

**TEAM Westport Meeting Minutes**  
**June 3, 2014, 8 AM**  
**Room 201, Westport Town Hall, Westport, CT**

**Attendees:** Judy Hamer, Catherine Onyemelukwe, Steve Daniels, Susan Ellis, Maggie Mudd, Harold Bailey, Jr. (Presiding), Bernicestine McLeod, Dolores Paoli, Brett Aronow

**Guests:** Kelle Ruden, Zoe Tarrant

The meeting was called to order at 8:05 AM.

The minutes from our May 6, 2014 meeting were approved.

Susan Ellis moved acceptance and Judy seconded.

**New Business:** None noted.

**Old Business:**

**Programming Strategy and GamePlan:**

1. Books featuring 'Kids of Color'
  - a. Discussion:
    - i. Steve visited the Pingree School in New Jersey. The Librarian there has a tremendous resource. They have the ability to go on online and talk with anyone that might coordinate with them. They have done a lot of research in this area.
    - ii. Maxine Bleiweis, Director of the Westport Library, stated **in an email** that there is an issue nationally with regard to finding books reflecting children of color as evidenced by the NY Times article and the Wall Street Journal. For that matter, there are relatively few books published about and/or by people of color for children.
    - iii. Catch-22 Syndrome: One of the factors in whether certain categories of children's books are included in programming is the degree to which they are being checked out. However, one of the key factors as to whether they are being checked out is whether children have been exposed to them as a natural, normal part of library programming. Children's books with protagonists of color have traditionally been checked out at relatively low levels so by that criterion it has not justified programming or purchasing them on a widespread basis.
  - b. Recommendations:
    - i. Having a diverse collection of books in town is a commitment to the children of our town since such books are needed by ALL children and NOT just children of color. Therefore, to the greatest extent possible and practical Westport should determine which books are available and add them to our Public and School Library collection(s) .
    - ii. We should look at the criteria for purchasing books as well as programming at both public and school libraries to ensure that there is a priority placed on having books reflecting all children. Although there is a dearth of diverse books in the market place, we can start with what has been published and purchase those books.

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- iii. Include books and films with protagonists of color as a natural part of children's story time and film programming.
- iv. Assess which diverse titles and films are already a part of our Library collections.
  1. Are they being included
    - a. in programming?
    - b. on summer reading lists?
- v. Based upon the aggregate input we received from the Essay Contest, Westport students are aware that there is a limit as to how much they learn about diversity under current conditions. Continue to develop vehicles for students to convey their perspectives on this issue to parents and the community.
- vi. Work with the PTA re: awareness.
- vii. All books are not necessarily great. At young ages, it is important for children to read as many books of varying sizes and calibers as possible to maximize the potential that they will be inspired to become lifelong readers as they mature. As such, diverse titles should be a part of the mix across the board - not just among the classic or 'great' books categories.
- viii. There was some discussion when Kelle Ruden suggested that TEAM Westport come up with a reading list of diverse titles for now to lay the groundwork for next year such that the Library could
  - highlight them
  - feature them proactively in programming (vs a display)The consensus reached was that
  1. Any such list should be compiled by professional librarians and educators vs TEAM Westport.
  2. Any programmatic inclusion should be on a natural, 'matter of fact' basis
- ix. We should start the conversation to drive awareness about this issue in Westport and surrounding communities. Potential approaches to be explored include
  1. Engagement of an expert to kick off a campaign.
  2. Working jointly with Maxine Bleiweis and the Westport Library on messaging and press releases
  3. Building awareness groups school by school to support the inclusion of diverse titles .
  4. Working with Westport Public Schools to drive awareness and action as part of its 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills curriculum strategy.
  5. Soliciting authors who can read their works and speak with children.
    - a. Note: they may need assurance that their books are being read.
- x. Arrange a follow-on meeting with Mary Parmelee who is the Children's Librarian at the Westport Library.

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2. 12 Years a Slave Book/Film Recap
  - a. There were 8-10 people at book discussion on Thursday evening, May 29th. We had a good discussion led by Judy hammer and Catherine Onyemelukwe.
  - b. 40 people viewed the movie; 20+ stayed for the discussion held on Saturday, May 31<sup>st</sup>. The discussion was a vigorous one led by Rev. Alison Patton, Judy Hammer and Harold Bailey. There was an interesting perspective raised by one of the attendees – comparing slavery to Totalitarianism as a system. The ‘system’ aspect kept coming up as well as the violence. Maggie mentioned a book Who Killed John Clayton? by Kenneth C. Barnes about one of her relatives with respect to the ‘system’ and violence during Reconstruction and Jim Crow. John Clayton was deprived of his seat by white cotton plantation holders when a ballot box was stolen. He was assassinated when he contested the election results. His older brother was governor later. The revelation of the work was the extent to which money drove the ‘system’ of slavery. This extended to Wall St. – not just the South.
3. Amistad in Norwalk
  - a. Discussions are underway with the city of Norwalk for an event on August 23<sup>rd</sup> and August 24<sup>th</sup>. (8/23 and 8/24). We are trying to see if The Amistad can dock in Norwalk and are waiting for Norwalk representatives to get back to us re: whether the harbor can accommodate the ship.
4. Westport Country Playhouse – “Intimate Apparel”

We will have a representative from the Playhouse come in to resume discussions. At this time they are short on staff and are looking for replacements for a vacant position involved with Community Relationship building. Harold will have Michael Ross forward the job description.

Education Committee:

1. Essay Contest Committee Recommendations
  - a. The Diversity Essay Committee met. They recommend that we do an essay contest next year. They hope to get more entrants. Since the judges need more time, they propose extending the judging period a week and present the awards on April 6, 2015.
  - b. The Committee proposed the Essay topics. We decided on one for next year’s contest that will be published later (in December).
  - c. We plan to start pursuing sponsors earlier. Donors can contribute to the town fund. We need to identify at least one sponsor. Private donations are great and encouraged, but we also need a main sponsor. Harold and Steve have some contacts to pursue as possible sponsors.
  - d. Catherine will do our Annual Report so we’ll have that to show. Harold needs to give input.

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2. Social Studies Resource Survey

We are still asking for names for the Social Studies Resource Survey, although, to our knowledge, the school system has not used it yet.

3. Board of Education

- a. Later this month, there is a 'Teacher of Color' recruitment fair. Harold has sent an email to the Superintendent letting him know about it. The town of Westport is attending and the Superintendent promised to keep us posted on any results.
- b. Discussion ensued re:
  - i. the importance of having teachers of color within the Westport School system
  - ii. the massive impediment of the School System's lack of diversity within its administrative and teacher ranks for recruiting teachers of color
  - iii. the need for the Town and System to embrace the need for a solution with more creativity and flexibility

Marketing Committee:

We are still collecting information for our TEAM Westport Book List (books we have read that we feel should be on the list as resources to the community with regard to diversity).

Action: Catherine will email the current list of Book titles to us so that we can add to the list. Comments about books added are welcomed.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:35 AM.

The next meeting will be held at 8AM on Tuesday, July 1, 2014, in Room 201 of Town Hall.

Respectfully submitted,

Bernicestine E. McLeod  
Secretary