THE VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Office of Public Relations
1834 Kongens Gade, Charlotte Amalie * St. Thomas * U.S. Virgin Islands 00802-6746
Telephone: 340.774.0100 Ext. 8136 (STT/STJ) 340.773.1095 Ext. 7064 (STX)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE **0706-26**
July 27, 2026

For More Information Contact:
Office of Public Relations
public.relations@vide.vi

VIDE Division of Virgin Islands Culture Education Announces Winners of the 2026 “We Can Be Heroes: Heroes Like Us" Virgin Islands History Challenge

The Virgin Islands Department of Education's Division of Virgin Islands Cultural Education (DVICE) proudly announces the winners of the 2026 "We Can Be Heroes: Heroes Like Us" Virgin Islands History Challenge, an interdisciplinary initiative that inspired students to discover and celebrate the Virgin Islanders whose leadership, creativity, courage, and service continue to shape the Territory.

Launched during Virgin Islands History Month, the challenge encouraged students to explore Virgin Islands history through comic books, genealogy, environmental research, digital storytelling, and visual arts while strengthening literacy, historical research, and creative expression. Students examined the lives of historical figures, contemporary leaders, family members, and community changemakers, demonstrating that heroism can be found throughout the Virgin Islands.

This year's initiative featured partnerships with the Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources' Division of Fish and Wildlife, where Director Dr. Nicole Angeli introduced students to careers in environmental conservation, and Virgin Islands graphic novelist Devon "Guzbez" Pelle, who shared how storytelling and illustration can preserve local history through graphic novels.

DVICE also continued its partnership with American Ancestors, providing Virgin Islands public schools with complimentary access to genealogy and historical records, including Danish West Indies census collections, giving students opportunities to research family histories and explore the everyday people who helped shape the Territory.

The Division extends special thanks to Educational Complex High School, particularly educator Cleon Lynch and her students, for embracing the challenge as an interdisciplinary classroom project. Appreciation is also extended to Crucian Gold for sponsoring student prizes and the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority (WAPA) for supporting the initiative's environmental education component.

2026 Virgin Islands History Challenge Winners

- Milagros Rodriguez
- Anayra Lang
- Dariany Keyes
- Monifa Huggins
- Azyrah Joseph

Stephanie Chalana Brown, State Director of the Division of Virgin Islands Cultural Education, said the challenge demonstrates how cultural education prepares students to become researchers, innovators, artists, scientists, and engaged citizens. "Our goal is for students to recognize that the Virgin Islands is filled with remarkable stories waiting to be discovered. Whether researching family history through genealogy, documenting marine ecosystems, creating digital comics, or studying community leaders, students are developing the research, technology, communication, and creative skills that will prepare them for future careers while preserving the history of our Territory," Brown said.

The Division congratulates all participating students, educators, families, and community partners for making the 2026 Virgin Islands History Challenge a success.

Additional lesson plans, classroom resources, and project materials are available on the Division of Virgin Islands Cultural Education's GoOpenUSVI microsite: https://goopenusvi.vide.vi/courseware/lesson/769/overview.

###