

Friends of Taktse *UPDATE*

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June 2017

U.S. 501(c)(3) agent:
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Our Magnificent New Building

by Ms. Bhawna Thapa & Ms. Anugrah Rai

We all heaved a huge sigh of relief when the spacious new building started operating this academic session. The new building has changed our lives

profoundly. Before the new building, classes were conducted in diminutive, thin-walled classrooms, in the library, on the stairs, or even outside in the basketball court. It's very hard to focus on learning under such conditions.

Classes now take place without distractions or worrying about the weather. The Upper School is benefitting the most. We now have classrooms reserved for particular subjects, three laboratories, an Upper School resource room, and an examination hall. Teachers can decorate their classrooms with subject materials, put up lesson charts, and make the class environment friendly and conducive for learning.

Accounting teacher Mr. Suraj says, "At first, when we met each other in the hallways of the new building, we would ask each other for directions, but now we know our way around. Students love to attend art classes in the colorful and innovative new art room, and we now have an adequate infirmary for our community."



Geography teacher Ms. Urvashi says, "I can now display maps and speak to my students in a strong, enthusiastic voice without worrying about disturbing other classes."

Fourth grader Heshal, arriving at school on his first day, peered out the window of the bus at the new building and exclaimed, "Wow, so big!"

In addition to the new building, classrooms in the old building (K-8) have been doubled in size by removing the dividing walls. We can set up different activity areas such as arts and crafts, a listening center, a classroom library, and a big, carpeted area to form a proper circle. We are no longer forced into squished, misshapen circles as we were in the old classrooms.

The new building will accommodate the growing number of students at Taktse (there are now 20 to 25 students at each grade level). No longer will daily learning be hindered by difficulties with conducting basic functions such as sitting in a proper circle for morning meetings, or transitioning from one activity to another without bumping into each other.

The spacious new accommodations for the administration department are a relief from the old administrative office, which housed twelve employees, the principal's office, the accounting section, and a storage area for the Cambridge board exams in a single room partitioned by plywood dividers. Important files were often misplaced due to the close quarters. There was no privacy, even for important meetings (*continued on page 3*)

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Thank you Mr. Yawan, Mr. Namgyal, and all who contributed to this newsletter!

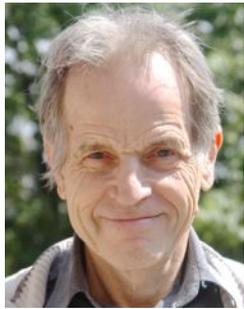




(continued from page 1) with the principal, as everyone could hear through the plywood dividers. If more than three people had to attend a meeting, the door had to be left open to fit the extra ones. A small visitor lounge was crammed inside the same room. Candidates for employment sometimes had to be interviewed outside the office.

However, it is a changed scenario now. The spacious administrative area in the new building, which overlooks majestic Mount Kanchenjunga, features a private workstation for each employee.

We are incredibly grateful to all the generous donors who have made this possible at our small school in the mountains. With your constant support and contributions, we at Taktse are now much better able to fulfill our mission of providing high-quality education to our students, and promoting progressive learning in the region.



Jerry Sykes, an examiner from Cambridge University, is helping with Upper School Science.

Progress at Taktse

by Jerry Sykes

I first arrived at Taktse in August 2016. That short visit gave me an initial impression of the condition of the school, and possible initiatives for future development. It was clear that the school's vision was to provide a more pupil-centered educational experience for students than is the norm in India. This laudable aim was being pursued in tandem with that of enabling students to achieve the best possible internationally recognized qualifications to

prepare them for further education or employment. Hence the decision was taken to engage with the Cambridge Assessment suite of primary, IGCSE and Advanced Level qualifications – by no means the easiest awarding body with which to gain outstanding results, but certainly one with unmatched international recognition.

Taktse had come a long way in the decade since its initial inception. At the time of my first visit last August, there was ample evidence of inspired and dedicated teaching at all 12 grade levels; the classrooms and teaching areas were brightly decorated with posters, examples of children's work, and ideas for further educational inspiration; lending a warm, welcoming yet clearly challenging aspect to the environment. The school was in the midst of a huge expansion – the construction of a new building, designed to more than double its capacity, was nearly complete, and animated discussions were taking place about how to best use the new space. As a teacher of science, I was enthused by the prospect of the commissioning of three separate laboratories for biology, chemistry and physics – a much-needed improvement on the one laboratory, which was all that was previously available for the sciences.

I was thus full of anticipation regarding the progress I would discover on my second visit seven months later. I was not disappointed. The new building now houses the Upper School, as well as a spacious administrative office, a dining area, and three science labs. In addition, the Lower School now has more room for constructive activity in the older building. Other improvements in the pipeline include new sports facilities and resurfacing of the road leading to the school.

A most impressively organized Taktse Olympics, attended by enthusiastic students, teachers and parents, took place on the first day on my second visit.

The school has developed a solid foundation on which to continue the progress which has been made on so many levels in a relatively short time. I am honored to be involved in some small way in the splendid initiative which is Taktse School. I plan to return later in the year, when I have no doubt that I will see the school has again moved forward.





Governance at Taktse

by Mr. Sonam P. Denjongpa, Board Member

I grew up in a monastic school that functioned as a family. My father was the teacher and my mother cooked and fed us. The older monk students collected firewood and helped in the kitchen. The younger ones were allowed to play. My parents treated them as their own kids.

In the beginning, Taktse School was run in a similar way. We elders took care of the students as we had been taken care of when we were young. But as the school grew from 27 elementary schoolers to a school of 250 students in grades K-12, running it became more

complex. Who was in charge of what? What were the respective responsibilities and roles of the trustees, the principal, and the leadership team? Mr. Lauenstein, the principal, suggested that a more formal structure of governance was needed. The founders agreed and sought outside assistance.

We can find shamans and lamas in the Himalayas, but a modern governance wizard was not so easy to find in the local area. With the help of our protecting deities, we found Mr. Aman Singh and his partner, Ms. Mahak Chhajer. Mr. Singh and Ms. Chhajer set up their own educational consulting firm, Ren Projects Private LTD. Mr. Singh was the founding Project Director of Ashoka University, one of the first truly excellent liberal arts colleges in India. Ms. Chhajer is Associate Director for Admissions at Ashoka University.

Mr. Singh and Ms. Chhajer began by interviewing our supporters, parents, trustees, teachers and alumni. Drawing upon their backgrounds in governance structures at other schools in India, they then came up with a hybrid proposal for Taktse, combining elements to create something compatible with Sikkimese culture and customs. Their proposal specifies who is responsible for what, how the school leadership should relate to the trustees, and how the trustees should support the school. It includes a procedure for creating a board of educational experts from India and abroad for Taktse.



In May, I returned to Taktse to join Mr. Singh, Ms. Chhajer and the other trustees to implement a workable structure of governance for the school. Our Buddhist tradition tells us to perfect our skills from countless lifetimes. We are aware that this takes time, but we hope to improve Taktse's governance during this lifetime. We are very excited to have found Mr. Singh and Ms. Chhajer, and to have made a good start.

Taktse is a place where students find space to follow their passions. A group of students who call themselves the "Storians" dabbles in different forms of media. One of their productions is a [video about the Young Leaders Retreat of 2017](#). This video was directed mainly by Gyani Pradhan, a Grade 11 student.



Making a Video of the Young Leaders' Retreat

by Gyani Wong Ah Sui Pradhan ("WASP")

My parents, Christophe Wong Ah Sui and Anu Wong, came up with the idea of filming the Young Leaders Retreat, and I did it. Initially, I was disappointed that the retreat didn't cater to the whole of the Upper School, but I was able to go after writing a letter to Mr. Namgyal, who graciously allowed me to attend and even film it. Although Mr. Yawan was not too familiar with the world of video, he did his best to help me and I am very grateful for his assistance. Another member of the Storians, Rheah Pundi Oberoi, was an immense help. She kept pushing for

the interviews, which took an eternity to complete. Without her constant reminders and effort to set up times when the interviewees as well as we were free, we probably never would have finished the video.

My school year was off to a running start because of this opportunity, and I loved the whole experience. It let me put my newly crafted skills and resolve to the test. I feel that the end result (a video called "[The Harness That Could](#)") says I passed with flying colors. I made something of which I am actually proud. And to me, there is nothing greater than looking back on how far you've come.



Video



Taktse Graduation 2017

by Ms. Dawa Yolmo

April 27th was an amalgamation of a warm morning, touching speeches, a musical ensemble, and a wonderful crowd of students, teachers, parents and trustees who gathered to celebrate our graduates (Sanjeevan, Sangay, Abhishek, Amit, Jikmee, Dawa, Pemma Lhazin, Pema Dolkar, Rewang, Krishna, Sherap and Vineet). This bittersweet day for our seniors, who are leaving Taktse to take the world in their stride, was dedicated to reliving and celebrating their journey.



The graduation theme was "A Day in Paris." A model of the Eiffel tower soared high on the stage, and an ensemble of students from the Gandhi Ashram School, Kalimpong played a medley of tunes for us.



Neither the hot morning sun nor the hailstones that surprised us in the afternoon could abate our exhilaration as the day concluded with warm hugs, warm wishes and memories that will linger with us.

The entire Taktse family congratulates the graduates, and thanks all the parents and other guests who joined us on this very special day.





Graduation was a day of nostalgia and remembering the early years at Taktse. Reminiscing together, the words hung in the air like mist on the mountains.



“Ten years ago, when asked whether I wanted to go to a boarding school, far from my mom’s cooking and my forest, my answer had been a spontaneous “YES!” In about a week’s time, I stood gazing at Taktse swathe in a thick layer of fog and cocooned by dense forest. Taktse was a monk meditating in solitude and it called me to join.” - Abhishek



“As a child in Sikkim, I loved the multi-faced gods of my Hindu family, the gentle flicker of diyas and the promises of safety that the pantheon offered.” - Shweta



“When I first saw the intimidating Mt. Kanchenjunga, I was six years old, surrounded by nature, a building and strangers who were interested in helping me shape my future. I was a stranger among strangers back then, hoping to make bonds and blend into a new and different culture.” - Vineet



“From coming to Taktse at the tender age of 12, I have learned more than I ever expected to learn – far more than just being able to comprehend the words of Shakespeare, integrate complex fractions, and sort out just how much current flows in an average light bulb.” - Dawa Penjor



“From that small kid, who was not aware of his surroundings, to a semi-mature person who is going to become a computer science engineer. Yes, I have come a long way!” - Amit



“There has always been something about leaving. Maybe it’s the final sticky hugs, the last memorable words and the hope for a next time.” - Sangay



“My life has been a balancing act between two cultures. It has been about respectfully agreeing to the other person but still being able to voice strong opinions and ask questions about everything that aroused my curiosity instead of remaining clueless.” - Pemma



“In Grades 7 and 8, I attended a more traditional and conservative school. In those two years I wanted to do well at school not because I wanted to learn more about the world I live in, but to achieve a grade that would place me above the 50th percentile. I was fed with the notion that humanities and other similar subjects were vastly inferior to the sciences.” - Rewang



“In my nine years at Taktse, the highs and lows of my school life have truly been like a sine wave. I have seen people come and go as the hands of time move second by second, minute by minute, and hour by hour. I’ve had mentors who inspired me to dream big – mentors who changed my views about the world and helped me grow as a human being.” - Jikmee





The Fruit Market

by Ms. Mamta Rai and Ms. Anugrah Rai,
Lower School Teachers

On a warm Monday morning, 21 first graders were scampering around in the upper courtyard like ants, trying to lift and carry colorful baskets full of guavas, bananas and oranges, and setting up tables for their annual Fruit Market.



The Fruit Market is an interdisciplinary approach to learning. First graders learn about money, practice addition and subtraction with fake rupees, and solve story problems to find the cost of a product. They also learn about fruits and vegetables in Environmental Studies class, draw pictures of them as advertisements for the event, write letters to the Principal requesting loans, and take a field trip to a local market to buy fruits to re-sell at their own market at school.

When we go to Lal Bazaar, the first graders are divided into smaller groups led by the first grade teachers. It's a joy to see their eyes widen with excitement when they see so many people at the market. Vendors sit on the ground and shout to sell their local vegetables, radishes, bitter gourds, pumpkins, carrots, etc. spread out before them on plastic sheets. The students scrunch their faces when they get a waft of pungent fermented 'kinema' (fermented soybean) or body odors as they pass through the crowd. Onlookers are fascinated to see the tiny ones asking questions (initially shy and nudging each other to talk in the local language) and taking down notes. They marvel at the articulation of our first grade students, and remark, "Kati batthey nani haru!" (such smart kids!). They ask the teachers, "Which school are they from?"



After visiting the local market, we return to Taktse and discuss what the students saw and did, and the fruits that they bought. They also draw pictures. At last, the long-awaited market day arrives!

The fruit sellers hold up guavas by their stems, swinging them high and shouting "Guavas! Guavas!" The upper courtyard is crowded with students and teachers wanting to buy their favorite fresh fruits. They smile and watch patiently as the cashiers take a little longer to calculate and return the change.



"Can I get a discount?" asks a teacher.

"Um... Yes," hesitantly replies a young guava seller with a smile.

After most of the fruits are sold, the first graders take their first-hand experience of dealing with money back to their classes. Together they do the accounting, while learning about profit and loss and proudly portraying themselves as little emerging entrepreneurs.



Every Child is an Artist

by Ms. Emily Murray, Resource Person

Pulling up in the school bus to Taktse, I first set eyes on a beautiful school that sits among magical mountains. It is filled with respectful, enthusiastic children. The school has a tone of peace and acceptance and really shows how approaching education in a positive and alternative way creates a healthy learning environment. It's a space where students are not afraid to explore what is possible in their education.



The new classroom dedicated to art opened its doors the day that I arrived. The kids were so excited to see what this new space and new art materials that I had brought with me were all about. Although the room doesn't have tables it didn't seem to bother the children who eagerly began working on their creations right on the floor. They just seemed excited to make art and nothing would stop them.

Many times during my first week of teaching art the kids would look at me with eyes of disbelief that the project was so open-ended for them to creatively problem solve. As I would sit and watch them try to create their compositions utilizing the new techniques I had taught them, I could almost see the wheels spinning in their heads, as they started truly thinking in creative ways. Students of various ages approached me to say they had fun and that it was the best art project they had ever done.

This feedback reassured me of the great job Taktse is doing to bring quality art education to its students. Art is a place for children to learn, trust their ideas, and explore what is possible. Taktse art classes give each child the opportunity and freedom to think and create for themselves.



Teacher Empowerment Through Action Research

by Dr. Neeraja Raghavan, author and Founding Director, Thinking Teacher, provided professional development for teachers at Taktse

This **short film** outlines the steps of Action Research for teachers. It promotes the Action Research method and brings out the power of Action Research for teacher development. It emphasizes the importance of keeping alive the thinking process in a teacher - if one is to sustain the same in a student.



Video

Video link: <https://youtu.be/fmtUL6S3QGg>



Taktse Olympics 2017

by Mr. Bhaskar Thapa,
Middle School Teacher

The Taktse Olympics 2017 was spectacular and convivial, and included events such as the 100m sprint, long jump and the 400m race. Almost all the students and teachers participated.

After days of torrential rainfall, we kept our fingers crossed and prayed for the rain clouds to stay away. Despite the cloudy and damp weather, the Taktse Olympics went smoothly. The events featured intense effort and close competition. The rain at the end didn't wash away our high spirits.

Nerves were wracked as students anxiously awaited their events. Parents eagerly watched each and every event. Enthusiasm, high hopes, and the spirit of sportsmanship kept energies high all day.

Yes, it was another victory for the Taktse family! Thank you to all who contributed to making the Taktse Olympics of 2017 a big success!





Getting to YES

by Tshering Wangyal Bhutia, Student

Last year, our principal, Mr. Lauenstein, suggested that I apply for the [Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study \(YES\) Program](#) which provides students from all over the world with an opportunity to attend high school for one year in the U.S. It is a chance to connect with students of different cultural backgrounds, and have an exciting and enriching learning experience abroad.

To get accepted into the program, I had to go through a complicated and lengthy application process. I wrote essays and travelled twice to Kolkata on the overnight train for interviews. I was nervous when I went for the interviews, as I knew the interviewers would be asking me about my Sikkimese culture. Although I do know quite a bit about modern Sikkimese culture, I did not have much idea about the culture of my parents' generation. I did some research by googling and discussing the past with the head of our hostel, Mr. Lepcha. By doing this, I realized how distant I was from our traditions and how much had changed in a generation. I was fascinated by our ancestors' worship of various deities and nature around Sikkim.

We were late for the first interview in Kolkata. Accompanied by Mr. Tsheten, we got off our overnight train at 7:30 am and rushed to the venue. We found a washroom, and changed our clothes, brushed our teeth and washed up as fast as possible. As I nervously entered the hall, I saw about 30 other students, accompanied by their parents, all smartly dressed in their different school uniforms. I was wearing jeans and a casual shirt. As the only student from northeast India, and the only one without my mom or dad, I felt very self-conscious. We waited 10 minutes or so for the interviewers to show up. I was expecting Americans, but they were Indians. This made me feel a little less uncomfortable.

The interviewers described the program and then we were allowed to ask questions. Coming from Sikkim, where we tend to feel shy, I sat back in silence and watched. Eventually I was asked to talk about my culture. From religion, to language, to looks, and even to food, the Sikkimese are very different from the rest of India. Somehow I found the courage to share what I knew about Sikkim.

Then came the medical tests, which were surprisingly challenging. There were so many medical forms to be filled out! I realized that Sikkimese medical services are very disorganized. I went to the hospital more than a dozen times, and each time I met three or four doctors.

Each time they referred me to another doctor, so I would have to go back again with our school nurse Ms. Anita. I worried that I would not be able to get the forms completed on time, and in fact I did miss the deadline. But the program officials were very understanding. They gave me various strategies to complete the medical forms. Even though my papers were late they generously accepted my submission.

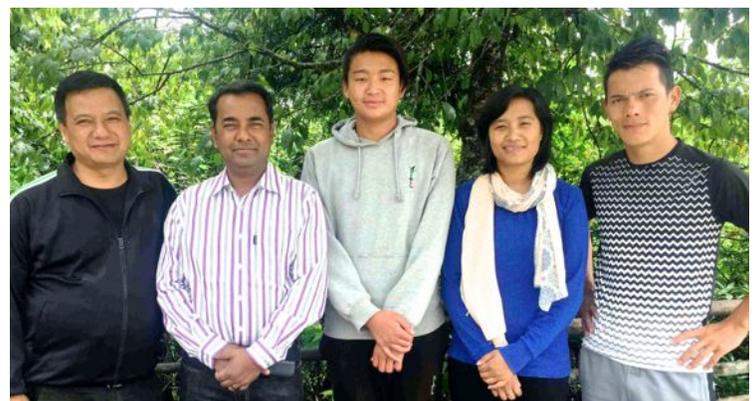
About a month after finally completing the application, my phone began to vibrate. I saw that it was an email from the program. My heart was beating fast. I didn't want to open it. I knew this email would have the verdict. I felt like going to a shrine and praying but I was too curious to wait. I opened the email, and this is what it said:

"Dear Tshering Bhutia,

Congratulations! We are pleased to inform you that you have been selected as a recipient of a Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (YES) Program Scholarship 2017 to the United States of America."

I jumped off my chair and shouted with joy while my friends stared at me as if I had gone mad. I sat on my bed imagining America and thinking about representing my school, my country and most importantly, the learning and development that I would gain from this experience. I reflected back on when Mr. Lauenstein told me about the program and how I never thought I would get in, and all the help I got from Ms. Malisha, Mr. Lepcha, Ms. Anita, Mr. Pema Namgyal, Mr. Tseten, Ms. Pema, my Mom and my friends, who put in hours of work helping me with my application, organizing my papers, and keeping in touch with the program representatives in Delhi.

I will leave Sikkim for the U.S. in August. Once I arrive I will be assigned to a host family and a host school. Of course I am nervous about adjusting to the western lifestyle and making new friends. But along with feeling nervous, I am grateful and ready to take on this challenge and start a new chapter of my life. Traveling to exotic lands has always been one of my dreams and now it has come true!



Mr. Seraphine Lepcha Mr. Ramesh Singh Tshering Wangyal Ms. Malisha Chhetri Mr. Tseten Lepcha



This year Taktse is fortunate to have Dr. Ralph W. Black visiting us as a Resource Person. Dr. Black is a poet and an associate professor of English at the College of Brockport, State University of New York. He has over 30 years of experience in teaching creative writing and poetry. He has been a great resource for our literature department teachers and students. Please enjoy his reflection about his visit to Taktse.

A Poet's Impressions of Taktse

by Dr. Ralph Black

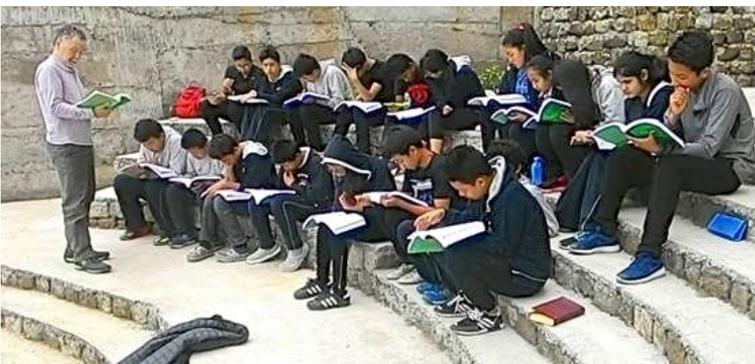
I'd been hearing about Taktse School for many years before I finally found a way to get myself (and my daughter) to Gangtok, Sikkim, to see for myself. Since my sabbatical from my teaching job at the State University of New York coincided perfectly with my daughter's gap year between high school and college, we decided to join forces and spend a couple of months teaching at Taktse.

The first thing you notice is, of course, the mountains. Mt. Kangchenjunga (the third highest peak in the Himalayas) makes an impressive appearance every now and then, giving the school a magnificent perspective. Next to the mountains are the students—bright and open and confident, they swirl around the school, greeting each other and teachers with generosity and respect. When I first arrived, it wasn't unusual for a 3rd or 4th grader to walk up to me and ask my name, where I'm from, why I'm here at Taktse.

My particular duties revolve around teaching English and creative writing, mostly to the high

schoolers. We read short stories and poems, and practice close reading and analytical writing. When we read work by an Indian writer like Anita Desai, the students are full of energetic responses about the familiar world they see depicted. When the writer is British or American (The 11th graders are getting a taste of Hopkins and Whitman, and a bit of Gwendolyn Brooks), there is curiosity and wonder at the inventive use of form, or the radical abandonment of form for a freer, more "democratic" voice!

Though I'm new to the school, I get the strong feeling that Taktse has a particular, and quite unique, educational "vision." The culture celebrates inquiry and engagement over rote memorization, understanding that independent thinking and problem solving is the best way to foster individuals who will thrive in this rapidly changing century. If my next month is as exciting and invigorating as my first, I'll count myself one lucky teacher.





Teaching Poetry with Dr. Black

by Ms. Dawa Yolmo
Upper School Teacher

Dr. Ralph Black came into my class and asked my students,

‘to take a poem and hold it up to the light like a color slide, or press an ear against its hive.’

I froze. That’s not what I thought we would do in these classes. I had expected that the two of us would happily look at a handful of poems from the syllabus;

‘tie the poem to a chair with rope and torture a confession out of it.’

But Dr. Ralph was not doing that. He was asking us to read poems, any poems, find out what makes them a poem, bringing Billy Collins in the class. No tying them to a chair. No confessions. And all this while, I was wondering and worrying when we would find out the theme of the poem, when we will start to write answers on them, not realizing that these eight to nine years of teaching poems solely for exam has taken its toll on me, my love for poems. That I have begun to see them only as a medium of passing the tests, scoring well on them, and almost forgetting to,

‘drop a mouse into a poem and watch him probe his way out,

or walk inside the poem’s room, and feel the walls for a light switch.’

Almost. And that is perhaps what I owe the most to Dr. Ralph’s visit to Taktse this year. Besides being introduced to Billy Collins and golden shovel and haikus once again, watching Dr. Ralph teach poetry has made me realize that I need to stop reading poems only to get the answers, stop treating them so clinically, reignite my passion, our passion for these delicate beings, not worry about losing time when a student passionately brings in his/her favorite poem to share in class, not be afraid of hearing my own voice while reading a poem without any purpose besides reading it during morning meetings. I look forward to balancing this with what I have been doing, while bearing in mind to avoid,

‘beating poems with a hose to find out what they really mean.’



The Art of Weaving Poetry

by Ms. Bhawna Thapa
Middle School Coordinator

For the past six weeks, every Wednesday and Thursday morning, ten language arts teachers from grade 4 to grade 8 have been gathering in a cozy corner of the library to attend the poetry

workshops lead by Mr. Ralph Black, a passionate poet and a terrific teacher from the State University of New York (SUNY) in Brockport, NY.

During this time, our teachers have been introduced to captivating and unconventional forms of poetry like ‘*The Golden Shovel*’, ‘*Haiku*’, ‘*Prose Poem*’ and ‘*Exquisite Corpse*’. The teachers’ personal favourite was the ‘*Exquisite Corpse*,’ in which every teacher added two lines to the poem after seeing only the last line of what the previous person had contributed. The most entertaining part was unfolding the paper and reading the poems aloud. Surprisingly, some poems held on to the same theme until the end, while some took absurd, yet gripping turns. Here’s one poem that unfolded as such:

*I have heard this music before,
So serene, so enticing
Like the rhythm to your heart
It wakes you up from your sorrow,
And your sorrow becomes a bird,
a fist of feathers, lifting into the air and floating
Vanishing everything into a thin line
Just like the northern star, seen yet unreached
Just like deep blue ocean
You cannot stop your thoughts
that come to you over and over
Now that’s when you can let it go
Because you are the monster of your own thoughts.*

“Working with Mr. Ralph has not only helped us learn strategies to teach poetry but it has also helped us bring out the poet in us,” Ms. Alisha expressed, after she had written and shared her Prose Poem in the workshop.

Workshops with experts like Mr. Ralph are a boon to our school. Most of us having come from a traditional method of teaching, it is easy to fall back to our old ways but experiences like this lift us out of our own ruts. To pass on the joy of simply appreciating poetry (a priceless idea we learnt in the workshop), the Lit teachers will be conducting a workshop on ‘*Exquisite Corpse*’ for the entire faculty.

Let’s begin weaving poems together!



Young Leaders' Retreat 2017

Young Leaders' Retreat (YLR) is held at the beginning of each year to get students and teachers excited and energized for the new year.

The first retreat took place three years ago, in 2015. It was held in the backfield behind the school buildings. It was such a big success that the students requested that we make this an annual program.

YLR has several goals:

- get students to think deeply about who they are, what they want to achieve, and the vision they have for their lives, and start the year with positive energy.
- encourage students to take risks.
- foster bonding between students and teachers

This year, 27 students from Grades 9 and 10 participated in YLR. It was held at the beautiful, sprawling campus of the Indian Himalayan Center for Adventure & Ecotourism (IHCAE). Highlights included workshops on self deep diving to bring out the ethos of knowing oneself better. Students also participated in adventure programs like rope courses, outdoor cooking competitions, and overnight camping to push participants out of their comfort zone.



We extend our warmest thanks to Mr. Kunzang Gyatso Bhutia (Chief Instructor and Everest) of IHCAE and his team of instructors for their immense support and unwavering courage.

We look forward to another YLR next year.





Sonam Ugay graduated from Taktse in 2016. He attends Endicott College in Beverly, MA.

Bhutan Math and Poetry Pilot Project

by Sonam Ugay

My former schoolmate from Taktse, Kitsho Tenzin, now studying in Japan, and I have a theory as to why there are disturbing youth problems such as drug abuse and violence in our country, Bhutan. First, the youth are unable to express themselves, and second, they hate math. This summer we are proposing to address these issues in our own small way, through poetry and math workshops at a few schools in Bhutan.

Although Bhutan is rich in art and culture, we often don't truly express how we feel for fear of sounding disrespectful. Such fear often leads to youths not being able to openly communicate to their parents, adults, and friends when they are going through difficult times. Instead, they seek comfort in the use of drugs and alcohol.

Kitsho and I believe that if we can introduce Bhutan youth to self expression through poetry, they may develop an ability to avoid harmful life choices. Additionally we've noticed that while there are many students in Bhutan who might have a passion for science and business, they do not pursue these because they are turned off by math. We believe that this happens in large part because society tells them math is difficult. This makes it tough for the younger generations to actually develop a love of math. Often they will feel they are stupid and give up on themselves. We want to show them how fun math can be.

Our goal is to make these workshops fascinating and empowering for students. If you have any thoughts, ideas or encouragements, please let us know. We have started a **Go Fund Me** page at <https://www.gofundme.com/svwy-bhutan-math-and-poetry-project>. Our goal is to raise \$600. We would love your support. If we raise enough funds, we are hoping to invite a Taktse teacher or other students to help us with this project.



Ingsa Subba, who graduated from Taktse in 2016, is attending Endicott College in Beverly, MA.

A Scene in My Life

by Ingsa H. Subba

The inevitable jitters of freshman year (Why are they looking at me? Do I look "normal"? Do I smell "normal"?) are slowly fading away. Now I walk the Endicott College hallways less terrified about the wandering eyes of other students. I can actually start random conversations with strangers. Is this an American trait?

I am taking some fascinating classes. Ancient Philosophy is absolutely riveting. I've been thinking a lot about Socrates and his way of teaching. I feel like I could relate to him more than other philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, and Ibn-Rashid. His rebellious tendencies and questioning of authorities drew me to him because I see something of myself in him, although hopefully I won't go out like he did.

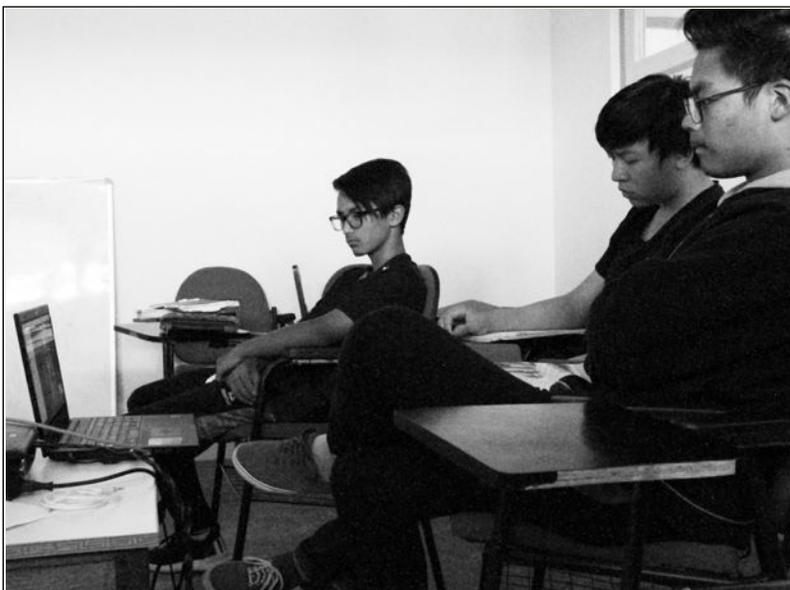
World Geography is a thrilling experience. There, I learn and relate to people from diverse regions and backgrounds. The sheer number of cultures, which are so unique yet often similar to my own, have

expanded my horizons. I recently gave a presentation about the Himalayas for this class. The American students were surprised to hear that we don't live on the white capped mountains. It's hard to explain the difference between "foothills" and "mountains" to these sea level folk.

Coming from Sikkim, I worried I would feel inadequate in front of the American kids. However, this isn't the case. In fact, I feel like I can relate to the American kids. For example, having read a plethora of children's books at Taktse, such as my personal favorite "Ferdinand the Bull," I can talk about how Ferdinand was my favorite childhood animal, after I chug a keg of beer upside down. Just kidding about the beer, and checking to see if you are still reading. I love Ferdinand and honestly, I'm more likely to be at the library than anywhere near a keg.

I'm looking at life in a new way at Endicott, full of questions and feeling very grateful (and occasionally guilty). I am eager to make the most out of this education I'm being given.

I can see now that I am a result of many different people putting incredible energy into a dream. I want to keep honoring this effort. Thank you for being part of my life.



Seeking Skype Tutors

Are you a high school teacher? Do you want to make a difference in the world?

We urgently need teachers to teach/tutor our 10, 11 and 12th graders over Skype. Following are the subjects in which we need help: chemistry, physics, biology, math, business studies, history, geography, literature, and computer science.

Class times can be flexible, according to the time difference. The number of classes (minimum of one per week) is flexible too.

If you are interested in volunteering or know a teacher, retiree or grad student who might be, please contact: Meenakshi Pradhan at: meenakshi.pradhan@taktse.org or Malisha Chhetri at: malisha.chhetri@taktse.org.



Seeking College Mentors

Are you interested in mentoring a Taktse student through the college application process? It involves bi-weekly Skype calls to help a student identify appropriate schools, negotiate the Common Application and financial aid process, and revise essays.

If so, please contact:

Professor Lisa Smulyan
Swarthmore College
610-328-8343

lsmulya1@swarthmore.edu

or Mr. Rinchen Pakhrin
Taktse International School
rinchen.pakhrin@taktse.org

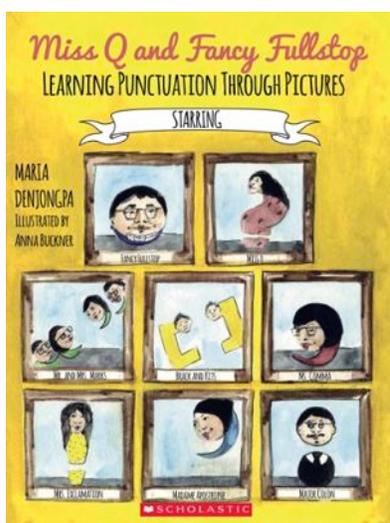
Miss Q and Fancy Fullstop Learning Punctuation through Pictures

Author: Maria Denjongpa • Illustrator: Anna Buckner

An abridged book review by Deeptha Vivekanand

Miss Q and Fancy Fullstop is a guide to common punctuation marks and how to use them, explained to children (and adults!) through a narrative.

My first reaction when I saw the cover was, “What fun this looks like!” My assumption was strengthened when I finished the book. Sometimes you can judge a book by its cover. The quirky and playful watercolor images of punctuation marks with human features lures you in immediately. Children will enjoy the funny images of a curvy question mark with a woman’s face, a spectacled full stop and a colon with a head and body detached!



Maria Denjongpa, formerly an English teacher at Taktse, uses witty language peppered with puns and clever wordplay in following the lives of two central characters: Ms. Q, the perennial questioner of all things and Mr. Fancy Fullstop, whose noble family is known to “put their feet

down when sentences get out of control.” The two fall in love and get married against their families’ wishes.

Illustrator Anna Buckner, formerly a Resource Person at Taktse, moved to Sikkim for an apprenticeship in Buddhist thangka painting. Whether it’s the facial features of the characters or the tiny details on a teacup, her love for Sikkim shines through.

To conclude, I have never been more careful with my own punctuation as I have been while writing this review!