, surviving. The crowds didn't...the size didn't bother me, but it didn't prepare me for what I do. Now. Here I am, in front of you know, all these students and, you know, introverted me, bossing everybody around telling them what to do giving instruction, repeating myself, modeling the English that I need to be able to teach them when I'm speaking or when I'm writing, and I don't think I would have been as strong in my English if they had not been for my English teachers that I had on the high school level here at Madison.

I might have been happy and good at it from grades 1 to 8, maybe, but it wasn't until I got here that it really started to grow higher, and I started to do assignments that were bigger. And I started to really have some strong, strong, strong teachers here in Madison, and it prepared me for my vocation.

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They went hand in hand. You cannot be in mass media and not have a strong grasp on the English language. It's not going work, unless that's just your angle. But in general, you need that when you're producing the writing in English or the speaking, you need to have that strong background in it.

So definitely it was something that played a strong role in my life. My bachelor's degree is in a writing courses. I have a technical writing bachelor's degree. That's an English background, and then my Masters and Masters to teach English as a second language. I just kept it going in English in English, but all started right here in Madison Park.

Greg: *Ms. Wright hopes her own personal achievements will inspire her students so they understand that they can accomplish whatever they set out to do and can become whatever they want to be.*

Ms. Wright: And I hope that they walk away with knowing that, you know, if I work for something, I can achieve it. Other people before me did it, and they felt that they valued education to be able to get them where they wanted to go in life.

Sometimes when you work with students from other countries, if they've had gaps in their education, the future after high school, they're not really considering what they're going to be doing when they get out of high school. They are very much living in today and just going to school every day and showing up. If you speak to them about, you know, some of their futures after high school lets out. A lot of them really haven't considered it. A lot of them have not considered what they want to do. It's not that they don't want to do anything. They just really don't know about the opportunities that the country has, that Boston has for them to be able to jump into and pursue.

So some of these ideas and examples of some of the black Americans that I'm speaking about, hopefully we'll kind of generate some of the ideas that they want to do when they get out of Madison Park to go onto their vocation and succeed or go to a university, whichever they prefer. But just know that there's more. There's more after high school that you can go jump out there. You can take advantage of all the opportunities were preparing you for, especially with your English, use that, use that to succeed in whatever you're going reach the masses with both of your languages. That's another thing that I want them to be able to take away.

But to know that you can further your education after high school by going to a university. I had a discussion with them about what a PhD was, and did they realize the rank of what that was in academia and every head in the room said no. So, we went over that again to give the background knowledge of Okay, you started high school, and that's 12 years. Then after that, if you want, you can pursue an Associates. If you choose. After that, you go to a Masters or some people go straight to a Bachelor's degree. After that, if you choose, you go to a master's degree, and after that you'd go to the PhD and the PhD is the highest academic achievement one can go for.

I spell that out for them because I wanted them to see what Martin Luther King I was going for. He chose that level. He could have stopped at his bachelor's in Atlanta. We've been like, Okay, I'm going to reach masses now. And he went all the way to it for theology because he wanted to be the expert. I believe he did, and he wanted to be able to reach the masses, and he knew what he was going to be set out to do, and he prepared himself here for that. That's a really big job that he had, and he used Boston and Boston University to be able to prepare himself to be able to reach the country, to win a Nobel Peace Prize, to have a street named after him, a school named after him and all of these things that are going around the country in his name. And now Barack Obama is getting

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that. He's getting school names. He's getting roads named after him. Malcolm X The same thing. He's getting streets, names named after him.

And so, these are people that were, you know, they were educated either in life or they were educated academically. And both of them they did all of that here in Boston, which helps shape them.

And so that's the main thing that I want them to walk away with, that they can get out there and they can start their goals, makes the goals and choose the past that they want their in charge of that here. But there's so much opportunity here in this country, and there's a lot of opportunity in Roxbury and in Boston for that

Greg: *For Ms. Wright, one of the best parts of teaching English to students from all different backgrounds and cultures is knowing the students in her classroom maybe the next great leaders of the city, the state or even the nation.*

Ms. Wright: I said I want to see you all 10 20 years from now. And so I had him in my English class. And I remember you never, never, know who you're going have in front of you. And they all had a public school education just like you. They had an English class just like you. Nothing was given to them. I think they didn't inherit anything, they didn't have, you know, these parents who gave them this money so that they didn't know they earned everything that they ever had. They earned these street names and dedications, and they earned their degrees. They earned positions and politics. They earned all that. That means they worked for it. So that's what I would love for them to be able to get out of this. You know what? Why? I'm waiting for you all to finish so that I can see what you're going be doing. I will earn you got any earning things for yourself. I'm going be around here in Roxbury in the future, you know, and I'd love to be able to see them to succeed in what it is they choose to do.

Greg: *We are greatly indebted to Settenah Wright for sharing with us the lessons she has been teaching during Black History Month at Madison Park Technical High School We hope you've enjoyed this podcast from JFYNetworks. If you have any questions or comments, please navigate to our website, www.jfynet.org. We also invite you to follow us on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube. Thank you for listening to this podcast. This has been a production of JFYNetworks.*