



When Elly Katz talks about Sages & Seekers, she often uses the word “magic” to describe the process that unfolds in connecting young people with senior citizens and the resulting sense of inspiration and purpose that both cohorts receive from the program. As a teacher who has facilitated the program for over a decade, led its adoption as a fully-integrated component of my school’s English curriculum, and even twice participated in the program as a Seeker myself, I can attest to the magic of Sages & Seekers in so many ways.

The Rivers School first piloted Sages & Seekers in 2010, and right away, we saw the value of forging intergenerational connections for our students. It was clear how engaged all of our Seekers were in learning about their Sages’ lives and how invested they became in representing their Sages’ stories in the tribute essays. Even—and sometimes especially—students who were disengaged with their academic work or disconnected socially came to life in the program. Slowly but surely, we expanded the program at Rivers as teachers in the English department recognized the importance of providing students with the opportunity to practice interpersonal skills, to develop empathy, to write about something that really mattered to them, and to view the world from a wider, wiser perspective. Magic tends to spread naturally, and it did so at Rivers.

In the years since, the program has grown to become an essential part of the English program and sophomore experience at Rivers. Since 2016, all tenth graders have participated in Sages & Seekers as part of their English class, and the program’s ability to facilitate empathy, cultural competence, and perspective taking inspired us to reconstruct our English 10 curriculum around those skills and concepts. Now, students think about the fallout from failures of empathy, as well as the possibility of redemption, in Khaled Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner*. They investigate the importance of keeping alive stories of the past in Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*. They come to understand the effects of history and intergenerational trauma in Yaa Gyasi’s *Homegoing*. Most importantly, they learn that attending with care and respect to the experiences of others leads individuals—and society at large—to feel the human condition in its full beauty, complexity, and wonder. Sages & Seekers has also served as an inspiration for the deepening of community engagement projects at Rivers and as a natural companion to a new mandatory civics seminar for tenth graders. It’s safe to say that Sages & Seekers has become the center of gravity around which we now organize sophomores’ English classes and co-



curricular experiences. Such developments didn't happen magically; rather, Sages & Seekers inspired us as teachers to prioritize socio-emotional and experiential learning in our educational program at Rivers.

Additionally, Sages & Seekers has become a community-wide endeavor. Over the years, we have had many current grandparents and a number of alumni participate at Sages, and both constituents always feel a deepened sense of connection to the school community through the program. More recently, we have also benefited from the efforts of a dedicated group of parents overseeing recruitment of Sages and communication with them for the program. Many of these parents volunteered to take on this responsibility after seeing the profound impact that interacting with Sages had on their own children's lives. Rivers is institutionally "all in" on Sages & Seekers, and we feel incredibly lucky that the program has grown to be such a central part of the student experience and sense of community at our school.

Every teacher has favorite moments during the cycle of the school year: the first whistle of soccer practice in the fall, the opening number of the musical in the winter, or the sense of relief on the faces of seniors as they complete their final AP exam. My favorite moments of the year all connect to Sages & Seekers: seeing the nervous energy (and awkwardness) of sixteen-year-olds gradually transition into laughter and nods of focus during the first session; learning about messages exchanged among Sages and Seekers in between meetings; hearing tribune essays, which almost always represent students' best writing of the year, read aloud during the penultimate session; and witnessing both students and seniors gush with appreciation for each other during final reflections. While individual texts come and go from our English program and pedagogies progress over time, one thing that will not change at The Rivers School is the inclusion of Sages as "living texts" in our curriculum or the act of forging meaningful interpersonal connections as essential to how we encourage students to develop as thinkers. In writing a graduate school paper about my first year of Sages & Seekers back in 2010, I noted that "the program became the highlight of my year—and perhaps the most exciting undertaking in my five years of teaching." With a few more years of teaching under my belt and quite a few more gray hairs on my head, I can add a host of other superlatives to that statement, as the magic of Sages & Seekers has only grown over time.

