



"HONESTY AND HUMILITY ARE THE CATALYSTS THROUGH WHICH THE WORLD
CAN BE BOTH HEARD AND TRANSFORMED" - JAMES CLOWES

Hands for a Bridge

Spring 2017 Newsletter



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BASED AT ROOSEVELT HIGH SCHOOL

Hands for a Bridge
P.O. Box 27004
Seattle, WA 98165

*Edited and Compiled by Kendall
Barton and Chloe Swedberg*

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The End and the Beginning



By Kendall Barton

At this time last year, none of us knew what we were getting into. I distinctly remember last year's welcome ceremony. I dragged my feet as the old Hands for a Bridge cohort beckoned us to the front after their performance, expecting us to sing "Lean on Me" with them. I tried to hide in the back and mumble half-remembered words as quietly as possible. When we came to the last verse, I made eye contact with another new recruit in disbelief as that HFB class threw themselves on the floor with enthusiasm to complete the song. I couldn't imagine myself ever singing so loudly in front of so many people.

Now, one year later, I have belted out "Lean on Me" in classrooms here in Seattle and across the globe in South Africa. I have thrown myself to the ground on stages and in parks, at open mics, and in gravel parking lots. I have performed in front of hundreds of people, sprung poetry on unsuspecting classes, and made friends thousands of miles away. Hands for a Bridge has pushed me and extended the limits of my comfort zone time and time again. It has challenged the way I think, tested my beliefs, and expanded the horizons of what I thought possible, all while building a community.

Recently, we passed the torch on to the next Hands for a Bridge class. They, too, were brought to the front with all the past students to sing "Lean on Me" for the first time. Some were already enthusiastic, others were more hesitant, but all will grow and be changed. The opportunities and experiences provided by Hands for a Bridge are theirs to seize now. Even as my class and I say goodbye, I know that we will always be a part of the Hands for a Bridge community. I can't wait to see next year's class be challenged and transformed by the unique program that is Hands for a Bridge.





Summer Picnic



By Sophia O'Hara

An afternoon up in a park
ducking under and around outstretched tree branches
gradually we accumulated on top of the hill

All together for the first time we didn't talk much
but slowly
through skits and laughter and new "hellos"
we began to know little pieces of each other

We danced, sang, and clapped to rhythms we orchestrated together
In small groups our eyes and hearts began to open
To the ways of one another

A challenge was presented to us; a tightrope
And with it a single stick to get up and over

Head high and perched between two trees that we couldn't touch to get across.
We started in a box and stared, then strategized, then bit by bit, person by person we made our way over.
We fell again and again but our hands were linked and we lifted each other back up just as much
People were sent back with each brush of the rope
And so we trailed back and forth
By the end of the afternoon with one person left to go, we dared not smile yet
Soon their feet touched back to ground on the finished side and we all cheered, smiling and content
and with that confidence in each other and ourselves as well

we begun the year together



The Teachers



By Riley Collins and Mara Louter

I remember sitting in the hostel in a bright yellow chair. Looking to my left, Ms. Magidman sat with a lap full of yarn, eyes intently focused on her quickly moving fingers attached to knitting needles. She was making a sock. She had been working on that single sock since I sat on the airplane seat beside her.

To my right sat the red-headed son of Ms. Magidman. His mouth was ever moving, as he continued to add a philosophical line across the group's conversation. An occasional tear fell from his eye, which matched his endless care for every person he laid eyes on.

Next to this philosophical teacher (who secretly had a large yoda tattoo on his shoulder) a dark curly haired woman sat with legs outstretched in an extremely comfortable manner. Nancy was her name. Her calming voice hit the group and silenced even the ever moving mouth of the red-headed yoda man. Her words hit us all like soft butterflies landing in our chests, reassuring us that everything would be okay and hugging us like there was something bad in us she was trying to squeeze out and dispose of.

The sounds of knitting needles mixed with Ms. Magidman's deep chuckle mixed with the intense giggles of her students (and son) perched in the circle next to her are sounds that have never left my ears.

Now as I sit in a dark grey chair in a straight line, the voices and laughs from bright chairs and a misshapen circle are released in my ears and in my memories. Today, I walk down a hallway at my brightly but awkwardly lit school. I see a tall red-headed man walking with a peppiness only a person wearing toe shoes and with a secret yoda tattoo could possess. We connect our "hellos" with a secret handshake, which strengthens the halls with its intense clap. An action so simple has connected us from our time sitting in that misshapen circle to now and to next year and to years to come.

It all began in the airport. Scurrying around SeaTac with our massive suitcases, shifting through the clear halls, looking at the maps and signs. Sitting through a fourteen-hour flight, eight-hour layover, and another ungodly nine-hour flight really does make people bond. I was only newly acquainted with the group of adults. Being in a contained space with them and my exhausted classmates, laughing and complaining together, I had no idea what the next two weeks were going to be like.

The exposure to the blazing Cape Town sun definitely woke us up. We waited in the parking lot and anticipatedly gripped our suitcases for our gleaming white vans. Ms. MacDonald handed us our cell phones and firmly but caringly told us to always text her that we were safe at our homestays by 8 p.m. She's been here before.

My guy Bob has been here before too, and you can tell. He shed tears when talking about the organization, laughed along with our jokes, and always understood how to fix a problem. Being driven around in the vans, We all screamed and hollered together about the baboons in the road doing their "business," fervently pointed out the emus and penguins. It was something that could only be described as simply human.

It always felt so natural being with all of the adults. Plesha, Elizabeth, and Grosskopf were what you'd call newbies. And it honestly was a pretty good feeling to experience something completely novel and shocking, not only with your peers as a teenager, but with the adults that are supposed to be responsible for you. Experiencing South African song and dance with the teachers and finding out that all of us are tone deaf was certainly something that unified all of us as a group.



Aisling's Song



By Kayla Braverman

*“What is going on?
Been in a fog
For way too long
I hope you see
I’m trying hard
To be your friend
But I love the fog
I’ve been living in
And it’s hard for me to let it go
But if I can
It’ll be for you.
Because I love you...
I love you guys! ”*

It all started at the open mic on our retreat with the South African visitors. Aisling walked up to the stage and started snapping. The audience waited in anticipation, wondering what she would do next. No one knew that what was about to happen would have a lasting effect on our experience in Hands for a Bridge. She sang.

During the rest of the South African visitation, we sang this song dozens of times with our new friends. In class throughout the year, if one student starts snapping, the rest of us will join in singing “I’ll find you in a fog.” We shared this song with our parents and community at the auction. When we traveled across the world, we brought this song with us. In Cape Town, we sang this song on the cable car up to Table Mountain on Valentine’s Day. Recently, we passed this song down to next year’s HFB class during our end of the year presentation for them. This song is a symbol of the supportive and loving community HFB creates. I’ll never forget hearing 32 voices yell “I love you guys!” at the end of this song, as we huddled into a group hug. I’m so happy that HFB 2017 was able to leave our mark on this program by passing down such a special song.



South African Retreat



By Aimon Heffernan

On the last weekend of the South African HFB students' visit, we went on a retreat. We drove for about 50 minutes to camp Waskowitz. Up until this point, we'd been building our relationships every day. Each day, we'd spend time together during and/or after school. When we went on the retreat, it was the closest we'd been. That was the time when friendship turned to family, when we all opened up completely and showed our trust and our vulnerability.

Throughout the retreat, we spent time writing in our journals, getting to know each other, and singing songs. It was two days that flew by in an hour. We lowered our barriers and welcomed each other into our personas. The retreat was the point where we all got closest, where we truly transformed from friends to a family. Beliefs, backgrounds and personality didn't matter. We all connected.

We'd sit down by the creek, silently listening to the watery waves washing their way down the curvy creek, as our thoughts flew from our mind to our paper. We took a little bit of the retreat home with us, in our journals, which will always be with us.





Mask Making



By Kenyon Schultz

On the South African retreat we made masks that represented our inner and outer selves. One side was Sharpie drawings of things we liked and what people noticed about us from a distance, the other was a water-color painting that represented our inner feelings and personalities. Both South African and Roosevelt students made masks and the differences between the two seemed huge at first but when analyzed closer were actually very similar. We used these masks in an activity later in the day. We each had to create a dance for our masks and then teach this mask to a partner and swap masks. We did this a few times, laughing the whole time and ended up with mangled versions of the original dance. We all developed very interesting perspectives on each other through this activity.





Our Books



By Rachel Glaser

This year we read seven books:

“Cal” by Bernard MacLaverty

Set in Northern Ireland, this book unfolds as Cal, a catholic living in a protestant neighborhood, deals with the guilt of being involved in the murder of a man, whose widow he has fallen in love with.

“Citizen” by Claudia Rankine

A collection of poems about the black experience in modern-day America

“Lakota Woman” by Mary Brave Bird and Richard Erdoes

The autobiography of Mary Brave Bird, an important figure in the American Indian Movement.

“A Small Place” by Jamaica Kincaid

Kincaid’s ode to her home Antigua. Discusses imperialism in Jamaica as it has evolved through the ages.

“My Traitor’s Heart” by Rian Malan

Rian Malan chronicles stories he has researched and reported on about violence and hope in South Africa, in parallel to his reality as one of the heirs to an infamous Afrikaner dynasty.

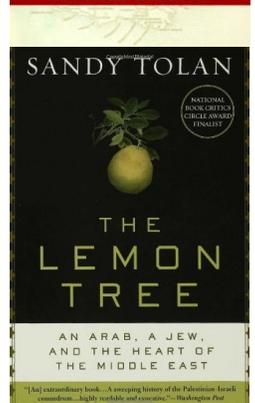
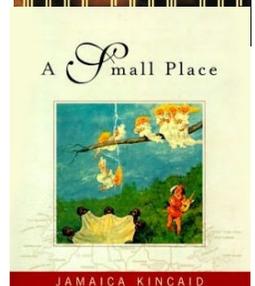
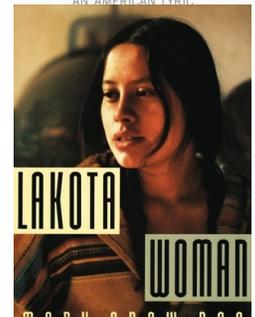
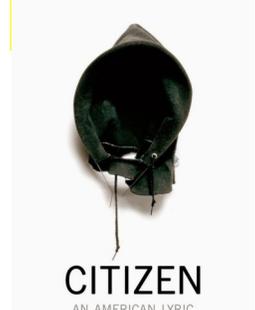
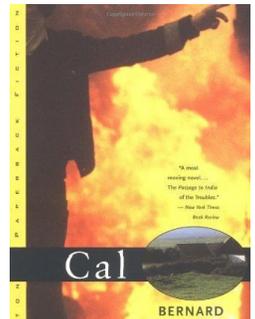
“The Lemon Tree” by Sandy Tolan

A story of friendship and conflict set in the midst of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Gender Books: “Whipping Girl” by Julia Serano, “The Body Project” by Joan Jacobs Brumberg, “The Red Tent” by Anita Diamant, “The Bell Jar” by Sylvia Plath, “The Left Hand of Darkness” by Ursula K. Le Guin, “Women of the Silk” by Gail Tsukiyama, “Memoirs of a Geisha” by Arthur Golden, and “Cinderella Ate My Daughter” by Peggy Orenstein

Books discussing various aspects of gender.

The most impactful book I read this year was “A Small Place” by Jamaica Kincaid. As a potential tourist, and a citizen of the United States, it is important for me to understand the role I play when I travel abroad. The act of simply being a tourist in a foreign country is an act of imperialism. In order to attempt to minimize this, it is essential to recognize my imperialism when traveling abroad so that I do not become any more a tool of it. In my opinion, we read this book, in that vein, to prepare us for our trips to other countries so that when we arrived we could watch our behavior and avoid the trope of the typical American tourist.





History Projects



By Greta Lynch

One of the biggest portions of our year is the trip we embark on in the middle of February. However, before we can travel to these new places we have to conduct research on the conflicting issues first. In groups of four we researched and created elaborate presentations that reflected the conflicts in either Northern Ireland or South Africa. The groups were decided upon randomly, but each person was researching the country they would travel to in February. Every group created a dynamic and well-researched poster board that went into depth on the ongoing conflicts in the two countries. After the research portion, each person presented their topic to a small group of peers. We watched and evaluated each other on the ability to deliver the information well and the depth of the project. It was very interesting to see what each group had come up with and how they each designed their boards. I really enjoyed this project, as it allowed us to work individually and as a whole class. Each group worked well together and created very original and interesting presentations.





Auction



By Aisling Doyle Wade

The whole class shifted nervously, counting on our fingers how many auction items we'd individually procured. Two? Three? One? None?! Some students felt additionally uncomfortable, realizing they had yet to even send out their invitations. It was exactly one week before the auction and things were not looking good. All were pure intentioned, but many of us uneasy shouldering the new responsibility of being in Hands for a Bridge. Busy schedules full of sports, school, and work had taken precedence over auction preparation, and with only a week left before the big day, it seemed the 2017 HFBers were about to let the whole community down. We were hearing it from every direction. Mr. Nolet had been telling us every day in class that many of us had yet to turn in our three auction items and those organizing the event were becoming nervous that we would not have enough items or people in attendance. Ms. MacDonald reminded us that an auction with not enough items and/or guests is no grand money-making event, and Ms. Magidman did not let us forget how much the annual budget of HFB relies on the auction. Many of us 2017 HFBers felt the sting of pre-guilt as we crept nearer to the auction date, each day more nervous that the whole event would fall apart.

Just days before the auction, we continued scrambling to put together more items and convince more people to come. We whispered frightfully to each other in the alcove outside Nolet's room,

“What if we broke HFB?”

“What if we don't raise enough money and no South Africans can travel next year?”

“Oh no... what have we done?”

Finally, the much-anticipated day arrived. The morning of November 19 was spent, by many of us, in nervous discomfort. We wandered around our houses sipping tea, watching snippets of cartoons, trying to do homework, all too unnerved to complete any task fully. Around 4 o'clock in the afternoon, we began arriving to the basement of St. Mark's. Helping to set up, we saw promising signs. There seemed to be a plethora of items being laid out on the long auction tables, from gift cards and baskets to offered services and trips. There seemed to be no shortage of items at all! The 2017 HFBers let out a collective sigh of relief, the first test had been passed. Our moods only continued to improve as the spacious basement began transforming into a homey yet exciting space with catered horderves, starry strings of lights, lively chatter, and the sweet chords of Aimon Heffernan's guitar. As teams of HFBers began the first rounds of selling auction tickets, our elation was only expanded by the appearing crowds of guests. It seemed we'd also packed the house!



All in all, the evening turned out to be magical. For many of us, this was the first time we experienced a fuller scope of the HFB community. It was incredible to see so many people connected with the program. Alumni, family and friends of HFBers, teachers, and other community members came together to help students have continued access to the HFB experience. It was at the auction that many of us felt the legacy and heritage of the program for the first time. As we belted out songs on the stage, struggling to remember recently learned lyrics, mingled with guests and experienced the night, we realized how many years of hard work and development had come before us, how many auctions had previously been held and how many people had experienced the program before us.

We ended up raising a record amount of money, and we still can't figure out how that happened. In reality, it was probably the tireless work of the HFB teachers, board members, and auction organizers that pulled it off, but it felt for many of us like the day we earned our HFB stripes. From then on, we've recognized the unconventional way this class has liked to do things. 2017 HFBers are perhaps not the most reassuringly organized group to ever be in the program, but we always get it done, and always in a genuine and meaningful way.

Polly Olsen's Visits

By Eleanor McGuire

Early in the year we read "Lakota Woman" by Mary Crow dog. It was a memoir of a Native American woman discussing her struggles with poverty, discrimination, and upholding cultural values. We had many deep conversations about this book and they were further enriched when Yakima tribe member Polly Olsen came to visit. She started our first meeting by telling us about her role working in the Native American health care system. We learned that Native Americans received little funding or recognition from the government and sometimes even ignored completely. She spoke from the heart and when she shared her story of the depression



she got being away from in Oklahoma, we were able to feel her despair too. Prior to her visit and reading "Lakota Woman", many of us, myself included, knew about historical events involving Native Americans, but little about the issue they face today. She enlightened us and we kept the conversation going long after she left. Six weeks later, in the midst of the Standing Rock controversy, Polly visited us again. This time was very different though. We talked not about politics but about reciprocity. We sat in a circle and every single person shared an instance when someone reciprocated gratitude towards them. Tears were shed and it brought us closer together as a class. Polly passed around a ball of twine and we each put a bead on it. We were connected yet we each had our own part. Right as she left, we cut the string into small places and made bracelets. It was an emotional experience and I'll never forget the impact she made on us and the HFB class.



Voices in the Community



By Kellyn Barrow

Our Hands for a Bridge group has had various assignments that revolve around extending our voices out into the community. To name a few we had the lunchroom project, the open mic spoken word assignment, guerilla poetry assignment, and the real change assignment. All of these activities involved some form of the students sharing experiences and their speech. They were asked to go where they would reach out of their comfort zones and attempt to connect with their peers and strangers in ways that they wouldn't normally. Although these did seem like a very challenging and daunting assignments at first many were able to gain rewarding experiences where they or someone they reached out to was able to learn something new. This community work has been very important and although some things our group has done this year may not be remembered immediately, every interaction leaves an impact that may ripple throughout lifetimes.



Guerrilla Poetry



By Olivia McAlpine

We started out by brainstorming a list. “What are things that need to be talked about at Roosevelt?” After a few rounds of elimination, the groups finally decided on mental health, success culture, individuality, apathy and ignorance, stress and suicide, LGBTQ+ sexual education, rape and sexual assault, and materialism. After writing, rewriting, and rehearsing, we attacked our first classroom. I remember the note cards I held shaking and my voice trembling. I dreaded the next performance. My stomach hurt as we walked into our second classroom. However, to my surprise, the second one was easier. Then the third was easier, then the fourth, and so on. By the end of it, I got a thrill out of making the classes we entered uncomfortable. Overall, it was pretty much a positive experience for everyone. The assignment challenged us to step even further outside of our comfort zones to use our voices to express subjects that really matter.



Open Mics



By Marissa McGinnis

This year, Hands For A Bridge played a big role in making Roosevelt open mics a welcoming and supportive environment. Mr. Nolet encourages the class to assume the attitude of the poet and not to be afraid of being vulnerable in front of a crowd, and this showed in the open mics. The South African featured open mic is one of the biggest open mics of the year, and this year was no different; having the South Africans introduce our school to their poetry and music was an amazing thing to witness. At the end of the mic, the entire room was up on their feet, jumping and belting out “Lean On Me” in a dimly lit room; the ground was shaking and everyone was filled with joy and acceptance.



Due to two Poets Committee leaders being in the HFB class this year, we collaborated a lot more with student voice than in past years. Every student in our class was required to attend at least two stu-

dent voice events and to participate by sharing original work. The powerful pieces shared by HFB students welcomed and encouraged others at the mics to also share. Their snaps supported kids who were more shy and intimidated by the mic, and they introduced friends to these great opportunities of sharing their voice. The class gives us a lot of different writing material that we are able to share and perform at open mics. This year's HFB class assumed the attitude of a poet by owning their individual voices in front of others and in front of a microphone.

By Olivia Davis

One of the main tenants of HFB is sharing your voice, be it in politics or poetry, and the open mics provided an opportunity to expand this ideal beyond the classroom. The open mics, which I personally had attended, felt almost as if they were from a movie; the quirky fairy lights, the circle of students, and the one person who was spilling their heart into the microphone. There were songs and poetry and stories, and during the final open mic of the year, cookies. It felt like every day in HFB should, with deep feeling and personal truths being revealed to people who we may not know, but want to share with anyways. Better yet, it was an event that anyone could attend, so people I had never met before told me their lives and losses and confusions. I told them my own in return, using what I'd written in class, and it felt like a wonderful, fitting crossover. Fellow HFBers were also there, and having them come up to me afterwards to tell me they had liked my writing was truly rewarding; to know that we were able to step away from the class setting and still be appreciative of one another was a gratifying realization. This, to me, is why open mics are valuable: The connections we make grow stronger through what we share of ourselves, and the open mics are a jumping-off point to have your words find a home.





Real Change

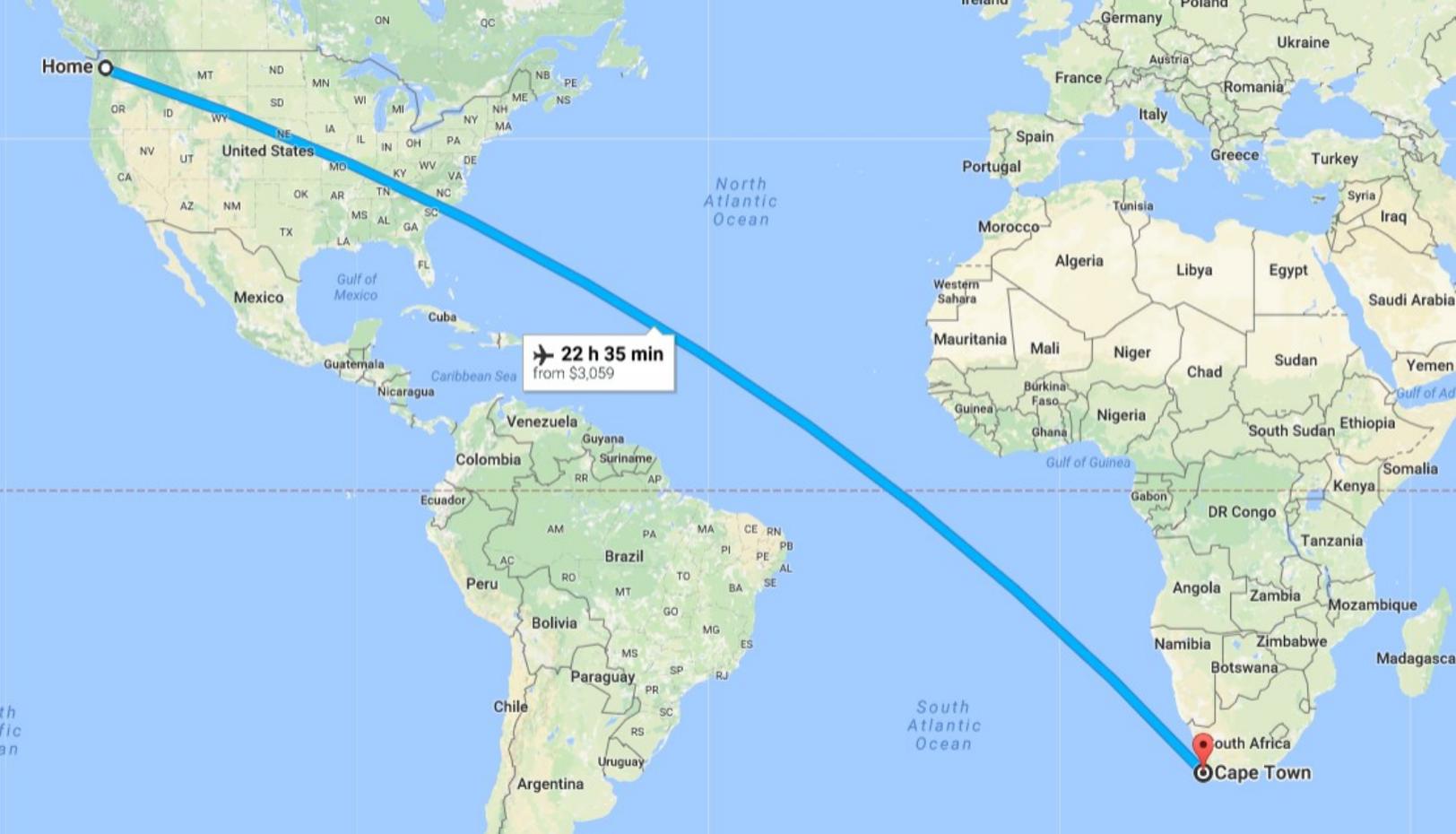


Daphne Raigrodski

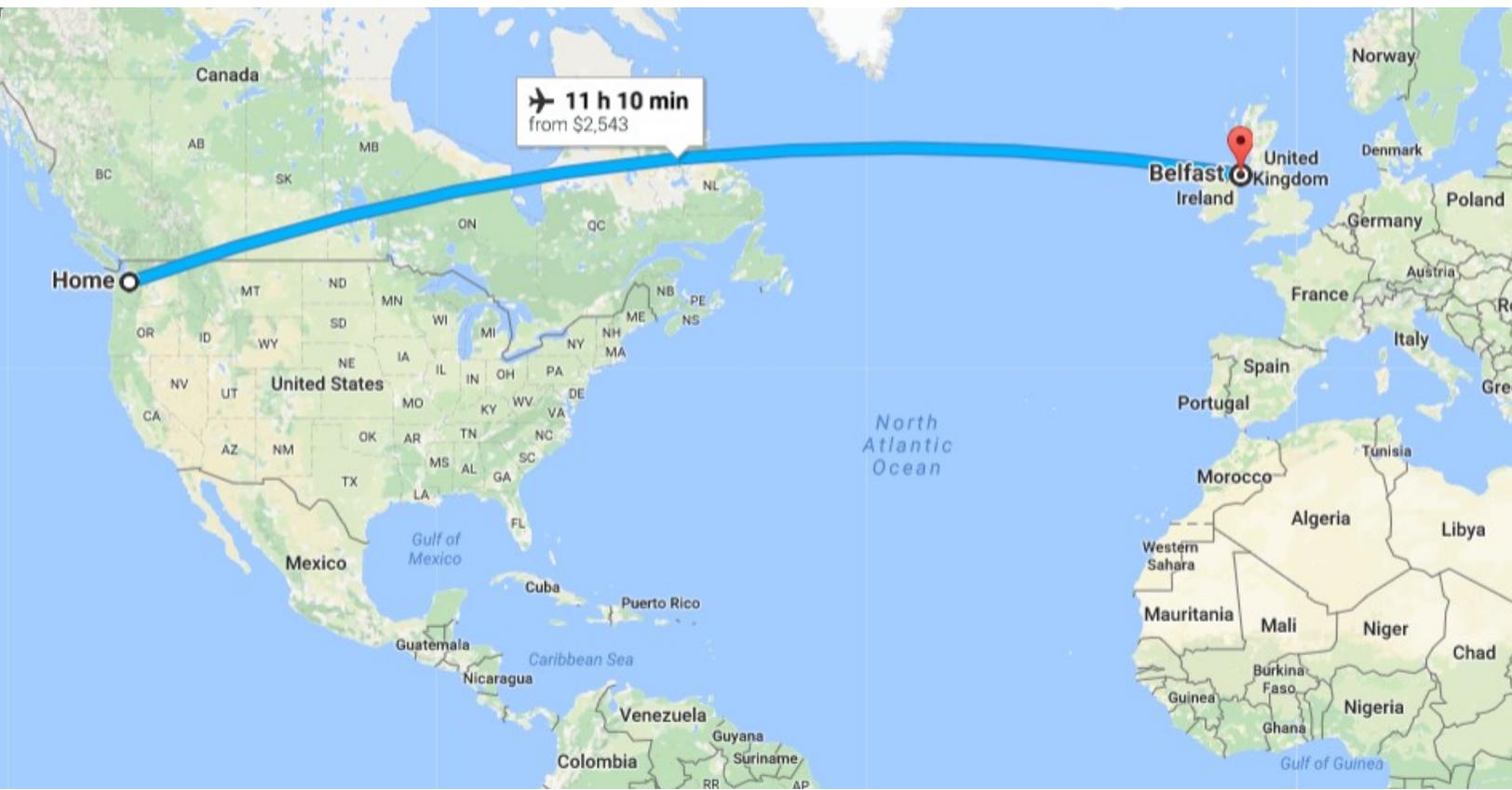
Listen. It is so important to listen. Every person has a story, but many times when we see homeless people around Seattle we tend to walk by, give them a subtle nod or maybe a smile. Many people acknowledge the homeless people that we see and many people don't. But it seems to be a rarity that we stop and talk, exchange stories, and truly acknowledge that just because you don't have a home doesn't make you any less human. That is exactly what we did when we each went and talked to Real Change vendors. With the Real Change project we bought copies of Real Change and had conversations with people whose stories and opinions we most likely wouldn't have heard otherwise. Talking to Margaret at the PCC on 40th, I got to hear a different perspective. I got to hear her story and hear her opinions. She talked about education and its importance as well as her views on how the upcoming election would change things for everyone.

In Seattle, homelessness is a huge issue, and unfortunately many of us, including the city, push it under the rug. People have preconceived notions about homelessness, about why people become homeless, or the correlation between drug addiction, alcoholism, and homelessness. But by going out and buying a copy of the Real Change newspaper and taking even just a minute or two to talk to the person selling the newspaper, you can see how those preconceived notions rarely tend to be the case. Even if you don't end up having in depth conversations about life, just asking how someone is doing can instantly improve their day.





Travel





South Africa



By Hannah Nichols

The 2017 Hands for a Bridge trip to Cape Town, South Africa is a moment in time that we will all hold close in our hearts forever. The conversations, memories, art, adventures, laughter, songs, friendship, learning, and love we all experienced was something that will sustain us for the rest of our lives. These two weeks in Cape Town changed our perspectives, challenged our ideas, and helped us all grow into the people we hope to be some day.

At the retreat in Cape Town we had a group conversation about stereotypes. The teachers would read a statement and everyone would shout out if they believed it to be true, false, or if they thought it was an accurate or true stereotype. This conversation was really interesting to have with so many students from different backgrounds. The statements ranged from topics of gender, race, music, culture, and even food. From a Roosevelt student's perspective, it was frustrating that the Cape Town students wanted to spend lots of conversation time on statements about how people

eat rather than about topics like race. However, we held our own and kept the conversation going with patience. It was especially interesting to see what the South African students thought about American stereotypes. Lots of these stereotypes seemed to stem from American media. The students also had lots of questions about our recently-elected president, Donald Trump.

One memory that everyone from our trip has is walking into Nelson Mandela's jail cell on Robben Island.

We will never forget our tour guide, who showed us around the walls he was contained in for many years of his own life. We will never forget the barbed wire all around us on fences, the small jail cells, the ration lists, the coded old letters sent in and out of the prison, the faces and names of people passed away, the steel bunk beds, and the echoing sound of the hands of our tour guide as he hit the heavy metal doors.

There is no better way to come together than coming together through art. While we were at camp, we had the chance to create art pieces based upon a word. Each group had a different word like truth, trust, love, empower, etc. We created a three-dimensional art piece with paper, pens, and tape. Then, later that afternoon we got to recreate it on the beach in the sand. The whole process was fun, and it was really interesting to see all the different finished final products.

Table mountain was an adventure in Cape Town. The spinning gandala took us up to the top with an amazing view of the ocean and the city below us. The wind was nice and cool, and the clouds that covered the rocky mountain top provided a nice table cloth. When you're up so high and looking back down on the earth, it's



easier to understand who and what matters most to you in the world. The bigger picture becomes just a little bit clearer.



Laughter was something never lost for a moment, and will never be forgotten in Cape Town. Whether it was riding in the van, hanging out in the park and at school, or swimming with penguins, laughter was an ever-present part of our journey together, and we all benefited from it.

Singing is HFB. Without it this program would be incomplete. At camp, in the van, at the open mic, on the

beach, in church, at the school assembly, at our final picnic, or in the airport, HFB songs were always traveling around with us in our pockets. Music has become more important to each of us in our own way. Aisling's song has been passed on and we can't imagine HFB any other way.



The friendships we have made overseas are ones that we will keep for the rest of our lives. We have learned more from each other than we ever could sitting in any regular high school classroom. The bonding, jokes, photographs, funny whatsapp texts, and hugs are things to cherish forever. Nzolo's necklaces and the string bracelets from the camp web, are items that will never be lost.

School in Cape Town was very different in many ways. It was different from Roosevelt, and both Isilimela and Bellville were also very different from one another. The difference in resources, teachers, uniforms, and students was astounding. No matter

how few miles separated these schools in Cape Town, the divide was evident, and never went unnoticed.

We will forever be thankful for the endless love and warmth we felt from all our friends in South Africa. They were like one big giant family, and we are so lucky to have been able to create these bonds overseas. No matter what we do in the world, HFB will always inspire us to love everyone as if they were our long lost friends. We will take a little bit of the sunshine and love from Cape Town and spread it across the world wherever we may go.





Northern Ireland



By Payton Pederson

The trip was made special not only by Northern Ireland’s incredible landscape, but by the people we had the opportunity to meet. Of course, we got to connect closely to the other HFB students, and they were amazing. I was most surprised by the response we received from other students, teachers, and community members. When Mr. Harkin allowed us to meet with younger students, that, for me, was a key moment in our visit. We talked to them about all sorts of topics ranging from sports, family, and religion. After this, the younger students did not hesitate to come and talk to us. They were all so sweet and welcoming, and very excited to have us around. The teachers were also willing to host us in their classrooms to connect with other students. Our eyes were opened by the school’s community and Derry’s community as well. The people on the streets, in shops, and the people who spoke to us were kind and receptive to our personalities. They were willing to teach us and learn from us as well. Overall, the trip was well-balanced between asking questions and answering questions.



By Olivia Capestany

The Northern Ireland trip was unforgettable in many ways. Every activity we did, whether it was bowling with the Irish kids or watching “Blinkered,” was worthwhile and fun. Before the trip, I was nervous because I had no idea what to expect, but after a nine-hour flight to Londonderry, I knew that I had made the right decision to join HFB. Throughout the trip, we grew closer with both our HFB Seattle family and our new HFB Irish family by bonding on the bus and going to school together. Going to Northern Ireland really helped me gain a new perspective on life and help shaped my ideas on conflict. Even more than that, I gained another family. Immediately, I became close with the Irish HFB and now I truly feel like I have two families. One, my Seattle family, and another 9 hours away in Londonderry.





Blinkered



By Elliott Zilberstein and Elliot Jones

Blinkered is an interactive play created by Patricia Byrne, who is also the artistic director of Sole Purpose Productions, which is the production agency that has hosted this successful play since its' premier last year. Blinkered focuses on a suicidal nineteen year-old named Ryan, and follows him and his family as he begins to show signs of suicidal desire, and an eventual follow-through. The Hands for a Bridge travelers to Northern Ireland have once again had the privilege this current year in witnessing the play live in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland traveler Elliott Zilberstein notes, "Part of the brilliance of this program is the comfortable allowance not only of emotions to be expressed, but to be expressed in the presence of the family you create throughout the year." He's referencing the shameless tears that were flowing from so many in the audience in response to such a powerful, and moving production.



Writing Prompts



By Sophia O'Hara

As a class there is no doubt we know how to talk. Prompted or unprompted we all always seem to find things to say to one another, oftentimes driving us off track a little. We read books or excerpts from them, we read articles, we watch talks from interesting people, and learn to process our thoughts through our words to each other. The writing prompts that began this year opened up a new and interesting way to get to know each other, but more importantly, ourselves. There is something to be said for writing pen to paper. The way your thoughts fall out onto a page in a stream of consciousness is somehow less guarded and more exploratory than a conversation often is. The written dialogue that the writing prompts initiated between Northern Ireland, South Africa, and us here at home was compelling in a way unique to the face to face interactions and conversations that we had all already previously experienced. I love writing letters. In this day and age with instant connection almost always available it's a breath away from the constant chatter of the online world. It opens up a more concrete and direct way to open up your thoughts. As a class we weren't always excited at the vulnerable position it sometimes put us in. Having someone else able to explore your tangible thoughts is a bizarre notion. But as we did them more and more people began to open up and also to really look forward to receiving them back from the other places. Although our outgoing letters exceeded the number we received back, hopefully this exchange is one that grows and flourishes in the years to come.



Assuming the Attitude of the Poet



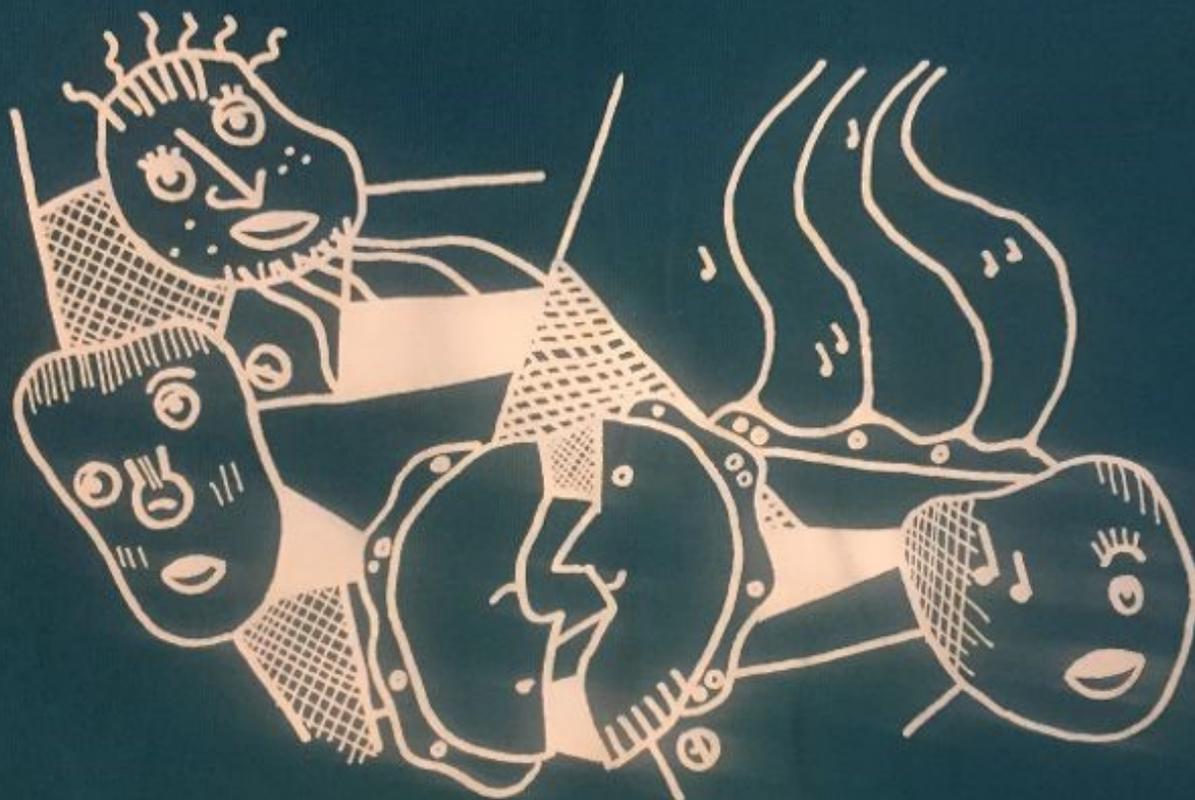
By Laura Madsen

Anyone looking in from an unconnected standpoint would tell you that Mr. Nolet's Hands for a Bridge class is a certified cult. In fact, many (if not all) of its participants (including myself) would agree. We are a group that functions, for all intents and purposes, outside the norms of regular language arts classes. To expand on just how disconnected from the status quo of academia we are, my younger sister sat beside me on the couch a couple of months ago trying to help me write a paper on personal experiences with different aspects of society. Like always, I had backed myself into a corner trying to unravel the meaning of all of it, staring catatonic at the blinking cursor on an entirely white page. Questioning my indecisiveness, she tried to help guide me through the motions of typing out the simplest of five-paragraph essays, only to be met by a frustratingly defiant refusal.

She sat back bewildered and asked, "why not a five-paragraph essay?" "Because there is no such thing as a five-paragraph essay in the world of Nolet," was the reply. She continued to stare. I explained to her that, in the eyes of Nolet, a five-paragraph essay was nothing more than the bare minimum completion of an assignment, offering no manner of depth or truth to the motivation behind the content of the piece. "He believes that an essay is written to intrigue the reader, pull them down so far into the story they can barely come up for air, only able to be led out from underground by the writer themselves, bringing them to the end of a spectacular journey. Or something like that." My sister just looked at me and laughed.

"We must assume the attitude of the poet," I continued, "the underlying idea being that the author must believe they have the power to interpret something into anything, as long as they can make the reader understand it too. It is the belief that you own whatever you are speaking of, and therefore take the audience through a journey in whatever way you choose."

I, an aspiring poet, fell in love with that concept, although upon hearing it at first was incredibly confused as to what it meant. I always ended up interpreting things as a poet would, despising rhetorical analysis (sorry, Ms. Kenny Hall) and other such on-demand essays. Really the word "essay" itself speaks to all manner of stereotypical eye-rolling and snoring teenagers in over-dramatized high school movies. It took me longer than I'd like to admit to understand that "assuming the attitude of the poet" was something I was already executing. As it turned out, the hard part was stepping back from the haze of metaphor to see the simplicity of fact. One might say Hands for a Bridge in its entirety assumes the attitude of the poet.



“Honesty and humility are the catalysts through which the world can be both heard and transformed.”

James Clowes