

THE STUDENT VIEW

The weekly column written by local high school students

Sekou Sundiata Strikes Success at High School

By ALEXA ZEPKA

Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

Tender streams of beautiful afternoon sunlight poured down through the empty spaces of magnolia and cherry blossom trees, casting delicate shadows across the lush green field as I sat quietly upon it at 4:03 p.m. on April 24.

I brought my gaze towards the sun and watched as pieces of blow flowers, dandelions, and loose strands of grass swirled into the warm air.

My eyes were captivated by the sight of all this matter – of all these simple particles of life drifting boundlessly up towards the sky. “The earth is made of matter, but the world is made of words,” I spoke to myself, reflecting on a specific quotation Sekou Sundiata had mentioned at a poetry workshop earlier that day...

An hour prior, I slipped through the door of the Westfield High School (WHS) library, feeling all of the nerves, curiosity and anticipation of being one of the two freshmen attending this workshop with poet, professor and musical artist Mr. Sundiata.

He entered the room with streaks of outside light cascading down upon his shoulders, dark skin gleaming with sweat, as he moved closer to a now silenced group of mostly sophomores, juniors and seniors.

Our eyes moved tentatively across him, focusing one moment on his black hair peppered with some strands of gray, and the next on his insightful eyes never ceasing to stir with wisdom. He did not speak for a few minutes, but instead, seemed to study everyone.

Finally, his lips began to move, asking us how we wanted to spend this period of our time together. “We want to hear about... you,” a few voices echoed in harmony. Mr. Sundiata grinned and reached for a briefcase beside his feet, preparing to express to us the world of profundity, depth, and meaning enclosed within it.

The special learning experiences WHS offers to its students, such as welcoming a visiting poet like Mr. Sundiata, are truly unique and beneficial. On that one day, many others and myself were able to listen to his poetry and relate many of its themes and morals to everyday life.

Through his poem titled “Sifer,” Mr. Sundiata compares a West Indies carnival, a ritual where “even the poor man could be crowned king,” to a world where everyone is equal. If one were to envision a high school environment during the time of a West Indies carnival, imagine how different students would be without social pressures or the necessity to stick with a certain group of people – if everybody’s voice and opinions were symmetrically important.

When students put one another down, it can dramatically alter their confidence and make it impossible for them to voice their opinion freely. Next time in class, pay closer attention to the students who never raise their hand although they know the answers, and wonder what has caused their inability to speak.

To a greater extent, visualize a world in which there is tolerance of religion, race and individual differences. If people did not ridicule others because of their lack of fitting in with majority, everyone would have the same chance of attaining their goals.

As Mr. Sundiata’s poem reminds us, “There are no guarantees, only prisons of hope, the door to the dream is open.”

Mr. Sundiata effectively demonstrated how everybody has the most powerful aspect of life existing within them: words. “The world is made of words,” and they can be utilized in a variety of ways, including simple things such as keeping people interested in conversation, which is essential in maintaining friends and relationships.

Just the way we carry out our words, stressing the most important ones, using gestures with our hands, movements with our bodies and a variation of tones in our voices, can spark the greatest curiosity within others.

Words are more than just things that come out of our mouths in speech; they have more power, when executed, than most people realize. Having a voice would be insignificant if we did not have words, for it is our words that give us a voice.

Ultimately, Mr. Sundiata’s take on words can tie into WHS in the sense that certain students’ words have different kinds of effects on other students depending upon where they stand on the social ladder.

For instance, if a popular student jokingly

calls one of his friends a loser, that word will not strike as much damage upon that friend’s heart as it would if directed towards someone unacquainted with the popular student, beholder of the word “loser.”

As Mr. Sundiata said, “It all depends on the skin – all depends on the skin you’re livin’ in.”

“I think we have time for one more question,” he explained, starting up towards the clock, which read 3:56 p.m. at the back of the library. A girl’s hand flew up. She asked how one knows when something is complete, and with that answer came a reference to the most important synonym of love: passion.

Similar to words, passion is an emotion, which is present inside of nearly everyone. At WHS, passion can be found almost everywhere; in athletes who attend long hours of practice, on stage in school performances, and in classrooms.

Mr. Sundiata discussed how in early African times, natives would dress in vibrant colors and create blazing fires to declare their passion for existence. In the modern world, we continue to symbolize these ancient means of passion in the most unlikely ways. Take students performing on stage, for example; their voice is the vibrant colors which express emotion, and their blazing fire is the stage lights.

Most students need to have some extent of passion in order to begin something, so the starting process is simple, but how do we know when it is complete?

To athletes, completion may be defined as victory. To actors and actresses, completion may be defined as causing an audience to give a standing ovation. To writers, something we all are as WHS students, for writing is something required for us to do every day, completion is defined as wholeness.

Mr. Sundiata believes that one knows a piece of writing is complete after it has been reread and edited so many times that they finally feel it has reached a roundness and wholeness.

Once an author is able to say that they have successfully conveyed every point they intended to their readers, and once their writing sounds so good that it seems to sing to them when read aloud in their mind, the author’s job is complete.

Over the course of this time that I have been sitting here before my computer reminiscing about my meeting with Mr. Sundiata and all that I have learned from it, one picture that has not yet left my mind is how the library looked and felt when I entered it the next day after having met him.

Something about it seemed incomplete. It was as if an incredibly significant part of a whole was missing. I sat in the same exact seat as I did one day earlier and studied the “Welcome Sekou Sundiata” poster that was still taped alongside a bookshelf.

Smiling, I reached for a piece of loose leaf in my English binder, and with all of the impact and meaning of Mr. Sundiata’s words still present within my heart, began to write, knowing this time that once I reached a sense of wholeness, my job would be done.

Ironically, the first words which flowed out of my pen and onto the paper were: Tender streams of beautiful afternoon sunlight poured down through the empty spaces of magnolia and cherry blossom trees, casting delicate shadows across the lush green field as I sat quietly upon it at 4:03 p.m. on April 24.

Alexa is a freshman at WHS.

Retired Educ. Assoc.

Holds Spring Luncheon

GARWOOD – The Union County Retired Educators Association will hold a spring luncheon on Tuesday, May 8, at The Westwood at 438 North Avenue in Garwood.

The business meeting will begin at 11 a.m. and will include committee reports, elections and installation of new officers. Wendell Steinhauer, New Jersey Education Association secretary and treasurer, will be the featured speaker and will discuss important issues of interest to the association members.

For more information and reservations, write to Celia Mantia, 527 3rd Avenue, Elizabeth, N.J. 07202.

FDU Inducts Students Into Psych Honor Soc.

AREA – Forty-nine students, two from the surrounding area, were inducted into Psi Chi, the National Psychology Honor Society, at ceremonies held on the College at Florham campus of Fairleigh Dickinson University (FDU) in Madison on Tuesday, April 10.

Representing two of the 49, Scotch Plains resident Jennifer Bassano and Westfield student Thomas Dwyer qualified.

To qualify for membership, students must complete at least nine FDU credits in psychology, be registered as a psychology major or minor, maintain a 3.25 grade-point average in all classes and a minimum of 3.5 grade-point average in psychology courses and maintain high personal standards of behavior.

Fourth-Grade Students Tour Five U.S. Regions

WESTFIELD – Fourth-grade students of Wilson Elementary School in Westfield recently toured the five regions of the United States without ever leaving Westfield.

Each of the five classes researched the five regions of the United States, which include the northeast, midwest, west, southwest and southeast, and became experts on landforms, climate, industries, natural resources, culture, history and places of interest in each specific region.

The children created a hands-on “region” in their respective classrooms, which included models of places of interest, historical sites, landforms and games of knowledge. The classes “traveled” to each region to learn about how the regions are similar, yet have their own unique characteristics.

there’s more at goleader.com

Jumble Store to Conduct Special Sale of Baby Items

CRANFORD – The Jumble Store, a thrift shop operated by the Junior League of Elizabeth-Plainfield, will hold a special sale featuring baby items on Saturday, May 12. Proceeds will benefit families living in crisis throughout Union County.

All marked baby items will be on sale, including clothing, toys, cribs, high chairs and strollers, among other merchandise. Additional clothing, jewelry, perfumes, small houseware and other gift items also will be available for purchase at thrift store prices on the ground floor of the store.

The store is located at 110 Walnut Avenue in Cranford, near the corner of Walnut and South Avenues. Anyone interested in donating items to help the league run its programs is asked to contact the store or to stop by during regular store hours.

The Jumble Store carries a variety of new, gently used and in-season

PARK MIDDLE SCHOOL HONOR ROLL

3rd Marking Period

SCOTCH PLAINS – Park Middle School Principal Lisa Rebimbas announced the school’s third marking period honor roll – separated by distinguished and regular honor rolls.

6th Grade

Distinguished

Aashay Anjaria, Adam Bransky, Abigail Bridge, Brian Burns, Dana Cappicille, Andrew Citera, Luke Crawford, Matthew Debiase, Nicholas Demmel, Timothy Duddy, Colleen Farrell, Alicia Fung-A-Fat, Justin Glock, Hannah Greaney, Danielle Karacsony, Emily Koprowski, Madeline Krema, Nicole Lamastra, George Leavitt, Christie Leist, Elsa Leistikow, Caroline Lesce, Tyler Martin, Matthew Medina, Kelsey Meisch, Olivia Nelson, Tara Palkoski, Savvas Petridis, Leya Quinones, Amanda Raphael, Carly Redfield, Elise Ringel, Maria Jose Rivero, Dylan Sands, Monique Santos, Zoe-Nicole Stein, Taylor Swaak, Jo Venice Uriarte, Mary Vannatta.

WF Student Volunteers In South Carolina

WESTFIELD – For a group of 15 Morristown-Beard students, a spring-break trip to South Carolina proved to, literally, be a constructive experience.

Students spent their vacation volunteering for Habitat For Humanity in Charleston, S.C., where they helped to build affordable housing for those in need. Junior Kathryn Donovan of Westfield participated.

The students, along with teachers, tackled a variety of tasks, including roofing, framing, installing siding and installing windows for families in need.

6th Grade Honor Roll

Stephanie Araneo, Maija Barnes, Robert Barone, Andres Barros, Vincenzo Bianco, Matthew Blanck, Emily Boruch, Matthew Boruch, Adam Bransky, Kaitlyn Budis, Caitlin Bunin, Mary Ellen Cagnassola, Nicole Campbell, Gabriel Canicosa, William Castore, Heather Chernoff, Christopher Ciccarino, Lucas Cimafonte, Michael Colineri, Kathleen Colonna, Craig Conlan, John Cunningham, Dana Decarlo, Taylor Decarlo, Joshua Eisen, Katrina Fernando, Dahlia Fioretti, Melissa Gara, Haley Goeller, Lia Gordon, Justin Grambor, Christina Jackson, Rebecca Jenkins, James Kaiser, Sonali Kamath, David Leavitt, Caroline Lesce, Ryan Lesiak, Maxim Maltsev, Maxwell Mansilla, Francisco Marrero, Ashley Martinez, Morris May, Grace McAlindin, Danielle McDuffie, Edward McNeil, Jonathan Miskis, Chelsea Mills, Katherine Minski, Tessa Mitterhoff, Enovy Molina-Chevez, Robert Mrozek, John Murphy, Colin O’Kell, Renee Oliver, Jacob Palmer, Samantha Renfree, Bridget Reynolds, John Roberts, Kathryn Rodriguez, Jacqueline Roiz, Marc Rosario, Alexander Segulin, Merhan Shams, Jeremy Siegel, Taylor Smith, Antonio Spadaro, Christopher Stanton, Christopher Stone, Gabrielle Testa, Aidan Zibro, Robert Zukofsky.

7th Grade

Distinguished

Elizabeth Baldwin, Georgy Baliko, Dominika Blach, Kelsey Boyce, Laura Cappelli, Isabel Crystal, Erin Dempsey, Margaret Diaz, Katherine Fletcher, Ryan Kiel, Kathryn Lee, Kristin Lee, Stacy Leinfuss, James Marvosa, Lisa Matrale, Meghan McGrath, Anna McGuinness, Mariel Mital, Emily Nardone, Taylor Novello, Margaret O’Brien, Dhruvi Patel, Erin Pierce, Delaney Reimers, Cassandra Segulin, Emily Stefanik, Christine Szpond, Alex Tannenbaum, Chayakorn Triamarit, Sarah VanBuskirk, Alexandra Zaller.

7th Grade Honor Roll

Omar Amer, Alyssa Apuzzo, Rachel Armus, Lisa Awaitey, Ibukin Babalola, Ashante Battle, Jacqueline Batts, Dominique Bray, Samuel Brown, Robert Bunnell, Chris Burke, Adam Carabba, Olivia Checchio, Ara Cho, Abigale Churaman, Clare Cohen, Robert Colonna, Travis Cortes, Lindsay Curtis, Octavia Dails, Alivia Demaria, Jennifer Denman, Nicole DePaola, Louis Dodge, Ramona Dunning, Jessica Esbrandt, Kendall Fawcett, Jaclyn

Friedman, Steven Garber, Allison Grimm, Carly Grossman, Matthew Harnett, Kevin Hesson, Quade Ibarra, Amira Khalil, Kerri Killeen, Joshua Knechtel, Victoria Lesce, Robert Locketell, Jessica McGovern, Meghan McGrath, Daniel McMillan, Joseph McQuoid, Jake Metsky, David Michalak, Luke Mineo, Dylan Mruzinski, Claire Muirhead, Marisol Pacaja, Kristina Palazzolo, Raushan Palejwala, Emma Pearson, Bertram Peters, Alyssa Provenzano, Melissa Quarto, Francis Quigley, Disha Rao, Max Reo, Carlie Roessel, Kathryn Romagnano, Victoria Roser, Benjamin Ross, Christopher Salazar, Jillian Schuster, Zachary Shanker, Rose Sigona, Daniel Sligowski, Brandon Smithwick, Allison Speck, Alex Suriano, Luke Vuono, Keira Wiggins, Andrew Wilson, Alan Woodfield, Kristina Zekunde, Michael Ziegler.

8th Grade

Distinguished

Brie Adamczyk, Bria Barnes, Erin Brown, Lauren Buckley, Santino Butler, Micael Canicosa, Joanna Carroll, Mariana Caruso-Gilbert, Rachel Chan, Hayley Cornwell, Meghan Cunningham, Matthew D’Apuzzo, Brendan Farrell, Emma Kelly, Richard Krema, Brianna Mahoney, Nathalia Montoya, Benjamin Parisi, Stephanie Robak, Kevin Schmidt, Danielle Schweizer.

8th Grade Honor Roll

Elle Bernardo, Micaela Jo Bernardo, Jerry Bi, Celeste Bilkerdyk, Christina Bobyack, Laura Bryce, Meghan Bruckman, Toni-ann Capece, Charles Centinaro, Jacqueline Close, Jennifer Cua, Paige Della Bada, Desli Demarsico, Rachel Dolan, Sarah Drum, Erik Ekstrand, Alyssa Elenis, Kimberly Federico, Tessa Felegy, Alyssa Gonzalez, Elena Hagan, Camille Handy, Amanda Hanna, Peter Huether, Danya Jacobs, Priyanka Kamath, Matthew Kersey, Kenneth Lee, Anna Leistikow, Alexa Levy, Connor Lockier, Taryn Luby, Vidhan Malik, David Mandala, Edison May, Yevgeniy Mayorenko, Melissa McKenna, Adam Monzella, Tyler Palkoski, Hyun-Jin Park, Lindsay Payne, Ananhi Rao, Adam Redfield, Brittany Reilly, William Rivera, Carl Sebastian Rosen, Anne Rubin, Rachel Siegel, Bryce Smith, Harmeet Sohal, Oleg Solovyev, Michael Spaeth, Allison Staniec, Sarah Elis Stein, Elizabeth Stranzanbach, Jamie Swanton, Rory Szeto, Elizabeth Tenzer, Rose Thompson.



CONSTRUCTIVE FORCES...From left, Morristown-Beard students Kathryn Donovan of Westfield, Megan Mattaliano of Randolph and Fraser Miller of New Vernon help out at the Habitat for Humanity construction site in Charleston, S.C.

A tan looks good, an education lasts longer.

Most Courses Start the Week of May 21st & July 10th

For information call 908-709-7518 - or - visit us online at www.ucc.edu

Union County College
Cranford • Elizabeth
Scotch Plains • Plainfield

This summer, do something that'll last a lifetime.

- Get started on a college career or earn credits toward your degree with UCC's Summer Session.
- Convenient 3 to 12 week sessions
- Attend class at any of several locations or learn from home with Telecourses & Online courses

REGISTER TODAY!

Are You Taking Too Much Risk With Your Portfolio?

Most people take more risk than necessary to achieve their goals.

ACCESS IS THE KEY

The Frankfort Group of RBC Dain Rauscher offers customized portfolios with world class service for the affluent investor. Our investment approach is designed for those who need more than a “cookie cutter” approach for products and services. We work closely with you and your other professional advisors to understand your objectives.



INVESTMENT PRODUCTS & SERVICES

- Equities
- Private Equity
- Municipal and Taxable Fixed Income Portfolios
- IPOs
- Insurance/Annuities

The Frankfort Group

(866) 374-6266 • Fax: (908) 608-2136
adam.frankfort@rbcdain.com

RBC Dain Rauscher
86 Summit Avenue, Suite 400
Summit, NJ 07901

RBC Dain Rauscher
MEMBER NYSE/SIPC

© Copyright 2007 RBC Dain Rauscher Inc. All rights reserved.

FIT Activewear for Everyday Living

254 East Broad Street
Westfield
908.233.3364

NOW OPEN

We fit your lifestyle with cool and comfortable activewear

Dress for work or play or hanging around

Feel good! Look great!

Stop by and check out the newest tennis fashions for kids and adults

High Performance Footwear

Golf apparel arriving soon

Store Hours:
Monday thru Saturday 9:30am – 5:30pm
Thursday until 7pm
Closed Sunday