Bringing Boatbuilding and Adventure Rowing to Wiscasset Schools: The Whitby Pilot Gig

This program aims to introduce unique and challenging marine experiences to high school students in Wiscasset Schools by incorporating the use of traditional Whitby Pilot Gigs. These sleek, six-oared wooden boats, originating from the rugged coast of Yorkshire, England, offer a thrilling and demanding form of open-water rowing. And the program will launch with Wiscasset students building the first boat from a kit.



A High School Boatbuilding Program in Wiscasset

This program aims to provide our high school students with a unique and engaging learning experience by introducing them to the art and craft of wooden boatbuilding. Rooted in Maine's rich maritime heritage, the program will offer students a hands-on opportunity to learn valuable skills in woodworking, craftsmanship, and teamwork while building a functional wooden boat.

Boatbuilding Program:

- **Develop Practical Skills:** Students will acquire a wide range of practical skills, including:
    - **Woodworking and Composite Techniques:** Starting with a ‘stitch and glue’ boat kit, students will emerge with an assembled hull by the end of the spring semester. Adult volunteers will assist in instruction and to help ensure the boat get’s launched by summer.
    - **Learning to follow Detailed Written Instructions:** Each student will receive a detailed manual for building the boat. They will learn to read the instructions and interpret them into reality, valuable skills for the workplace.
- **Foster Teamwork and Collaboration:** The boatbuilding process requires close collaboration, communication, and problem-solving among students.
- **Instill a Sense of Pride and Accomplishment:** Building a boat from a kit is a challenging and rewarding endeavor that fosters a strong sense of accomplishment and pride in students involved and for the school as a whole.
- **Connect with Maine's Maritime Heritage:** The program will provide students with a deeper understanding and appreciation for Maine's rich maritime history and boatbuilding traditions.
- **Explore STEM Concepts:** Boatbuilding integrates various STEM concepts, including physics, geometry, math and engineering.

Program Components:

1. **Safety and Training:**
    - **Safety Training:** All students will undergo comprehensive safety training, including:

        - **Tool & Material Safety:** Proper use and maintenance of tools and materials.
        - **Workshop Safety:** Safe work practices within the boatbuilding workshop.
        - **Personal Protective Equipment:** Proper use of safety gear, such as eye protection, ear protection, and dust masks.
2. **Boat Design and Planning:**
    - **Boat Selection:** The program will build a 32 foot rowing boat which will serve Maine people for a generation to come.
    - **Project Design and Planning:** Students will learn about project design and construction, valuable for future endeavors in many fields
    - **Material Selection:** Students will learn about different types of wood and composites used in boatbuilding and their appropriate use and applications.
3. **Construction Process:**
    - **Construction Technique:** Students will learn stitch and glue construction as well as becoming familiar with boatbuilding terms such as frame, stem, planking, sternpost, ribs, and keel.
    - **Finishing Touches:** Students will learn to finish the boat, including sanding, fairing, painting, and rigging.
4. **Community Engagement:**
    - **Local Partnerships:** The boatbuilding program will attract collaboration with local boatbuilders, businesses, maritime museums, and historical societies to provide mentorship and access to resources.
    - **Community Demonstrations:** The program will help to attract community support for rowing demonstrations to showcase the students' work and share their learning experiences while bringing adults in and teaching them to row.
    - **Volunteer Opportunities:** Engage local **adult volunteers** with boatbuilding expertise to assist with instruction and mentorship.

Expected Outcomes:

- **Improved Practical Skills:** Students will develop a wide range of valuable woodworking and boatbuilding skills but they will also develop skills that align with the **Maine Learning Results** ensuring the program will be valuable and accreditable.
- **Enhanced Teamwork and Collaboration:** Students will demonstrate improved teamwork, communication, and problem-solving abilities.
- **Increased Confidence and Self-Esteem:** Students will gain a strong sense of accomplishment and pride in their work.
- **Deeper Appreciation for Maine's Heritage:** Students will develop a greater understanding and appreciation for Maine's maritime history and boatbuilding traditions.
- **Positive School Climate:** The program will foster a positive school climate by providing a unique and engaging learning experience.

Conclusion:

This boatbuilding program offers a unique and valuable educational opportunity for high school students. By combining craftsmanship and ‘place based’ learning with modern educational principles, the program will provide students with practical skills, foster teamwork, and instill a deep appreciation for Maine's rich maritime heritage.

Program Goals:

- **Develop Physical Fitness:** Rowing in a pilot gig is a demanding full-body workout, improving cardiovascular health, strength, endurance, and coordination.

- **Foster Teamwork and Leadership:** The success of each rowing crew relies on synchronized effort, clear communication, and effective leadership.
- **Build Confidence and Resilience:** Navigating open water in a small boat requires courage, problem-solving skills, and the ability to adapt to changing conditions.
- **Instill a Love for the Marine Environment:** By experiencing the power and beauty of the ocean firsthand, students will gain a deeper appreciation for coastal ecosystems and the importance of conservation.
- **Provide a Unique and Engaging Extracurricular Activity:** The program will offer a distinctive and exciting alternative to traditional high school sports, fostering a sense of camaraderie and shared passion.

Rowing Program:

1. **Safety and Training:**
    - **Comprehensive Safety Training:** All participants will undergo rigorous safety training, including:
        - **Water Safety:** Basic swimming skills, cold water survival techniques, and rescue procedures.
        - **Boat Handling:** Proper boat handling techniques, including launching, landing, and maneuvering in various conditions.
        - **Seamanship:** Basic navigation, weather awareness, and understanding of tidal currents.
        - **Risk Management:** Identifying and mitigating potential hazards, such as strong currents, fog, and sudden weather changes.
    - **Rowing Technique:** Experienced coaches will provide instruction on proper rowing technique, including:
        - **Ergometer Training:** Indoor rowing sessions to develop strength, endurance, and rowing mechanics.
        - **On-Water Training:** Progressive on-water training, starting with calm conditions and gradually progressing to more challenging waters.
        - **Crew Coordination:** Emphasis on synchronized rowing, communication, and effective teamwork.
2. **Boat Acquisition and Maintenance:**
    - **Acquisition of Whitby Pilot Gigs:** The program will acquire a fleet of high-quality Whitby Pilot Gigs, potentially through a combination of fundraising, grants, and community partnerships.
    - **Boat Maintenance:** Students will be involved in the ongoing maintenance and care of the boats, including:
        - **Basic Repairs:** Learning basic repair techniques for minor damage and wear and tear.
        - **Cleaning and Storage:** Proper cleaning and storage procedures to ensure the longevity of the boats.
3. **Community Engagement:**
    - **Local Partnerships:** Collaborate with local marine organizations, such as coastal conservancies, fishing cooperatives, and maritime museums, to provide educational opportunities and mentorship.

    - **Community Outreach:** Organize community rowing events and demonstrations to raise awareness and generate excitement about the program.
    - **Volunteer Opportunities:** Engage local volunteers to assist with coaching, safety support, and boat maintenance.
4. **Competitive Opportunities:**
    - **Local Regattas:** Participate in local rowing regattas and competitions to provide a competitive outlet for the students.
    - **Regional and National Events:** Explore opportunities to participate in regional and national pilot gig racing events.

Expected Outcomes:

- **Improved Physical Fitness:** Students will demonstrate significant improvements in cardiovascular health, strength, and endurance.
- **Enhanced Teamwork and Leadership Skills:** Students will develop strong teamwork, communication, and leadership skills.
- **Increased Confidence and Resilience:** Students will gain confidence in their abilities to overcome challenges and adapt to new situations.
- **Deeper Appreciation for the Marine Environment:** Students will develop a greater understanding and respect for the ocean and its ecosystems.
- **Positive School Climate:** The program will foster a positive school climate by providing a unique and engaging extracurricular activity.

Conclusion:

This program has the potential to be a transformative experience for high school students, providing them with valuable life skills, a deep appreciation for the marine environment, and a lifelong passion for rowing. By incorporating the unique challenges and rewards of Whitby Pilot Gig rowing, this program will offer a truly distinctive and enriching educational experience.