

Reflection

Khafeeon Love

“Give me my book! Give me my book!”

The shouts of the children seemed to echo around me. Excitement in their eyes, they stampeded towards us... over a hundred kids swarmed to get to their new book.

This is not what I signed up for, I thought.

I felt like Justin Bieber surrounded by thirteen-year-old girls. Why were they so excited to see these books? It's just a book.

The children began to break up the crowd. Their principal had told them to return to the school; they would be receiving their book shortly, just be patient.

We followed the students back to the school, crossing over a small river using a small stack of logs connecting the two sides (which didn't exactly seem the most stable). I was beginning to get home sick; I was tired of taking short showers and having to brush my teeth with bottled water on the side of my cabin.

About five minutes after walking in the warm July sun, we arrive at the school. The principal said something to the children in Kinyarwanda, and they quickly formed rows and sat down Indian style. It went so smoothly as if it was second nature; it amazed me how obedient the children were. I looked over and saw a group of Indiana University students sitting at a

long table in front of the Kabwende students; they motioned me to come join them.

I made my way to the table as quietly as possible because the principle was giving some sort of speech to the children. I had no idea what he said, but when he was finished, multiple children stood up and began clapping, excitement in their eyes, staring at the boxes of books that rested a couple feet away from my table. I clapped as well, as if I understood everything that he had said and shared the same excitement as the children.

I remembered Ms. Nagle, my old fifth grade reading teacher and the woman who bought me on this trip saying, “They’re going to do some talking, then, ya know, you clap, smile, and then pass out books.”

I guessed this was when I began to pass out books. I moved towards the books and took about a handful at a time and started to pass the books out to the students line by line. I guess I wasn’t moving quickly enough because soon they began waving their hands and pulling my jacket to ensure that they would be receiving their book next. I couldn’t understand why these kids, who are in fact in school, were so excited to receive a book full of just short stories made by students themselves.

After about thirty minutes of passing out the books, the students raced home. The next day was the first day of camp, and the students came bright and early to school ready to show off their books to each other. Each student went home and

wrapped the cover of their books in paper. I couldn't understand why, so I asked the teacher who spoke some English in hopes that she could help me. I found her sitting next to a group of girls who looked about my age, helping them read the short stories in the book.

"Excuse me. Can I ask you a question?"

She looked at me with some confusion, trying to comprehend my American accent. So I tried again using some of the language that I had learned in one of my mini-workshops before going on the trip to ask her again.

She gave me a response longer than necessary. I didn't understand all that she said, but I could pull out that that these were some of the children's only books. They did not own a book of their own before this, she told me.

I couldn't imagine not owning my own book. Something so small to me was something so momentous to someone else.

The day was over, and we were on our way back to the cabins. I couldn't stop thinking about those kids... and how they took so much pride in something I took for granted so much. It made me think.

I was truly blessed.

Khafeeon Love is a senior at Newark Collegiate Academy in Newark, New Jersey. Next school year, she will attend The new School in New York City to study Journalism and Design.

