

THE PELHAM EDUCATION FOUNDATION GRANT REQUEST

Seventh Grade Author Visit

IB MYP Curriculum Enrichment

Submitted by Wendy DeVito, Pelham Middle School English Teacher.

I. Project Objectives.

What do you hope to accomplish through the proposed project?

*As we work to becoming a Middle Years Program school within the International Baccalaureate Program, we are adding the novel *A Long Walk to Water* by Linda Sue Park to our curriculum. The novel is aligned with our current state Common Core Standards and meets the requirements of an IB unit as well. It is very exciting that the novel's author is available to meet with the students after they read her work! Students will be able to meet, listen to, and ask questions of the author, bringing our classroom discussions to a new level. This visit will generate enthusiasm about reading and writing. It will bring the book to life in a very real-world way. It will have a lasting impact on all the children, as the book is about a timely and relevant subject; the author can help students form their understanding on not only the novel but the very real global issue of access to water and its impact on political stability. She can also inspire kids by allowing them to see the results of the writing process at work.*

Is this project consistent with departmental, building and District objectives and priorities?

*This project is consistent with our departmental and building objectives as it is directly aligned with our transition to becoming an International Baccalaureate School. The addition of *A Long Walk to Water* allows us to teach a novel with a real-world Statement of Inquiry. Students will be using the novel as a window into how access to water impacts political stability. They will consider the question as it relates to the real-life *Salva* in his journey in the novel, as well as the fictional, *Nya*. Both characters, real and imagined, struggle to survive in Southern Sudan at different points in time. The unit will also allow students to have real-world impact as they research and learn about organizations that build wells in sub-Saharan Africa. Because the novel has non-fiction elements it is also directly related to the Common Core Curriculum.*

The opportunity to meet the author and hear directly about her interactions with the non-fiction character, as well as the creation of the fictional character, is an extremely valuable opportunity.

II. Project Beneficiaries.

Who will benefit from this project?

All of the seventh graders in regular, as well as self-contained English will benefit from meeting the author and experiencing her presentation. In addition, she will be available for book signings with the community.

How many students, grade levels, classes, departments or buildings will be affected?

The entire seventh grade of over 200 students, as well as possibly more members of the school and Pelham community. The English department as well will benefit from meeting with and learning from a living, successful, relevant author.

III. Project Description.

What product or service would you like to purchase? *Linda Sue Park's School Presentation.*

Did you consider other similar products or services? Why was this the best choice?

We reached out to both Salva Dut, the non-fiction character from the novel as well as Linda Sue Park. Mr. Dut currently lives in the Sudan so it is impossible to bring him in for a school visit. He does do Skype presentations, but they are booked through this school year. Linda Sue Park also does Skype visits with limited availability, but she would not be able to work with more than one or two classes if we were to follow that route. If she were to do enough Skype visits to see the entire grade it would cost much more than the visit. Truthfully, the author visit is the "best choice" because it is a uniquely memorable, direct connection to a novel. It is rare to meet and listen to the author of a novel studied in school. This has potential to be a wonderful experience for an entire grade of Pelham students, an experience they will remember for years to come.

When will you require funding for the project? How long will it take to implement?
Will it be completed all at once or in phases? When do you anticipate that the project will be completed?

The cost will be all at once. The event details need to be finalized 60 days prior to the visit, which is scheduled for April 14, 2016. The project will be completed shortly thereafter, once the children have been able to reflect on the impact of her presentation.

Who participated in the development of the project? How have teachers, principals, directors and supervisors been involved? Have any of them expressed concerns about the project? If so, how have those concerns been addressed?

Rachel Pixley and Wendy DeVito agreed to read the novel this summer and both loved it and agreed to implement it into our curriculum. Ms. DeVito then discussed the novel with Humanities Director, Maria Thompson and Middle School Principal, Rob Roelle. They worked together to order the novels so that we can read the book this school year. Ms. DeVito later reached out to the author to see if it was possible to arrange a school visit. Once we heard she was available, we contacted the seventh grade team, its leaders, and administration to make sure the date worked with the other departments. All necessary administrators were contacted, including the Director of Mathematics, Tom Callahan.

IV. Project Assessment.

Surveys would be used to assess student and teacher response to both the assembly and workshop. Teachers will also be asked to reflect upon what lasting impact the program has on student attitudes and classroom practices. Follow up lessons will occur in the classroom.

V. Project Budget.

The entire cost for the presentation is \$3,900 dollars includes presentation fee, transportation, and lodging to be given to the author as one lump sum at the time of her visit. (Please see contract.)

The visit includes three presentations: she will present to one third of the seventh grade at a time.

About Linda Sue Park: (from her website)

Linda Sue Park was born in Urbana, Illinois on March 25, 1960, and grew up outside Chicago. The daughter of Korean immigrants, she has been writing poems and stories since she was four years old, and her favorite thing to do as a child was read.

This is the first thing she ever published—a haiku in a children's magazine when she was nine years old:

In the green forest
A sparkling, bright blue pond hides.
And animals drink.

—*Trailblazer* magazine, Winter 1969

For this poem she was paid one whole dollar. She gave the check to her dad for Christmas. About a year later the company wrote to her asking her to cash the check! Linda Sue wrote back explaining that it was now framed and hung above her dad's desk and was it okay if he kept it? The magazine said it was fine, and her dad still has that check.

During elementary school and high school, Linda Sue had several more poems published in magazines for children and young people. She went to Stanford University, competed for the gymnastics team, and graduated with a degree in English. Then she took a job as a public-relations writer for a major oil company. This was not exactly the kind of writing she wanted to do, but it did teach her to present her work professionally and that an interested writer can make any subject fascinating (well, almost any subject ...).

In 1983, after two years with the oil company, Linda Sue left her job and moved to Dublin when a handsome Irishman swept her off her feet. She studied literature, moved to London, worked for an advertising agency, married that Irishman, had a baby, taught English as a second language to college students, worked as a food journalist, and had another baby. It was a busy time, and she never even thought about writing children's books.

In 1990, she and her family moved back to the U.S. because of her husband's job. Linda Sue continued teaching English to foreign students. It took her quite a while, but she finally realized that what she

really wanted to do was to write books for children. In 1997, she started writing her first book, *Seesaw Girl*. It was accepted that same year and published in 1999.

Since then, Linda Sue has published many other books for young people, including *A Single Shard*, which was awarded the 2002 Newbery Medal.

She now lives in western New York with the same Irishman; their son lives nearby, and their daughter lives in Brooklyn. Besides reading and writing, Linda Sue likes to cook, travel, watch movies, and do the *New York Times* crossword puzzle. She also loves dogs, watching sports on television and playing board and video games. When she grows up, she would like to be an elephant scientist.

A Long Walk to Water is based on the true story of Salva, one of some 3,800 Sudanese "Lost Boys" airlifted to the United States beginning in the mid 1990s.

Before leaving Africa, Salva's life is one of harrowing tragedy. Separated from his family by war and forced to travel on foot through hundreds of miles of hostile territory, he survives starvation, animal attacks, and disease, and ultimately leads a group of about 150 boys to safety in Kenya. Relocated to upstate New York, Salva resourcefully learns English and continues on to college. Eventually he returns to his home region in southern Sudan to establish a foundation that installs deep-water wells in remote villages in dire need of clean water. This poignant story of Salva's life is told side-by-side with the story of Nya, a young girl who lives today in one of those villages.