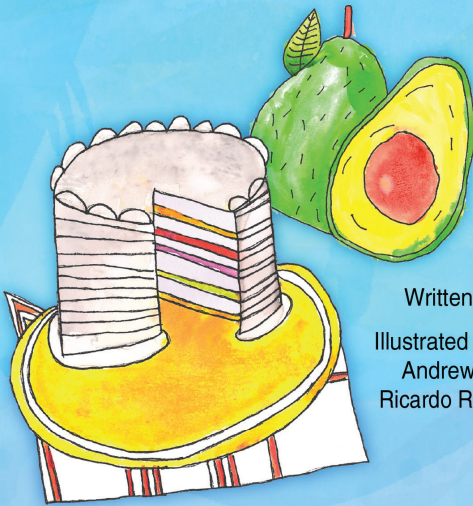


ISLAND ALPHABET:



DISCOVERING the Virgin Islands

Letter by Letter



Written by Angela Golden Bryan

Illustrated by 3rd Graders from Alfredo
Andrews, Claude O. Markoe and
Ricardo Richards Elementary Schools,
St. Croix

ISLAND ALPHABET:
DISCOVERING THE VIRGIN ISLANDS LETTER BY LETTER

STUDY GUIDE

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Dear Parents, Teachers, and Educators,

Each letter in this study guide corresponds to a page in the paperback version of *Island Alphabet: Discovering the Virgin Islands Letter by Letter*. Use the questions and activities to spark discussion, and enjoy the fun facts about Virgin Islands culture and history.

This book was born from the creativity and curiosity of third-grade students on the island of St. Croix. As part of a cultural education initiative, children from Claude O. Markoe, Alfredo Andrews, and Ricardo Richards Elementary Schools were invited to choose a letter, explore a piece of their heritage, and bring it to life through watercolor illustrations and brief research. The result is a beautiful tapestry of local history, language, and tradition—all seen through the eyes of our young storytellers.

The purpose of this guide is to offer questions and activities that:

- Reinforce reading comprehension
- Spark cultural curiosity
- Encourage creative expression
- Strengthen vocabulary and research skills

Whether you're using this book in a classroom, at home, or in a community setting, I pray it inspires wonder, pride, and a desire to learn more. Let's celebrate our islands—letter by letter.

With gratitude,
Angela Golden Bryan
Author & Cultural Ambassador

This guide is designed to accompany the book
Island Alphabet: Discovering the Virgin Islands Letter by Letter.
To enjoy the full rhymes and student illustrations, purchase your copy at
www.FireburnHeritage.org/products.



A – Page 7

Question/Activity:

Avocados grow in the Virgin Islands – What local dishes have you seen or tasted that include avocado? Have you ever seen an avocado tree?

Fun Fact:

In the Virgin Islands, avocados are often called “pear” or “alligator pear” because of their shape and rough skin. These local varieties are usually much larger than the small Hass avocados found in many grocery stores!

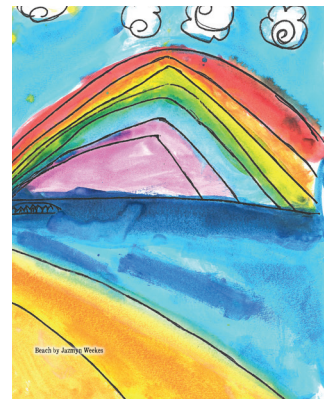
B – Page 9

Question/Activity:

The Virgin Islands are home to some of the most beautiful beaches in the world. What's your favorite beach memory? Can you describe what you see, hear, and feel when you're there?

Fun Fact:

The Virgin Islands are home to dozens of beautiful beaches, each with its own unique charm! On St. Croix, you can take a boat to Buck Island, where Turtle Beach is famous for its white sand and snorkeling reefs. Cinnamon Bay on St. John offers hiking trails and water sports in a scenic national park. And on St. Thomas, Magens Bay is a favorite for swimming, relaxing, and enjoying calm, turquoise water.



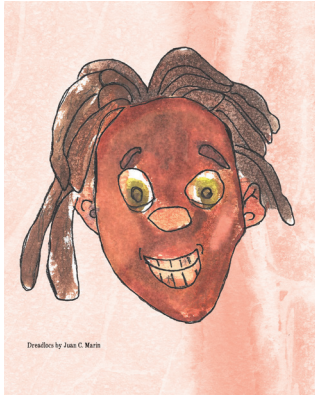
C – Page 11

Question/Activity:

The page shows coconuts. Have students list all the ways coconuts can be used (food, drinks, baskets) and share their ideas.

Fun Fact:

Coconuts were brought to the Caribbean centuries ago—likely from Southeast Asia—and became a staple in island life. In the Virgin Islands, coconut water is a refreshing drink, and coconut tart is a beloved dessert served especially during holidays.



D – Page 13

Question/Activity:

Dreadlocks are depicted. What do you think this hairstyle means to some people, and have you seen it in our community?

Fun Fact:

Dreadlocks have cultural roots in the Caribbean, often associated with Rastafarian heritage and reggae music. In the VI, natural hairstyles like dreadlocks are celebrated as part of cultural identity.

E – Page 15

Question/Activity:

The page is about Emancipation. What does emancipation mean? Why is Emancipation Day (July 3, 1848) important in Virgin Islands history?

Fun Fact:

Emancipation Day marks the freedom (liberation) of enslaved people in the Danish West Indies (now USVI) on July 3, 1848. It's a public holiday celebrated with pride, remembering leaders like Moses "Buddhoe" Gottlieb who helped win freedom.



F – Page 17

Question/Activity:

Fireburn is mentioned. What do you think happened during the Fireburn of 1878, and why would people protest by burning sugar plantations?

Fun Fact:

The Fireburn was a labor revolt on St. Croix in 1878 when workers (led largely by women known as "Queens" like Queen Mary Thomas) burned plantation fields to demand better wages and rights. It's a key event in VI history showing bravery against injustice.



G – Page 19

Question/Activity:

A goat is shown. How do goats affect island life – what might farmers use them for, and have you seen wild goats around?

Fun Fact:

Goats were introduced to the Virgin Islands by European settlers. They're common on all three islands, where some roam free; goats provide milk and meat and have even helped keep brush under control.

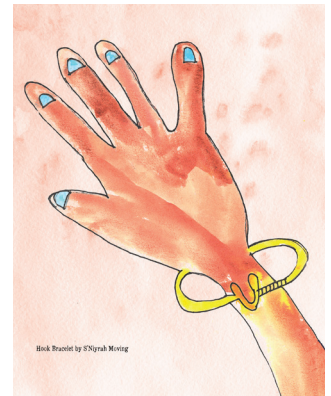
H – Page 21

Question/Activity:

Look at the hook bracelet on this page. What do you notice about its shape and design? What do you think it might symbolize?

Fun Fact:

The famous Crucian hook bracelet, created in St. Croix in the 1960s, is a symbol of love and unity. According to local legend, wearing the hook facing inward means your heart is “hooked” (taken), while outward means you’re open to love.



I – Page 23

Question/Activity:

Iguanas appear on this page. Why do you think iguanas like living in the Virgin Islands, and are they native here?

Fun Fact:

Iguanas are actually invasive in the Virgin Islands—they likely arrived by accident, possibly escaping from pet traders. Today, they thrive in the wild and are often seen sunbathing in trees or swimming near shorelines. They're now a common sight on all three main islands.



J – Page 25

Question/Activity:

The Jackfruit is one huge fruit! What other tropical fruits do we enjoy in the VI, and have you ever seen or tasted a jackfruit?

Fun Fact:

Jackfruit is one of the world's largest fruits and is native to South and South-east Asia. While it's not originally from the Caribbean, it can grow in our tropical climate. In the Virgin Islands, you're more likely to enjoy local fruits like mangoes, papayas, or soursop, but jackfruit can sometimes be found and is popular with vegetarians as a meat substitute because of its texture.

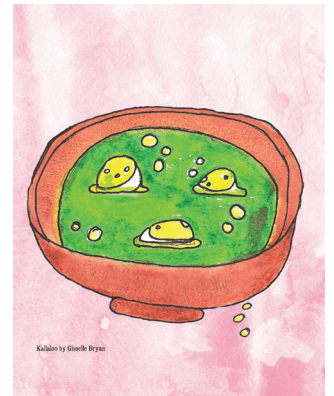
K – Page 27

Question/Activity:

Kallaloo is shown (a famous soup). Have the class draw a "soup pot" and fill it with labeled ingredients they think go into Virgin Islands kallaloo.

Fun Fact:

Kallaloo (often spelled Callaloo) is a traditional Crucian dish, especially eaten on Old Year's Night (New Year's Eve) for good luck. It's a thick green soup made with leafy greens, okra, seafood or meat, and herbs – a true taste of African heritage in VI cooking.



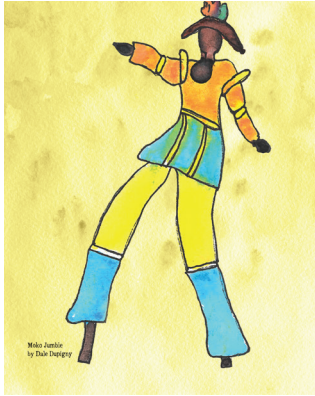
L – Page 29

Question/Activity:

The Leatherback sea turtle is featured. Why do sea turtles come onto our beaches, and how should we behave if we see one?

Fun Fact:

The Virgin Islands are important nesting grounds for leatherback turtles, the largest sea turtles on Earth (they can weigh over 1,000 lbs!). At Sandy Point on St. Croix, leatherbacks nest each year – locals know to keep beaches dark and quiet at night during nesting season to protect these gentle giants.



M – Page 31

Question/Activity:

Moko Jumbies are the tall figures on stilts. Where might you see a Moko Jumbie perform, and what do you think they represent?

Fun Fact:

Moko Jumbies are colorful stilt dancers who perform in parades and festivals across the Virgin Islands. With their tall costumes and skillful moves, they bring excitement and energy to events like Carnival and cultural celebrations. Today, many young performers train in Moko Jumbie arts as a way to keep local traditions alive.

N – Page 33

Question/Activity:

A nurse shark appears underwater. What do you know about nurse sharks – are they aggressive or mostly harmless, and would you swim near one?

Fun Fact:

Nurse sharks are common in the shallow waters around the VI. They are mostly gentle and often lie still on the seafloor; divers and snorkelers can sometimes get close without trouble. They got their name from the sucking sound they make - like a nursing baby!



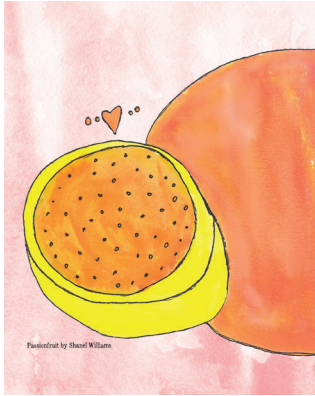
O – Page 35

Question/Activity:

The page shows okra. Do you eat okra at home? What dishes have okra, and why do you think people brought okra to the VI long ago?

Fun Fact:

Okra came to the Virgin Islands from Africa, carried by enslaved ancestors. It's a key ingredient in kallaloo soup and other Caribbean stews. Okra's thickening power and nutrition made it a staple in VI kitchens, and it remains popular in dishes today.



P – Page 37

Question/Activity:

Passionfruit vines produce yummy juice. If possible, show a real passionfruit – let kids describe its look, smell, and imagine its taste, then talk about how local drinks are made from it.

Fun Fact:

Passionfruit is a tropical vine that grows in the VI and wider Caribbean. Its tart-sweet pulp is used for juices, desserts, and jams. In the VI, passionfruit juice or punch is a favorite treat – plus, its flower is incredibly beautiful, often attracting butterflies.

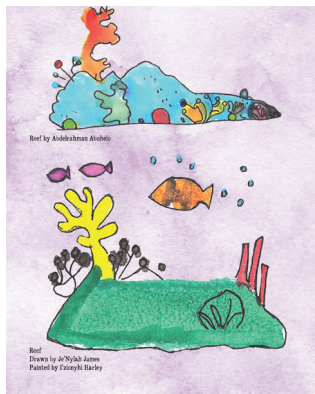
Q – Page 39

Question/Activity:

Who was Queen Mary? Why do you think Mary Thomas earned the title “Queen,” and what did she fight for?

Fun Fact:

Queen Mary Thomas was an important leader during the 1878 Fireburn on St. Croix. Along with three other women nicknamed “Queens,” she led the charge for workers’ rights by protesting harsh conditions. Today a major road in St. Croix is named Queen Mary Highway in her honor.



R – Page 41

Question/Activity:

The coral reef is illustrated. Have students name as many creatures as they can that live on a coral reef in the VI, and maybe sketch a reef scene with fish, corals, and turtles.

Fun Fact:

The USVI is home to vibrant coral reefs, like those in St. John’s Virgin Islands National Park. Coral reefs are living communities of tiny animals called coral polyps. They protect our shorelines and host countless fish, lobsters, and other marine life – while snorkeling, you can see colorful coral like brain coral and fan coral up close.



S – Page 43

Question/Activity:

The ruins of a sugar mill are shown. Why do we have so many old sugar mill ruins, and what do they tell us about life long ago in the VI?

Fun Fact:

Sugar mill ruins found on all three major islands are remnants of the 1700s–1800s plantation era, when sugar cane farming and slavery dominated the economy. Each stone windmill or chimney you see was once part of a sugar factory – today they remind us of our history and have become symbols on the landscape.

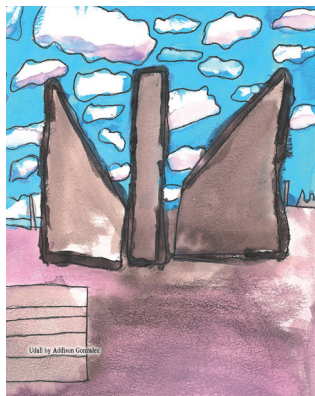
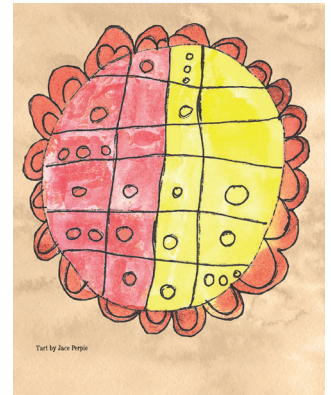
T – Page 45

Question/Activity:

It's all about tarts! Have each student draw or color a picture of their favorite tart (guava, pineapple, coconut, etc.), then share what makes it their favorite dessert.

Fun Fact:

“Tart” in the Virgin Islands means a filled pastry pie. Common fillings include guava, coconut, pineapple, or mango. VI families pass down secret tart recipes and these treats especially show up at Christmas and holidays – a sweet taste of local tradition.



U – Page 47

Question/Activity:

Point Udall is the place where the sun rises first in the United States—and it's right here in the Virgin Islands, on St. Croix! Have you ever been there or seen a picture of it? Try drawing what you think the sunrise looks like from that special spot.

Fun Fact:

Point Udall, located on the east end of St. Croix, is where the sun first rises over U.S. territory each day. There's a stone sundial called the Millennium Monument there, built to mark the beginning of the year 2000.



V – Page 49

Question/Activity:

A Vienna cake is shown – have you tasted a Vienna cake or seen one at a celebration? What makes this cake special?

Fun Fact:

The Vienna cake is a Crucian specialty—a rich, multi-layered yellow cake often filled with guava or pineapple jam. Despite its fancy name, it's not from Austria! The name “Vienna” may have been used to make it sound elegant, but the cake itself is uniquely local to St. Croix. Over time, it became a favorite for weddings, Christmas, and graduations—a sweet symbol of celebration and island pride. Today, you'll also find Vienna cake enjoyed on St. Thomas and St. John, as its popularity has spread across the Virgin Islands.

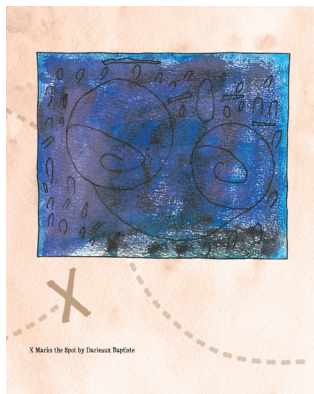
W – Page 51

Question/Activity:

Whelks (wilks) are sea snails. Would you try eating one? How do you think people collect whelks along the shore?

Fun Fact:

Caribbean whelks – called “wilks” in the VI – are harvested on rocky coasts especially after rough seas. In the Virgin Islands, they're cooked in soups or stews. Because over-harvesting can be a problem, there are sometimes regulations to protect these tasty snails so they remain part of the culture and ecosystem.



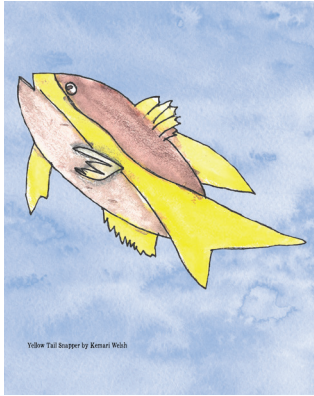
X – Page 53

Question/Activity:

X Marks the Spot shows the petroglyph carvings on St. John. If you made a treasure map of the Virgin Islands, what special places would you mark with an X? Or draw your own map and include at least one hidden treasure—like a waterfall, a beach, or an ancient carving.

Fun Fact:

Along the trails of St. John's Virgin Islands National Park, you can find ancient petroglyphs—rock carvings made by the island's early people. These symbols, found near freshwater pools, are believed to be hundreds of years old and connect us to the history and traditions of the island's first inhabitants.



Y – Page 55

Question/Activity:

The Yellowtail snapper is a fish on that page. Have you ever been fishing or eaten fish here? What do you notice about the snapper's colors?

Fun Fact:

Yellowtail snapper is a bright reef fish common in Virgin Islands waters. Locals often enjoy it grilled or fried whole—it's a staple of island cuisine. As its name suggests, it has a yellow stripe and tail. Fishermen commonly catch them just off the reefs, and fishing is such a big part of life in the Virgin Islands that some festivals and tournaments have celebrated this tradition over the years.

Z – Page 57

Question/Activity:

Z is for Zest. The word zest means energy, excitement, and love for life. What do you love most about life in the Virgin Islands?

Draw your own picture that shows your zest for life!

Fun Fact:

Each island in the Virgin Islands celebrates in its own unique way! St. Croix is known for its Crucian Christmas Festival, held in December and January. St. Thomas hosts Carnival in April and May. These colorful events include music, dancing, food, and parades—expressing the islands' zest for life in beautiful ways.



**You've reached the end of the alphabet—
but your learning doesn't stop here!**

There's always more to discover about culture, community, and history—whether it's your own or someone else's. Keep asking questions, sharing stories, and celebrating all the things that make each place unique and meaningful. **You are part of that story—letter by letter.**

Acknowledgments

This study guide was made possible thanks to the generous support of the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands (CFVI) with funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH).

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Together, we're preserving our heritage—
one letter at a time.

