

INDIA New England

Meru starts program on maritime trade between India, Mass.

With new grants, foundation expands focus, looks to train teachers on India units

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LEXINGTON, Mass. - Did you know that there existed a flourishing maritime trade between Salem, Mass. and India in the late 18th century?

And that a collection of art brought to Salem through that trade was the precursor of the Peabody Essex Museum?

Children from the Lexington Public School system's third grade will know these facts and many more through the efforts of the Meru Educational Foundation.

With a \$5,000 grant from the Massachusetts Foundation for Humanities and a \$12,930 grant from the Lexington Education Foundation, the group has introduced "Maritime Trade between Salem, Mass. and India" as a pilot program in Lexington's Bowman and Harrington Elementary schools this academic year.

Another new unit that Meru has taken to Lexington schools this year is "Gandhi, Civil Rights and Martin Luther King, Jr." for children of the fifth grade.

"The unit talks about what we can learn from India, and talks more about peace and non-violence," said Vanita Shastri, executive director of the foundation.

"The students like the notion of non-cooperation."

The foundation brings to schools topics related to India which are relevant to school social studies curricula.

For kindergarten, the group has a module on the Panchatantra stories, and volunteers act out the stories for children.

For the first grade, Meru educators talk about Diwali for their unit on festivals of the world.

Each presentation takes about an hour and a half, and there are five Meru educators to help Shastri with the sessions.

Eventually, Shastri hopes to become more involved in professional development of teachers, so that they handle the units themselves.

"We want to provide the teachers the resources, materials and advice so that they can cover the topic themselves," said Shastri.

The group is taking the training program to Lexington and Acton - Boxborough through a \$5,000 grant from the Bank of America.

Meru Educational Foundation is a non-profit organization that strives to promote the arts, history and culture of India.

For more information, visit www.merufoundation.org.

<http://www.mfh.org/grants/funded/boston.htm>