

# Maple Leaf Student Exchange 2008



*It was truly the experience of a lifetime!*

Through the generosity of the Maple Leaf Foundation, East Boston High School sent five students and one chaperone to the arctic island community of Sanikiluaq, Nunavut Province, Canada from March 17 to March 21, 2008. The EBHS students, Hemel Gil, Shawn Tortorici, Alejandro Bonilla, Erica Downey and Dennis Wright visited the Nuiyak School, a 270-student, K-12 school. The students and chaperone learned much from this Inuit community, and came away with true appreciation for how their counterparts live and work in a very different environment.

The EBHS students took part in an ice-fishing expedition, traveling by SkiDoo and sleds to Kataapik, an area where Inuit lived between 1920 and 1965. Kataapik is located 8–10 miles outside of the community limits. They also learned to make traditional Inuit crafts, witness a seal skinning, and function in near daily blizzard conditions.

*Sam Eqilaaq, Erica Downey, Hemel Gil, Shawn Tortorici, Alejandro Bonilla Jr., and Dennis Wright at the igloo.*



Zoo, the Museum of Science, the IMAX, a Showcase Cinema, Good Times, Boston Trolley Tour, Harbor Tour and Santarpio's Pizza. And they also found time to fit in a couple of visits to local malls!

It was exciting to watch the Inuit students see the city, and look at the sites. They were especially enamored of the seal tank at the Aquarium. It was the first time they were able to see seals swim: their experience limits their sightings to hunting, and they had never looked at a seal submerged in water, or watch them use flippers to balance in the water.

The Inuit students from the island and one chaperone visited our school and community from May 6 to May 11, 2008. The students, Sam Crow Equilaaq, Abillie Amitook, Jason Iqaluq, Charlie Tookalook and Lizzie Quatuq (most of whom have never gone further than Kuujjaarapik, a main land community about 45-minutes away by airplane) and their chaperone, Lisi Kavik, enjoyed many Boston sites and sounds.

From the moment they landed at Logan International, the students were squired around the city. They experienced Blue Man Group, visited the Canadian Consulate, the Prudential Tower, the NE Aquarium, the Franklin Park



*Hemel Gil and Abillie Amitook making bolas from twine and seal skin.*



## *An excerpt from emails sent home describing our trip*

...During our last night in Sanikiluaq, we met one of the elders. She is, at 76-years old, still hunting, fishing, living off the land when she camps, and serving as an educator for Inuit children and any visitors who come to the community.

She spoke of the trials her people endured and how they succeeded -- from the climate to government indifference to the Inuit generations long ago, and everything in between. She showed us how every part of a kill (seal, polar bear, fish, etc.) was used, and nothing wasted. Even sea gull throat linings were used as thread to help sew skins for clothing or shelter. She spoke in Inuit, and was mesmerizing and inspiring.

We visited the igloo on Friday morning, our last day on the island. I can't begin to describe the cold weather that greeted the day. The EBHS students had wanted to sleep in the igloo during our stay, but the previous wet weather made it unstable, and Lisi and some of elders did not feel it was safe. I managed to crawl inside the structure and take a few pictures before leaving. I have a shot of the kids at the igloo -- it looks like we are on some distant planet, and that's what it felt like as well.