

The Story Portrait Project

Building Cross- Cultural Understanding through Personal Stories



What: A cross-cultural service learning exchange which accomplishes the following objectives:

- Self-discovery through personal writing
- Diversity education through reading original works of students from another country
- Creative writing skills
- Global appreciation by giving and receiving cross-culturally

Project Summary: K-12 students write an original “Story Portrait,” which is prompted by questions and sentence starters. The collection of original writings is taken to another country and is presented to a partnership school personally by a traveler, resident or expatriate working in that country. The participating sister school reciprocates the gifts by sending their original works to the partnering school. It is important that the connection be made through an individual who has experience with both cultures. Before the books are written and upon receipt of the international books, it is necessary to present country specifics and culture. To assure quality and appropriateness of content, it is required that teachers read all student writings before they are sent out, as well as all in-coming writings before they are shared with students. On a larger scale, schools can create a “School Story Portrait” which combines their work into a bound book. This is administered in the “Artist in Residence Program” by Carrie Wagner.

Why it’s important: “The complete education in the 21st century must teach our children about their interdependent world, and it must prepare them to be good leaders and good global citizens. As our students participate in international exchange, they gain knowledge and experiences which help them contribute to a sustainable future for all.” (US Secretary of State, Arne Duncan, 2010) Teachers are also evaluated on the inclusion of diversity and global education opportunities in their classrooms.

Who should participate? This is a valuable exchange project for all grades K-12, but especially for middle school students who are beginning to gain self-awareness and appreciation for the intricately-connected nature of our global society. As they look ahead to their own future, students’ horizons are expanded as they learn about a world of need and global opportunities. When we learn about others, we learn even more about ourselves.

Participation Fees:

Two ways to participate:

Teacher Facilitated: It is required that participating schools purchase a *Village Wisdom Kit*, which gives the foundation for the project as well as resources for administering cross-cultural service learning projects. The kit includes a copy of Carrie Wagner’s book, *Village Wisdom*, 2 DVDs (one for teachers and one for students), a set of prompt photos for story-writing and a list of related resources.

Kit: \$100 + transport and administration of books \$150 = \$250

Facilitated by Carrie Wagner: For a more a more in-depth cross-cultural learning experience, invite Carrie to facilitate the project. This option includes the *Village Wisdom Kit*, and two presentations to students – an introductory session before writing begins, and one upon the delivery of books from partner school in another country.

2-3 hour presentation = \$300 (x2) + transport and administration of books \$150 = \$750

Background: The *Story Portrait* project is an outcrop of a service learning project called Books of Hope, (www.BooksOfHope.org). Carrie Wagner and her family traveled to Uganda in 2009, carrying with them 150 student-written books from Asheville. They brought back with them 250 Ugandan student-written books. The NC schools who participated in the project recognized that value of the mutual exchange. The unique quality of the *Story Portrait* project is that it links students through existing relationships, and is a mutual exchange opportunity for beneath-the-surface cross-cultural understanding.

Carrie Wagner is working through her network of international colleagues to provide partnership schools in many countries. Ask for a specific country.

