

An All School Read *Elaine Kaplan and Julia Weinstein*

Description: Rockwern Academy's All-School-Read programs began with a seed that grew into a huge tree branching in many directions. Julia Weinstein, the school librarian at Cincinnati's Jewish day school, and Language Arts teacher Elaine Kaplan were discussing Greg Mortenson's *Three Cups of Tea*. Then Ms. Weinstein learned the book had both a young adult version and a picture book companion, *Listen to the Wind*. The two considered the possibility of sharing the book and its messages of tolerance and education with the entire school, from Pre-K to 8th grade, across all disciplines, from Language Arts to Music to Art to Judaic Studies. The two developed a program for the book to serve as the basis of a community outreach program. After four years, the All-School-Read has become a Rockwern institution, integrated into every classroom across many subjects, unifying the school around an innovative reading program and providing a unique opportunity for Day School students to meet and learn with students from a variety of backgrounds.

Elaine Kaplan graduated summa cum laude from Amherst College, where she majored in American Studies. She is a member of Phi Beta Kappa. Elaine has taught fifth through ninth grade Language Arts and Social Studies for twenty years, the last sixteen at Rockwern Academy in Cincinnati, Ohio. Elaine has led Rockwern's participation in several interscholastic online middle school programs run by the University of Michigan and she was invited to speak at their new teacher program orientation in 2011. She has also coached award-winning Power of the Pen teams and taught afterschool creative writing and newspaper clubs. In 2011, Elaine was one of three teachers who received the Joyce Heiman Education Excellence Award for the development and implementation of an interfaith educational program. Elaine and her husband Andy are very proud of their three grown sons and new grandson. Elaine loves books, cooking, and dogs.

Julia Weinstein serves as librarian at Rockwern Academy, a Cincinnati Jewish day school, where she also develops special educational and outreach programming. She worked with Language Arts teacher Elaine Kaplan to institute the school's All-School Read program, which garnered national attention in 2011, when a "Three Cups of Tea" program blossomed into a Jewish-Muslim interfaith education partnership with the International Academy, Cincinnati's Muslim day school. Another All-School Read of President Obama's, "Of Thee I Sing," led to a collaboration with Pleasant Hills Academy, an inner-city Cincinnati public school. As school librarian, Julia has forged a partnership with the Cincinnati Public Library to greatly expand the school library's offerings. She regularly invites guest speakers to the school, including award-winning children's book authors and illustrators, storytellers, a member of the Tuskegee Airmen, a former Negro League player, and many others. She partnered with PJ Library to launch Rockwern's annual "Celebration of the Book" storytelling festival to help foster the love of reading. In 2011, Julia was one of three teachers to receive the Joyce Heiman Education Excellence Award. Julia's son is a 2014 graduate of Rockwern Academy. Julia enjoys reading, kayaking, and hiking.

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Julia-Intro

*In her book *Reading Magic*, the author Mem Fox said, "The fire of literacy is created by the emotional sparks between a child, a book, and the person reading. It isn't achieved by the book alone, nor by the child alone, nor by the adult who's reading aloud—it's the relationship winding between all three, bringing them together in easy harmony." At Rockwern Academy, we have created a program that takes that relationship even further, including everybody at our school as well as the outside community.

Hello, I am Julia Weinstein, the librarian at Rockwern Academy. This is Elaine Kaplan, our middle school Language Arts teacher and Assistant Principal.

Rockwern Academy is the community Jewish day school in Cincinnati, Ohio. We have students from 18 months old to 8th grade.

About five years ago, there was a lot of discussion among the parents at Rockwern regarding their desire for the kids to have exposure to a broader group of children, both to increase diversity and to provide more social opportunities. We were also hearing from parents that one of the things they valued most about Rockwern was our close-knit community. Among the faculty, we were having discussions about ways to increase integration across the curriculum, including Judaic studies, science, music and art. So, when Elaine saw something in the local newspaper about a school that had done an all-school read of one book, it sparked an idea. That particular school's goal was for the purpose of encouraging parents to read with their children.

We started thinking about an all-school read in a different way - to promote cross curricular study, to build community within our school, and to create an outreach opportunity in Cincinnati.

One of the core values at Rockwern Academy is lifelong learning. By asking all teachers, students and parents to read a single book, we hoped to model that value in a visible way. We decided to ask all teachers, in all grade levels, to design a lesson based on one book. We would also design a variety of other opportunities for kids to interact with people from other grades, another school, and in the community.

As a librarian working with a limited budget for collection development, I made use of the Cincinnati public library system to add valuable resources to provide books on other ethnicities, other countries and other cultures. The relationships we've developed with the public library have proven to be a great advantage to us.

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First, let me say that working with Julia has taught me what an enormous impact a great librarian can have. Julia has been responsible for a host of unique programs at Rockwern. She is indispensable.

We have done the All School Read four times now, and each year we took a different approach. I'd like to share with you our four approaches, because each program has had its own strengths and challenges. As you design your own program, hopefully you can learn from some of the mistakes that we made as well as some of our successes.

*In our first year, we chose perhaps the most challenging text, *Three Cups of Tea*, by Greg Mortenson, which was a best-seller at the time and had the unusual advantage of being published in * three different formats: an adult version, a young reader version, and a picture book, called *Listen to the Wind*. In this book, Mortenson wrote about the work he had done in Pakistan building schools in poor and remote districts, primarily for girls. It was an amazing story of one man, with no specific training, who saw a real problem and devoted his life to trying to solve it. Some of you may remember that later, Greg Mortenson encountered serious challenges to his leadership of the Central Asia Institute and the accuracy of his claims about his achievements, but when we chose the book, that was still in the future, and he seemed like a true hero. Although Mortenson was not Jewish, he appeared to be a great example of someone dedicating his life to the Jewish value of Tikkun Olam, repairing the world.

The basic themes in this text, the crucial importance of education for all children, and the fundamental idea that receiving an education is a privilege not to be taken for granted, were concepts that could be discussed and analyzed by children of all ages. Beyond that, however, we found multiple opportunities for cross-curricular integration. *In Language Arts, we were supporting the Common Core's goal of incorporating more nonfiction at all levels. * Social Studies teachers could discuss the geography, history, and culture of Central Asia.* *Listen to the Wind*, in particular, had beautiful cut-paper illustrations which could be emulated in art class, and * Judaic Studies classes seemed like the perfect place to bring in an analysis of how Muslim culture and values were similar to and different from Judaism, Jewish culture, and Jewish values. This last angle led us to our most interesting but also most controversial endeavor.

In discussing the book, Julia and I had the idea that perhaps it would make learning about Muslim culture more fun, interesting, and real if our kids could meet Muslim kids. We were aware that there was a Muslim Day School in Cincinnati, and, with the support of community Rabbis and our Head of School, we decided to reach out to them. We met with * Umama Alam, principal of the El-Sewedy International Academy, housed in the Islamic Center of Greater Cincinnati. Fortunately for us, Umama was open to developing a program with Rockwern, and together we hashed out a plan for our work.

Both schools began by reading the books. Our early childhood and primary students read *Listen to the Wind*. Grades 3 and up read the Young Readers' edition of *Three Cups of Tea*, and many of our teachers and parents read the original. Language Arts teachers incorporated the book into their classes. The more exciting part started when we initiated our pen pal program with the International Academy. Each student in grades 3 and up received a same-gender pen pal from the other school, and they wrote letters introducing themselves. It was early fall. We were celebrating the High Holidays, and Ramadan was almost simultaneous with Rosh Hashana that year, so our kids learned to wish their Muslim friends "Eid Mubarak" as a holiday greeting, and the kids at the Int'l Academy learned "Shanah Tovah" and "Chag Sameach." Right away we felt an unexpected kinship; we were all celebrating holidays not on the standard U.S. calendar. Upon receiving their first response letters, our students were surprised by the other similarities they found between themselves and their new friends. They liked the same sports, followed the same teams, shopped at the same mall, watched the same shows, and shared similar concerns about going to a small parochial school in suburban Cincinnati.

Once we saw that the pen pal program was successful, we moved on to planning and preparing for in-person visits. Kids at both schools learned songs that they would sing together – the song "Three Cups of Tea," "Od yavo Shalom Aleinu" and Matisyahu's "One Day". In * Art class, they decorated tea cups to exchange with their pen pal friends. In January, after two snow postponements, the * El-Sewedy kids came to visit Rockwern. They toured our * school, visited the synagogue, viewed a Torah, and * excitedly met their new Jewish friends. A highlight was when the student from both schools performed songs for each other and then sang together. Here's a very brief video of all the kids singing "One Day" together. * Local press covered the visit. * * * Later, we traveled to their school,* toured their * mosque, * * and shared a * * * * Kosher/Halal snack. For Martin Luther King Day, both schools * were invited to sing together with a * choir from an * inner city school at the Community * Martin Luther King Day

celebration, which began a * tradition that continues to this day. * We were also invited to walk together in the pre-game parade at Great American Ball Park before a Reds game. In introducing us, the announcer said, “The students taught our community a lesson about understanding and friendship.” Later, we were featured on the big scoreboard singing “Take Me Out to the Ballgame” together, during the 7th inning stretch.

This particular All School Read brought its own challenge. There were members of the community who weren’t quite ready for this ambitious cross-cultural project. We were surprised by negative feedback. Perhaps if we had anticipated this more clearly, we could have avoided some unpleasantness. * Overall, however, the program was hugely * successful.

(Change to Julia)

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For our next All-School Read, we chose *President Obama’s recently published book, *Of Thee I Sing*, written as a letter to his daughters, talking about a variety of inspirational American heroes such as Albert Einstein, Jackie Robinson, Helen Keller, and Caesar Chavez. The text of this book was probably most appropriate for the students in the middle of our range – a bit above the preschool’s comprehension level and not sufficiently challenging for our middle schoolers. However, the topic of heroes provided opportunities for independent * research and reading, and our teachers were easily able to incorporate research projects on appropriate reading levels into their reading, writing and social studies curricula. Judaic Studies teachers were able to focus on Jewish heroes, and of course all the research was supported by the Art and Music teachers. Art and Language Arts teachers cooperated on one project in which kids chose a hero for independent research and then created a * book jacket which included a cover that they created in Art and a blurb that they wrote for the Language Arts teacher. Loren Long,* * * * who illustrated *Of Thee I Sing*, visited our school and was most * impressed by the creativity and thought that went into the kids’ book covers.

For this project, we reached out to an inner city charter school, * Pleasant Hill Academy. We repeated the pen pal program. Later, we brought the kids together at an * * * * assembly where they had the opportunity to build on what they had learned about one hero, Jackie Robinson, by meeting local African American baseball players who had played both in the Negro League and for the Cincinnati Reds. (If you notice a baseball theme here, that is because one of us a baseball fanatic.) Furthermore, we created cross-grade opportunities within our school as the * older kids presented their hero research to the younger kids and also read to them.

What did we learn from this project? The book was very short, so the reading itself was quite brief. If the All School Read is intended to be a limited-time experience, that could be good, but for a longer program, a more substantial text is probably wiser. The ability to connect the book to age-appropriate research projects was an asset, and one we would recommend.

(Change to Elaine)

Our third year brought us the realization that, as a Jewish Day School, we probably needed to choose a Jewish Book. (Maybe we should have thought of that earlier!) We chose a fantastic collection of Jewish folktales by Penninah Schram called *The Hungry Clothes*. Folktales were a great genre, because they are teaching stories that can be understood by people of every age on different levels. Also, the anthology provided enough variety that teachers could choose the tales

best suited for their own students. We had a lot of fun creating projects that could be shared with other classes. For example, the 5th grade * turned the title story into a play, * created scenery and props in Art class, and presented it to the school. The 4th grade created a very elaborate puppet show, which they shared with students both older and younger. That year, we were fortunate to have Penninah Schram * * * visit our school for a workshop, and we also invited Kathy Wise, * * * a local storyteller who makes her own puppets to enhance her presentations. She performed stories for the whole school and * worked with the older students on storytelling skills. Later, the 6th and 7th grades developed their own * presentations, and traveled to all the younger classes * performing individual * folktales. Finally, we had the opportunity for an unusual service project * that utilized our new appreciation of puppets. A local pediatrician was taking a team of physicians to South Africa to teach local doctors how to perform pediatric reconstructive colorectal surgery. Our students conducted a * * puppet-making workshop and sent a collections of puppets to the Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital in Capetown as gifts for the sick children.* * *

This past year, * our fourth year, we took yet another approach. Rather than choose a single book for the whole school, we chose a single author, Kathryn Lasky. We chose Lasky because she is incredibly prolific, having written * books at levels from preschool picture books to young adult literature, in genres ranging from historical fiction to Holocaust to fantasy. We planned to cooperate with Agnon School, the Jewish Day School in Cleveland, and planned to incorporate technology by creating a joint website where students from both schools could communicate with each other and with Ms. Lasky herself. * Teachers chose the books that best fit their own curriculum. *The Deadlies* was popular in third and fourth grades and inspired a slide-show on *Felix Takes the Stage* by the 4th grade presented to the third grade. The entire 4th * grade also read *The Capture*, the first in Lasky's Guardian of Ga'Hoole series, a fantasy involving a kingdom of owls. They read the books, researched owl behavior, * dissected real owl pellets in Science class, and created * incredible owl models, Older students focused on *Lone Wolf*. Rather than sticking with the wolf theme, the older students each chose their own animal to research and followed that up by writing original fantasy stories that incorporated what they discovered, emulating the research process that Kathryn Lasky had followed for her writing. Later many of them * published their stories, and donated copies for our permanent collection in our library. For our joint * website, students formulated questions as they read their books and posted their * questions on the website. We then forwarded their questions to Ms. Lasky and were able to post her answers, too. Directly communicating with the author herself was a huge benefit for our students. Rockwern and Agnon students also discussed *The Capture* via Skype, and the Rockwern kids were able to show off their beautiful owls to an appreciative audience at Agnon.

*The technology piece of this project was fun and exciting, but technology always presents * unexpected complications. The joint website gave us an opportunity to communicate with each other and with Kathryn Lasky, but it was not as easy as we anticipated, so our advice is, anticipate challenges! Also, be sure put * passwords on your sites, and get * permission from parents * .

(Julia)

After four years, we've learned a lot. Some things worked very well.

* Students met people from different walks of life, most notably during our first program. Some of these students reconnected when they moved on to public Junior High schools. Rather than seeing a stranger whom they might have ignored, they spotted an old friend.

*Older students and younger students had very positive reading times together. Sometimes the younger students shared what they learned and sometimes the other way around. The more the kids read together, the more they got to know each other. Recently, one 8th grade student remarked in his graduation speech: “I would be willing to bet that I know almost every student in our building, and they know me!”

*The benefits were not limited to the students. Because of the cross-curricular emphasis in all grades, including pre-school, teachers had new opportunities to work with other teachers that they formerly saw only at monthly faculty meetings, and this has established a much more supportive and collaborative atmosphere among our faculty.

*Also, many parents were involved in the outreach programs, further strengthening our school community.

*Unique and unforgettable experiences like singing at Martin Luther King Day, going to a Reds ball game with another school, visiting a mosque, and meeting professional baseball players all happened as a result of the All-School Read.

*Rockwern Academy won service learning awards and was *recognized at a service learning symposium at Northern Kentucky University.

Each year, we’ve learned how to improve the program.*

First, we learned that we need a specific, designated * time frame and a way to hold teachers accountable for incorporating the program into their classes. So next year, we are planning to have one assembly to launch the program and another as a culmination. The students will understand more clearly that everybody is studying the same concept, and the culminating assembly will offer an opportunity to share their favorite projects and conclusions. In addition, to * enhance communication both within the school and with our parent body, we will publish a weekly description of All School Read projects in the weekly Friday newsletter to parents and the community. Every class will take a turn to share their All School Read experience.

We also learned that choosing a * single author, rather than one book, makes it harder to accomplish some of the goals of the all-school read. There wasn’t enough shared focus throughout the school, which made the program feel less cohesive.

Perhaps our most important lesson involves * inclusion. At first, we were very excited by the program and forged ahead with plans without including enough of the other teachers. It’s important to allow teachers to have input into the process. They need time to plan how to incorporate new reading material. For next year, we decided to add two more people to help plan and oversee the program: one teacher from preschool and one from Judaic studies. Already we

can tell that this will help with communication as well as coordination between the different grades and curricula.

*For the 2014-2015 All School Read, we are planning a new variation of the program. We will be focusing on a selection of books based on the Jewish value of * Kavod, respect. Teachers will choose from a selection of titles encompassing a range of reading levels, but everyone will know that the intent is to emphasize learning about the same thing, respect, in a variety of ways including respect for G-d, respect for others, respect for themselves, and respect for the environment.* Classes will have multiple opportunities to share their learning with each other, with their parents, and hopefully, with the * community as well. We are excited to continue the All School Read at Rockwern, and we hope that other schools will adopt the idea enjoy as much success from it as we have.

If anyone has questions, we are happy to answer them.