

St. Croix Avis

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Power of poetry

Workshop teaches students how to use creativity to tackle health issues

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ST. CROIX — "Be the change you want to see in the world," said Gandhi.

Dr. Imani Ma'at, from Atlanta, Georgia, is trying to make a change, and in result, 15 local high school students met on the second floor of the Florence Williams Public Library on Saturday to exercise their creative senses in hopes to find a solution to issues such as underaged sex; HIV/AIDS; low self-esteem; smoking drinking and drug use; violence; mental health and obesity.

Ma'at has developed a workbook, "Promoting Healthy Knowledge, Attitudes and Behaviors Among Youth Using Haiku and Creative Expression," to aid educators in conducting workshops around the idea of Haiku poetry and a healthier lifestyle for the under served teenager and teenagers of color.

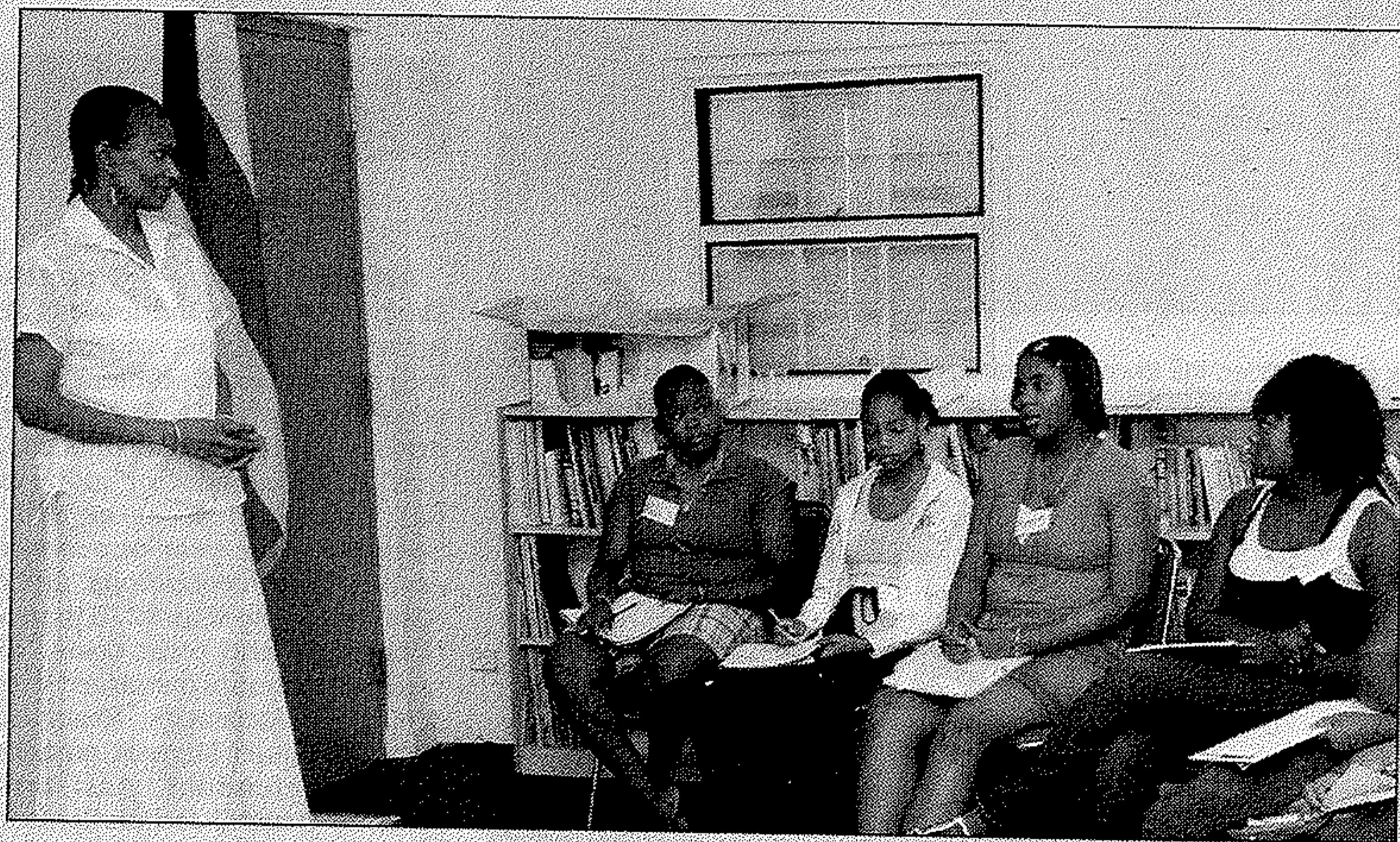
"I believe everyone is an artist," said Ma'at to the students on the subject of creativity. Ma'at described rap, writing and song, among others, as, "art forms that free the soul."

"If I were you, I/Would do Haiku in order/To set myself free," is one Haiku Ma'at wrote for the introduction of her book.

The workshop is entitled, "Healthy Haiku for Youth," in which Ma'at has changed the traditional form of a Haiku — structured poetry using words to describe a season and how life relates to the changes of seasons — to a form of expression that can relay a person's feelings and beliefs as it relates to the eight teenage issues.

The 14 girls and one boy, Ajeeb "Mouse" Prince, 10th grader from St. Croix Central High School, broke into three groups and were given the opportunity to be creative and write their own Haiku as it relates to violence, sex and drugs, three topics proven to be the most influential on local teens.

"Young black youth are taking each other out," said Ma'at. "This



Participants of the "Healthy Haiku for Youth" workshop talk with Dr. Imani Ma'at, author and workshop facilitator (far left), Saturday at the Florence Williams Public Library in Christiansted.

Kristin Duncan

is something we can stop if we can learn to love ourselves and the people who look like us."

The students then shared their personal stories.

"If she lives here with me, and I get in a fight with a person from a different neighborhood, she is going to jump on for me or else she can't be my friend anymore. That's just how it is," said one female teen about protecting boundaries.

Ma'at then shared some of her Haiku's on violence: "When he pulled back his/Fist, he stared at the lifeless/Face of his best friend."

Another child told a personal story of a boy, so close to her and her family she calls him brother, that developed a smoking habit.

She said, "I saw when his dad flicked the cigarette butt on the ground and he picked it up and tried to smoke it when he was in second or third grade. I asked him then what he was doing and he told me nothing. Now he is an 8th grader in alternative education and he is smoking weed."

The conversation continued,

"I've heard boys say that it [smoking weed] will turn them into businessmen, if they get into the "distribution business." But then I've heard them say the white stuff brings in more money."

The students involved in this workshop were born in the 1990s, when HIV/AIDS had already been defined as an epidemic in the U.S. Ma'at explained to them that the numbers are rising as it pertains to AIDS cases in America, specifically in African-Americans. In addition, the children say teenage pregnancy is becoming a "fashion statement" as school uniforms are now being designed to accommodate pregnant students and make them look stylish.

Ma'at wrote Haiku to address these issues, too:

"AIDS, now that's something/You get when you think you've got/ It all together!" and, "You get little, when/ You give it up, and it ain't/Appreciated."

"The view of the self has three dimensions: mind, body and spirit, and for teens the physical is

more prevalent. Understand that everyone looks different and that you do not need to change your natural features in order to look good. How you present yourself and how you see yourself is how others will perceive you."

One final Haiku for students to reflect on is as follows:

"Reinventing my-/Self, is the best way to fly/Into my future."

Both the Virgin Islands Perinatal, Inc. and the Virgin Islands Commission on the Status of Women made Saturday's workshop possible and Barbara Lee-Jackson, a member of both organizations, said that this workshop was just one more tool and one more resource to empower youth.

"When things are put in an individual's own words, it has a bigger impact on the what they choose, and the way they behave," Lee-Jackson said.

St. Croix Avis readers will get a chance to read Haikus written by the students during this workshop on the editorial pages at a later date.