

## The Memory Project: Books of Hope Program

One hundred and sixty students from three Bridgeport schools; Waltersville, Read and Batalla participated in a service-learning project to write, illustrate, bind and send books to Ugandan children in need of hope and inspiration. The Memory Project: Books of Hope program is a non-profit organization whose mission is to get English speaking books into the hands of children in Uganda.

A brutal civil war has caused unimaginable tragedy for the children of northern Uganda. Over the past 20 years, many thousands have been killed, tortured, kidnapped, and enslaved. The Memory Project through its Books of Hope program sends student-made books to refugee camps, schools, orphanages, and hospitals, where children are eager for a more joyful life.

Mrs. Deborah Broccoli, the Reading and Literacy Director for the Bridgeport School District invited teachers to participate in writing the books as a service project in collaboration with The School for Ethical Education. SEE staff worked closely with the three lead teachers to ensure that students understood that they were learning writing skills, editing and about service-learning. Students learned about the children of Uganda who are in great need of help. Additionally, they learned to treat one another with kindness and respect as they worked through writing and illustration of their own books. Students were responsible for evaluating the content of their own books in terms of being uplifting and hopeful as well as participating in peer editing. Teachers including Mrs. Ruggerio and Ms. Porpora from Read school, Mrs. Padilla from Waltersville School and Mrs. Strubbe from Batalla school clearly embraced the concept of students working to gain academic insight in literacy and civics while extending their learning to help someone else.

Batalla students from fourth through eighth grade hosted the sixth grade students from Waltersville for a celebration of their finished books as well as a moment of reflection and sharing of their books with one another. Read students had a separate event, as logistics would not allow them to attend the Batalla celebration. Read's Books of Hope program integrated an eighth grade class as mentors for kindergarten students to be the writers and illustrators of the books. As kindergartners told their stories, the eighth grade students wrote them and helped the kindergartners illustrate their work. The eighth grade students learned to work with younger students. Teachers noted that the older students showed "remarkable growth in maturity through the year."



Students share their stories during celebration of Books of Hope



Read School Celebration; Mrs. Ruggerio's Kindergartners with Ms. Porpora's 8th grade students