

# Ujima Club

By Rebecca Dyckman, Cold Spring Harbor High School, New York

My cousin, Katie Hahn, is a head of the Ujima club at Dalton School in New York City. Ujima is an initiative in community activism between the Dalton School and schools in Kenya. Ujima raises money to send high school students in Kenya to school.

In Kenya, primary school education is free, but in high school, you have to pay school fees. The majority of the population cannot afford to pay the fees. There is still some political unrest from time to time in Kenya, and there is a lot of corruption in the government.

During the summer of 2006, Katie went to South Africa and participated in the Summer Academy at Cape Town. For part of this program, she went to volunteer for a few days at a community center in South Africa. I had the pleasure of interviewing Katie about her experience volunteering at this community center. The community center was in a black township called Kayelitsha near Cape Town. In parts of South Africa, there is still a big separation between whites and blacks. Each has separate townships that they live in. The black townships are on the outskirts of big cities. The people who live in them are very poor, and they live in shacks. The people cannot afford to move out.

The community center Katie worked at is called J. L. Zwane. The children who attend the center range in age from eight to fourteen, although some children brought much younger siblings along with them. The community center is very nice. It receives government funding, but they don't have very many programs for children. The focus of the community center is on helping AIDS victims. Every night, the community center serves dinner to the people who have AIDS and are too sick to work. They also have support groups for them.

Since the focus at the community center was not at all on the children, Katie, and the rest of her group volunteered to help the children. Many of the children are orphans or are forced to act like a parent and take care of their siblings because their parents are too sick to work. Some of their parents have AIDS. A lot of them are raised by their grandmothers, and some of them have to live with relatives because their parents' shacks are too small to house them all.

The children go to the community center after school. There is a room where the children can sit and do their homework. They were so happy to have all the volunteers there because they don't get a lot of one on one attention. They have to act like adults. Many of the children can't attend the community center because they have to take care of their siblings, make dinner, and partake in household work.

The volunteers taught the children several things. For example, they taught the children how to use the computers. The computers had been donated to the community center, but no one knew how to use them. Katie taught the children a little about how to type and use Microsoft Word and how to use the internet. She also did art projects with the children. "It was very inspiring to talk to the kids because they have a lot working against them, but they still dream very big. A lot of them say that they want to be doctors or lawyers; one girl said she wanted to be a singer. Despite



*Members of the Summer Academy at Cape Town volunteer at a community center called Kayelitsha*

the circumstances they live in, they are still very ambitious.

It was sad though, because even though they were very ambitious, you know that most of them wouldn't be able to get out of the townships because they have no opportunities," said Katie.

Since the group of volunteers who worked with the children were from many different countries, they made up a dance to perform for the children that incorporated different dance moves from all the different countries that they were from.

The children were very happy and cheerful. They were glad that the volunteers' focus was on them. The children danced for the volunteers as well, and they tried to teach them songs and games. Not all of the children spoke English. For most of them, their first language was Xhosa, which is their tribal language. Some of them spoke Afrikaans, which is the language of the Afrikaners. The community center doesn't provide any food for the children. Katie and the rest of the volunteers brought lunch for themselves, but decided to give it to the children.

Unfortunately, Katie's and the rest of the volunteers'

work at the community center was cut short because the people in charge of Summer Academy at Cape Town did not feel that it was safe for them to go back. There is a very high rate of crime, and some of the people who live in the townships are very dangerous. One of the reasons why it is so dangerous is because there are no streets and no marked houses. It is easy for crime to take place. Even though their work was cut short, Katie learned that it's

definitely not about material things that make you happy. She was very inspired by these children. "These children didn't have many material things, but they still knew how to make the best of their situations," said Katie.

For more information about Ujima, please contact Malcolm Fenton at [fenton@dalton.org](mailto:fenton@dalton.org).

## Ujima Project First Hand

By Katie Hahn, Dalton School, New York, New York

The Ujima (oo-JEE-ma) Project is an initiative in community service and cultural awareness between the Dalton School in New York City and schools in Kenya .

The project was launched by the civil rights activist and Kenyan parliamentarian Koigi wa Wamwere in the spring of 2004. Ujima is a Swahili word meaning "living and working for one another". The Ujima Project manifests itself in the Dalton School in the form of Human Rights Clubs for grades 2-8 and an Ujima Club in the Dalton High School. These clubs strive to accomplish the goal of working for one another by raising money for the Ujima Subukia Fund, a scholarship fund that provides students in Kenya with scholarships for high school.

As of November 2006, funds raised at the Dalton School are providing each of 40 Kenyan students with a full four years of high school education in Kenya . To date, the Dalton community has raised over 66,000 dollars. Accounting and monitoring for the Ujima Subukia Fund is carried out through the offices of Getnick & Getnick, one of the nation's leading law firms specializing in business integrity and corporate transparency.

Koigi wa Wamwere was born in 1949 into a poor family in the Nakuru Province of Kenya. While at Cornell University on a scholarship to study hotel management, Koigi discovered the teachings of activists such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, whose work inspired him to become involved in politics and human rights. Koigi graduated from Cornell in 1973 and returned to Kenya to work for democratic reforms. As a journalist during

the presidency of Jomo Kenyatta and a member of parliament during the presidency of Daniel Arap Moi, Koigi was arrested numerous times for speaking out against government corruption, including two instances in which he was held in prison for two years without being charged with a crime.

In 1993, Koigi was arrested once again for allegedly robbing a police station. After being detained for two years, Koigi received a show trial in which he was not allowed to testify, offer evidence in his defense, or cross examine witnesses. Due to international pressure Koigi was not sentenced to death and instead received a sentence of four years in prison and six lashes with a cane. Eventually, all charges against Koigi were dropped and he was released from prison.

In 2002, Koigi wa Wamwere was elected to the Kenyan Parliament, in which he continues to serve, as a representative for the district of Subukia. Koigi wa Wamwere has devoted his life to speaking out for human rights, democracy, and nonviolence, even when doing so meant arrest, imprisonment, and often torture. Although he has spent much of his adult life in prison, he has emerged from these experiences with a wisdom and determination that has awed the world.

The idea for the Ujima Project sprang from Koigi's desire to offer others the opportunities that became available to him due to the scholarship he received to Cornell University as a young man. In Kenya , primary school is available to all children at no cost. However, when students reach secondary



school, they must pay a fee. This fee is beyond the means of many families, which are often large and include individuals afflicted with HIV/AIDS. It is not uncommon for promising Kenyan students to repeat primary school or stop their schooling altogether because they are unable to raise the money necessary to enter secondary school. The Ujima Project helps to remedy this situation by offering four-year scholarships to students on the basis of need and merit.

The High School Ujima Club at the Dalton School has conceived of and planned a number of fund-raising initiatives in the past years. Among these are the annual Ujima Fair for students in grades 4-6 and the annual Ujima Walk-a-thon, which occurs every spring to mark the founding of the Ujima Project. Another successful project involved students in grades 2-12 making collages inspired by African Art, which were then made into professionally-printed greeting cards and sold in packs of 12 before the holidays. This year the Dalton High School Ujima Club launched an African Hero's Series of t-shirts featuring images of African leaders such as Nelson Mandela.

The t-shirts are sold with informational pamphlets about the featured leader in order to encourage awareness about Africa. The Ujima Club has also helped to spread awareness about the challenges facing Africa and the ways in which we can help by bringing speakers such as Peter Murimi, the 2005 CNN African Journalist of the Year, and Hauwa Ibrahim, a prominent Nigerian human rights lawyer and winner of the 2005 Sakharov Prize for

Freedom of Thought, into the Dalton School.

In addition to working for our peers in Kenya by providing scholarships, members of the Ujima Club try to work with them by forming strong and lasting bonds with each individual scholarship student. One way we achieve this is through our pen-pal system. Through this exchange of letters we have established an open discourse between students in Kenya and students at the Dalton School that allows us to learn about Kenyan culture on a more personal level. Last summer the Ujima Project strengthened these bonds by sending Simon Kahuria Ngure, one of two scholarship students who will graduate from secondary school this year, to South Africa on a Global Leadership Adventures program that was also attended by five Dalton High School students. This gave Simon and the Dalton students the opportunity to learn about another culture and make friends from numerous African countries and the U.S. while sight-seeing and doing service work.

The Ujima Project works to bring education to our peers in Kenya while teaching Dalton students about Kenyan culture and the struggles our scholarship students face. We look forward to expanding our scholarship program and bringing the Ujima Project to universities in the U.S. when leaders of the Dalton High School Ujima Club graduate this year. We also anticipate assisting our current scholarship students in their efforts to attend college once they graduate from secondary school. *For more information please contact Malcolm Fenton at [fenton@dalton.org](mailto:fenton@dalton.org)*

## Letters to Ruth Sender: Author of The Cage

*Dear Riva Sender,*

Almost six years ago I had the life-changing opportunity to work with Riva Minsky-Sender as we adapted her touching novel *The Cage* for the stage. As part of that experience I was able to meet Riva and her husband Morris in person and spend several days together while they were here to meet our students and talk to our audiences. (see the story in the June 2002 issue of *An End To Intolerance*).

Since those days, Riva and Morris have had a very special place in my heart, and when life got busy as I had twins and lost contact with the Senders, they were always very close to me in spirit. Their amazing story of survival, and finding each other, and moving forward in the world with so much love is a constant source of comfort and inspiration to me. I admire their courage and gentleness in the way they have taught their life lessons and experiences to a new generation. I hope and pray, with this new globally connected world that we now live in, that the lessons the Senders and other Holocaust survivors have taught to us will be deeply understood and acted upon. I pray that today's youth will grow up believing in the power of the human spirit and will have the wisdom to do everything that is right and good in the world, for itself and its people.

Last June I learned from my English department head that *The Cage* was an English 10 book, and I was overjoyed!

Immediately I adopted it into my teaching. It gave me an opportunity not only to get out all the material I had collected during the production of the show, but also to reconnect with Riva. I am passionate about her story and I believe, strongly, in her desire to teach our kids about the Holocaust so that hopefully one day, we will eradicate these atrocious, hateful ways of thinking about our fellow humans. My students devoured the memoir, and were so eloquent in their conversations about the people and the history in the book that I was often moved to tears. We spent a whole month reading, researching, studying and talking about the Holocaust and about Riva and her family. The unit was capped off with the students given the opportunity to write to Riva, and all of them did. They were so amazed to hear back from her. She wrote to each one of them.

During the time that I was out of touch with the Senders, Morris passed away, and when I learned of that I was so sad to have lost the opportunity to connect with such a spirited human being. He was a dear, sweet man. I value Riva's place in my life so strongly. She is an unwavering flame of everything that is good and hopeful in a sometimes dark and uncertain world. For me, and for many of my students, the words "As long as there is life, there is hope" help to keep me focused on what we all need to do to make this a more beautiful world.

Thank you Riva, for all you do; for all you are. I love you.  
-Lana O'Brien, Teacher

Before I read your book I didn't know much about the Holocaust... I found it really touching how you kept courage throughout the whole war even though the Nazis tried to strip all emotions from you. I was wondering if you kept the notebook the commandant gave you? Do you still have any poems you wrote on the brown bag?

- Zachary Adams

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After reading *The Cage*, I cannot describe the respect I have acquired not only for you, but every single other person involved in the Holocaust. Before I read your book, I had some idea of what went on in the ghettos of Europe, but no real, clear picture of what happened. After I read your book it really opened my eyes to the horrors you, and your family, and thousands of other families were pointlessly, and innocently subjected to. I hope that through your suffering, and education that no one else should have to witness events similar to what you did... Now I feel compelled to go to Europe after I graduate in 2009 to learn more about what happened, and spread the information around so that everyone can learn of the tragedies that you and many others faced from 1939-1945.

-Eric Anderson

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I just finished reading your book *The Cage* with my class and I wanted to let you know that it has changed my life in a few ways. For one, before reading this book I didn't know much about the Holocaust and the Nazis, but after reading it I have learned so much and I am very intrigued to find out more.

Your strength and ability to look past all the hurt and disaster is incredible and very inspiring. I also admire the fact that you could have the courage to look at the past and write it on paper to share your experiences with others. That must have been incredibly difficult. I try to put myself in that situation to see if I could have handled it as well as you did. And no matter how hard I try all I could do was empathize for you and what you had to go through... I have learned to take nothing for granted for it can go as quickly as it came... Your hope gives me hope and your will power gives me strength.

-Brietana Jackson

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I have read many stories about the Holocaust, but none seemed as real to me [as yours], because I couldn't relate to any of the characters in their books. In your memoir, you mention that you were sixteen years old. I am fifteen, so I would be about the same age as you were. Your book made me really think of how it would be if I were there. I don't think I could hold on to hope as you did. I wonder if there were some times where you just wanted to give up, if so, when and what kept you motivated to keep going? This book almost brought me to tears many times, all the horrible things that happened to the Jews. I am glad you wrote your stories to tell the world what happened. Thank you so much for not giving up!

-Dani Dueck

*TOO YOUNG TO DIE*

*Am I too young to die?*

*Am I too young to live?*

*I see children ages three and four.*

*Thrown to the fires*

*grown men sixty eight and ninety.*

*I'm fed to the gas chamber.*

*I'm too young to live.*

*I'm the smallest and the first to go.*

*Even though I'm dead, my soul feels*

*the hot flames of persecution.*

*I bid you adieu.*

-Andrew Krause

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Your magnificent ability to perfectly capture a moment in writing almost had me in tears more than once throughout the course of the book... I look forward to reading the rest of your courageous fight for life.

-Mac Campbell

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While reading this book I kept thinking, why? And how could people be so mean? A lot of the time I was just disgusted. What makes people think they have the right to control other people? What makes people hate other people so much?

Are you interested in listening to the news and politics of Europe? When you hear about things that are going on in Germany, wie das Wiederauftauchen von "Neo Nazis" Gruppierungen. Was fuer Gefuehle loest das aus bei Ihnen? Do you ever think Germany could gain power over the whole world again? Or when you hear about all these bad things that are going on in the world right now, do you feel mad or sad? It's unbelievable how you are so full of love and caring after all that has happened to you and your family members... You've definitely influenced my life and your mother's saying, "As long as there is life, there is hope," will always stay with me.

-Sandra Arnold

You are such an amazing person! Just by reading your book I feel like I know you. You let people into your life so openly. You show people how capable they are of loving others and giving of themselves, the way you do... For me it has shown how much love can overcome so much hate. I am so glad that I was blessed enough to have chance at reading your story. I am so thankful that you wrote it.

-Jessica Giffen

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The reason why I can relate to your story is it is similar to what happened to my native culture. We had our language taken away from us, were raped, and put in residential schools. My own grandmother was taken from her family and put into a residential school. She is too ashamed to talk about what happened to her while in school.

But the part I liked the most in your story is when you got parent guardianship of your brothers so you could take care of them, which your Mom would have loved to see. This meant a lot to me because my grandmother was not given that chance to be with her family.

Both cultures have been through a lot of pain and suffering. That is why I can relate to your story. It means a lot to me that not only my people went through pain and suffering like that. Your book has made me want to learn my own language which is the Okanagan language.

I know the more you go through, the stronger you become because in life you have to be at the bottom before you can reach the top. That is a little motto I like to say to help people feel better.

It's dark. No where to go.

My heart is pounding not knowing what to do.

Frightened.

Wondering, when is my time?

I have vivid flashbacks on what life used to be.

The wonder of things in my life. All the good.

But, mostly bad. What people did to hurt me

And what people do to hurt your loved ones.

Why?

Why must that happened to a person?

Why God acts in those actions for people to hurt one another.

It should be peace and harmony.

-Jazmin Gregoire

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I usually read fantasy and fiction novels and that is why I thought *The Cage* would not be that entertaining. But, the stories of human endurance and courage, even when it didn't seem worth it, were influential and inspiring and I think *The Cage* should be part of everyone's regular curriculum for years and years to come.

-Peter Nolan

When I was reading it I felt like I was captured in it and experiencing everything with you, not to the same extent, of course. All the words in your book were like poetry in themselves. I can't believe all of the things you've been through. How you gave your all and never gave up hope, it's hard to believe how you could do that in such a situation... Your mother's words will stick with me... "As long as there is life, there is hope."

### Hope Never Dies

*When the world turns a blind eye*

*You ask yourself how the sun can shine*

*When the world itself is cold and dark*

*You've been sentenced to annihilation*

*You take all your memories with you*

*Only to have them obliterated*

*You feel you have platitudinous hope*

*Those ignorant people brainwashed to kill*

*Your next of kin before your eyes*

*There is still life, they have not won*

*You hold onto your loved one's words*

*That having hope will bring better days.*

-Sasha Meniconi

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When I read your story I had a lump in my throat the entire time. I couldn't being separated from my older sister. She is my idol and my best friend. I don't think I could ever be as strong or brave as you. Secondly, I find it so incredible that you aren't full of spite. You truly are one of the strongest humans I have ever heard of. Did you ever lose hope at any time during this period? Was there ever a time when you just wanted to give up? I'm sure tonnes of peoples I know would have and people you know must have as well. Did you ever hear from Shmulek or Yulek again?

-Melody Egerton

"Nothing is wrong." the people cry out

But they don't hear the screams, the shouts.

They don't know the ashes that lay all around

Were once actually people, who fell to the ground.

They may have been shot, once, twice or three times

And hadn't committed any serious crimes.

But they had been Jews, and as it was said,

"Jews are only animals; they all should be dead."

Some were just babies, lives had just begun,

And were ended right there, as they were hung.

Huddled in trains, their homes far away

Some never again seeing the light of day

They were killed all the time and nobody cared  
Except other Jews, frightened and scared.  
Why didn't they look and try to see  
Outside isolation lies tragedy.

- by Melody Egerton

From the beginning to the end it was hard to put the book down just because I always wanted to find out what was going to happen. I couldn't even imagine what it was like for you and how you feel about this now. After reading your book it has inspired me to learn more about World War II and the Holocaust...

-Lukas Rusak

I can't nearly express how much you have inspired me...The obstacles that you faced and successfully passed must have been so terrifying and yet you held on to hope and kept going.

I didn't know much about the Jewish people and the Nazi's until I read *The Cage*. It has really opened my eyes to what happened and the impact of it all. We spoke in class of how you must have felt while you were in the ghetto, caring for your brothers. Most of us said we would try our hardest to make it work, however, none of us were sure if we could make it through.

The word hope is used very often in your book. In the beginning you had hope and you still had it nearing the end. It is inspiring because you never stopped telling yourself that there was something better waiting for the Jewish people in the future.

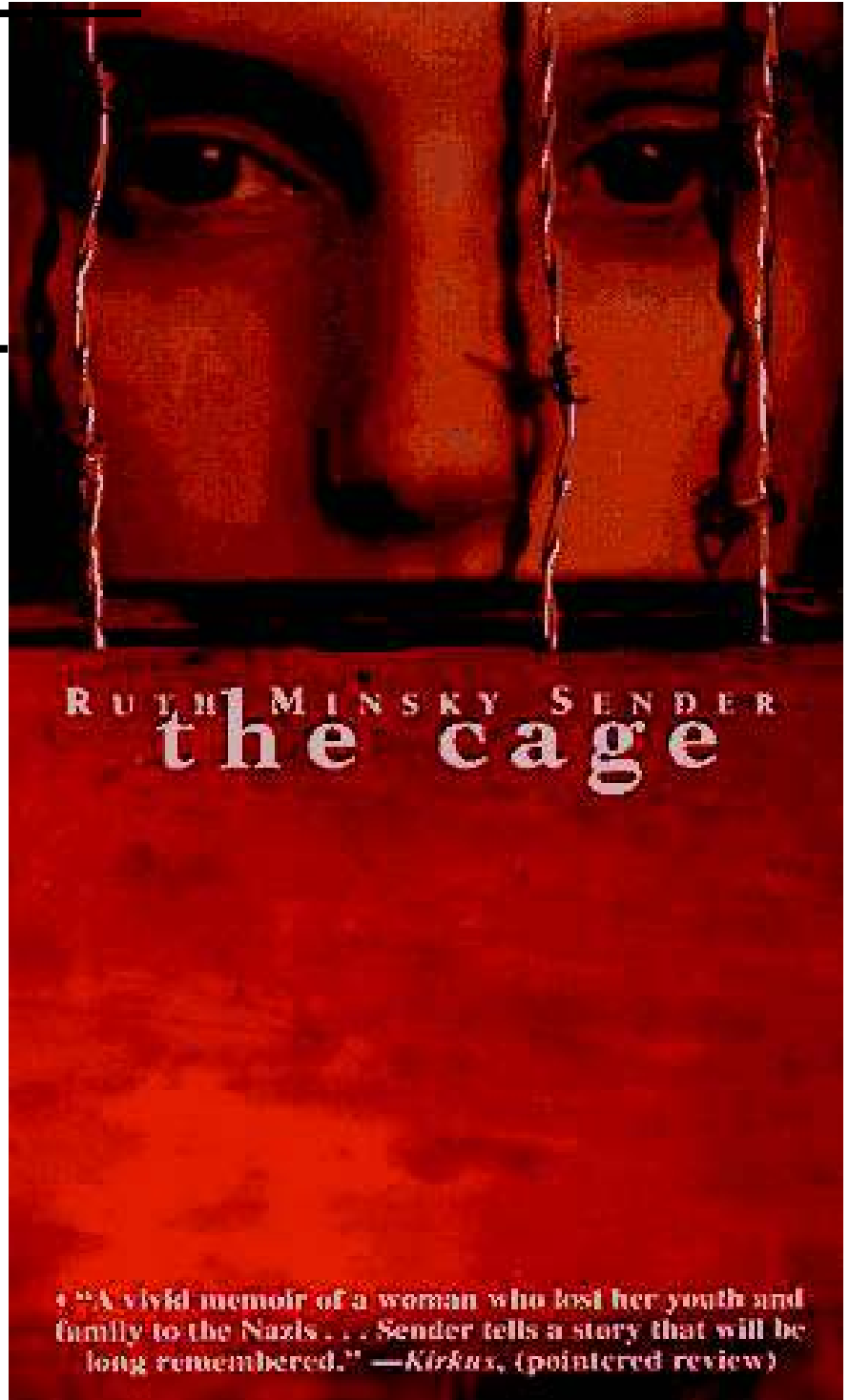
**New Day**

Dedicated to Riva Minska

*Tears falling  
of joy  
not sadness  
People talking  
of hope  
not madness*

*The sun comes out  
The wind blows calm  
And without a doubt  
I hold my arms  
Out to the world  
To embrace the day  
When nobody dies  
Rather everyone cheers  
For yesterday is past.*

-Jade Renner



# Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity

By Elisa Weidenbaum, Jericho Union Free School District, Jericho, New York

*Elisa Weidenbaum is a Spanish teacher and diversity educator*

Approximately thirteen years ago I learned about an initiative titled *S.E.E.D.*, or *Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity*, while teaching in New Hampshire. The chairperson of my department just returned from a weeklong S.E.E.D. leader training seminar with a newfound love and perspective on teaching, thus inspiring me to learn more about this national project on inclusive curriculum.

It wasn't until six years later, that at school I was teaching at in Baltimore, Maryland I received a memo asking if anyone was interested in participating in S.E.E.D. This was my second brush with this term and I jumped at the opportunity to participate in this program. My participation meant being a member of a classroom of teachers learning, discussing, and sharing our teaching practices with a focus on making diversity a core ideology in our teaching. We discussed the concept of "otherness" and how, at times, everyone feels like an "other," therefore making it vital to intentionally create an inclusive environment for our students, at least in the classroom and in the school community.

Fast forward to 2005 and I found myself sitting in a classroom in California being trained as a S.E.E.D. facilitator. During our ten day S.E.E.D. leader training, we, as educators, were challenged emotionally and mentally as we reflected on our own life experiences as a means of growing and embracing the realities and truths of others. Today, I am both pleased and honored to facilitate S.E.E.D. workshops for my colleagues in Jericho, where it is now my task to challenge the people I work with everyday to consider how they were educated and thus how they facilitate learning in their classrooms. What fascinates and amazes me is that each in-service I facilitate is also a growing opportunity for me. This is the essence of S.E.E.D. We never stop growing, we must always be reflective in our teaching and in the way we live our respective lives, and we must remember that we are simply part of a learning community- good teachers are also good students.

The S.E.E.D. seminar is a hands-on, interactive, and highly reflective course. We consider racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression in our own lives and then move into what this means in our classroom. How do we foster a learning environment representative of our entire student body? What can we do

collectively and individually to make school a place where students see themselves in what we discuss and explore within the walls of a building and within the soul of a community? It is when my colleagues approach me to let me know they had a "S.E.E.D. moment" that I know I am doing my job and S.E.E.D. is making a difference.



*Drawing by Stephanie Lau*