



HOLMDEL TOWNSHIP SCHOOL DISTRICT

"A COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE"

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INDIAN HILL SCHOOL STRENGTHENS ITS COMMUNITY OF READERS WITH "ONE READ" PROGRAM

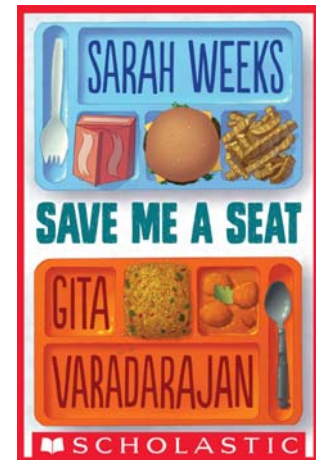
HOLMDEL (November 21, 2016) – Whenever we read a great book, we can't wait to share our experience with others. But what if everyone read the same book at the same time?

This is exactly what Principal Dr. Tali Axelrod and Library Media Specialist Lisa McTague set out to learn this year with students, staff, and parents at Indian Hill School, which serves all students in grades 4-6 in the Holmdel School District. Modeled after Chicago's successful "One Book, One Chicago" project, the school is implementing an obviously scaled-down version with the support of a generous grant from the Holmdel Foundation for Educational Excellence.

"Indian Hill, One Read" is a community-wide reading project that encourages students and adults of all ages to read the same book and participate in thought-provoking discussions and activities. The school's goal is to nurture and further develop its reading community by having everyone read the novel *Save Me a Seat* by Sarah Weeks and Gita Varadarajan. The book follows the intersecting stories on an immigrant boy and a long-bullied American fifth grader, who both learn that things aren't always as they seem, in what *Publisher's Weekly* has called an "engrossing and poignant tale."

Over the last two months, Guidance Counselor, Eileen Calvert and McTague have co-taught character education lessons they have designed to complement the book. So far they've celebrated several themes from the book, including Diversity & Tolerance (October) and Conflict Resolution (November). In December they will celebrate another theme from the book, Friendship.

As more individuals get their chance to read the book, student and staff reviews of it continue to be added to a display in the media center with various bulletin boards throughout the hallways and classrooms inviting interactive responses to the book. Before it is passed on to another reader, each copy of the book gets signed as a way of indicating who has shared in reading it.



Plans also include an opportunity for students, staff, and parents to discuss the book online in a safe environment. The project will culminate when co-author Sarah Weeks visits the school in the middle of January to speak with students. In addition to speaking to the whole school, Weeks and 15 students will skype with co-author Gita Varadarajan, who teaches 2nd grade in Princeton.

Upon finishing his borrowed copy of the book, Superintendent of Schools Dr. Robert McGarry noted how this community-wide reading project has “not only given the school an opportunity to build an even stronger community of readers, but it has also already sparked constructive discussions and learning among students and between students and staff members around respect for differences.” “It is a great complement to our Character Education program,” he added.