

CAN YOU IMAGINE A WORLD WITHOUT BOOKS ?

A Snapshot of High School Life in Guinea West Africa: Alanna P. Murphy
Waldorf School of OC, Newport Harbor H.S. GW University Alumni, U.S. Peace
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Do you remember the first time you read Harry Potter?

I do. I was in the fourth grade.

I read the first few books on my own, then I began reading to my 7 year old brother before bed. I remember I used to love stopping at the cliffhangers so that he would be anxious to keep going the next day. These books were our childhood.

When I came to Guinea in West Africa to teach high school English, I knew things would be different here. I remember looking up the statistics – only 52% of men and 30% of women are literate. These numbers are astonishing, but I thought that at least that 30-50% were reading books. But that was also wrong.

When I started teaching at the high school, I soon found out that there were no books. Teachers wrote texts on the chalkboard, and students copied them down in their notebooks. Some students learned from this, but most just learned to copy words and sentences they didn't know the meaning to. Come test time, they simply copied again. By doing this, many students passed their tests and moved up in school without actually knowing how to read or write on their own. This meant that by the time they got to my class in the 12th and 13th grade, young hopefuls aspiring to university, some were still illiterate. Many, had never read a book in all their 15 to 30 years on this earth.

I decided that something needed to be done, and Harry Potter was a great place to start. Surely this children's book would be easy for high schoolers to understand, and it would draw them into the wonderful world of reading and imagination. So I began taking 30 minutes at the end of every class to read together in French.

It was rough. It turns out that the Harry Potter vocabulary was a beast for these students who had never heard words like "wink," "nod," or "grumble." There was also the obstacle course of complicated grammar, and very short attention spans that kept the students listening for only a minute at a time. So as any Peace Corps Volunteer would, I improvised.

After every couple paragraphs I would pause the story and ask the students what had happened. I pranced around acting out the parts of Professor McGonagall, Hagrid, and Uncle Vernon. I drew stick figures of the Dursley and Potter families

with names. We made lists of new words like “Moldus” (that’s “Muggles” in French) as I also acted out new words and objects in an endless game of overenthusiastic charades. Slowly but surely, I won them over. After 2 months of this, we finally finished the first chapter. I like to talk about my Harry Potter experience because I think it gives a great snapshot of the reading level in my village, Mandiana.

I think that the human mind is naturally curious, but that it cannot discover its full potential until it is given encouragement and resources.

This is why I have teamed up with my fellow Peace Corps Volunteers to bring books to Guinea. We have partnered with the organization Books for Africa, and we are now raising \$20,000 to bring 20,000 books to Guinea! These books will then be used to start (or augment) 25 libraries around the country!

But we need your help to get there. We have until the end of June to raise the last \$15,000 and we really need a final push to make this project possible.

As a former student at Waldorf OC, I was given the privilege of not only a wonderful education, but also the joy of working alongside students, teachers, and families that were kind enough to help others in need. I am calling upon that kindness now, to help some other kind-hearted students in my life.

I’m not telling you that you should donate out of pity, but rather I’m asking you to donate because these are great kids who should feel the joy of education. Each dollar you donate buys one book for a Guinean library. You are donating to the first time a parent reads to his or her children, to that moment when a child begs for “just one more page.” You are donating to the imagination, and letting kids experience worlds other than their own. You are donating to the child with a big smile who announces that he’s read his first book. You are donating to hope, to the development of Guinea, and to self-confidence. You are donating to a child finding strength in new heroes.

Thank You

To donate please go to

<https://www.booksforafrica.org/donate/to-project.html?projectId=153>