This beautifully written and illustrated children’s book is the result of a year-long, collaborative effort between students from three different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. Every year, students from TEAM Schools (Newark, New Jersey), Indiana University (Bloomington, Indiana), and Kabwende Primary School (Kinigi, Rwanda) work tirelessly to produce a compilation of stories. Throughout the process, the participants in the Books & Beyond Project acquire skills in authoring, mentoring, collaborating, public relations, intercultural communication, grant writing, documenting, and fundraising. The final anthology serves as an instructional material for the teachers and students of Kabwende Primary School.

As you read the stories, it is important to remember that all of the student authors have grown up under challenging circumstances, with different sets of worries and different childhood experiences. Students in Newark face large achievement gaps and nearly a third of the city’s population live below the U.S. poverty level. Yet, with hard work, determination, and the help of those around them, students are able to overcome their adversities. In Rwanda, the student’s challenges are reflected in their stories. Hope, dreams, friendship, daily life, responsibility, and concern for family, community, and the environment are strong themes throughout.

This book provides you, the reader, with the indispensable opportunity to glance into the lives and experiences of children whose lives and struggles reveal both the beauty and complexity of our world. As you read through the pages, please remember that it is through the power of knowledge that we see beyond ourselves and learn to reach out and provide the help and support to those in greater need than our own.

— The teachers and students of the 2014-2015 Books & Beyond Project