

Introducing Ralph Singh



***“Stories have the power
to change the world”***

Ralph Singh, Chair
Wisdom Thinkers Network
1736 State Route 5
Elbridge, NY 13060

Phone: (888) 793-7257 x701
E-mail: ralph@wisdomthinkers.org
Website: www.wisdomthinkers.org

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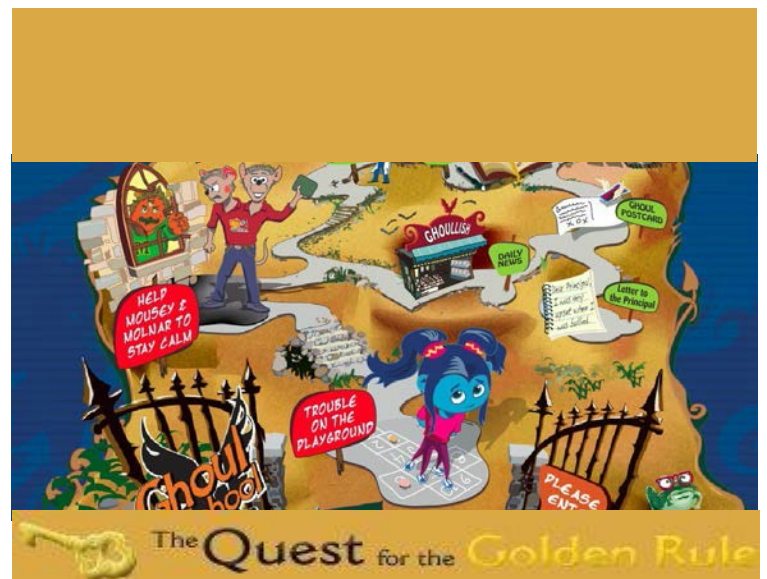
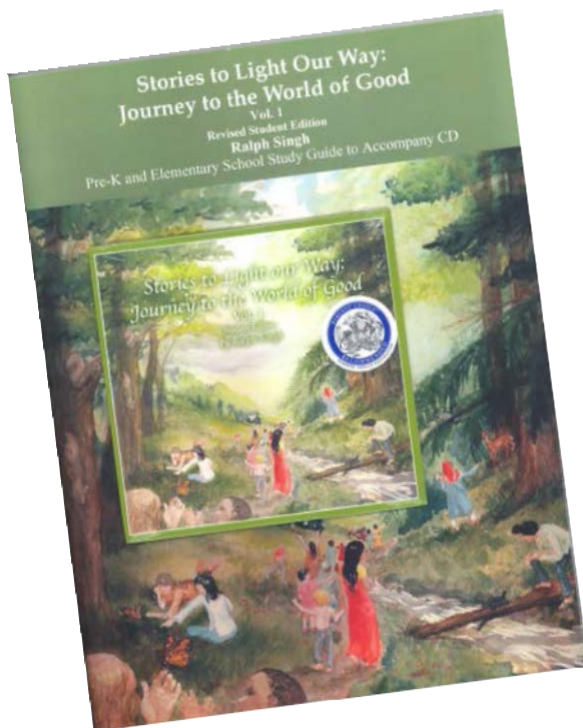
Video

[Youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com) | November 11, 2011

We create training workshops for schools, religious educators, and corporations to use stories in developing a more compassionate, inclusive, and ethical culture. This creative approach combines the time honored power of stories to deliver a message with the non-threatening, enjoyment of sharing and being engaged by story itself.

Click on below to view video or go to, www.wisdomthinkers.org/gallery

Light Our Way .mov



Cleveland Elementary School | CEP

Character.org | February 2013

In the year 2006, after a long history of poor academic achievement, low morale, unimpeded behavioral issues and negative school culture, Cleveland Elementary, in the Central Square School District, was characterized as a failing school.

Among the lowest performers on NYS standardized assessments, CE and the Cleveland Community experienced both a self-imposed and culturally assigned stigma. At the center of the illness, a climate of negativism and frustration, existed a flame of hope unwilling to extinguish yet unable to flourish. So was the story of Cleveland. Five years later, following a sweeping culture change, adherence to the 11 Principles of Effective Character Education and the belief in the power of positive attitude as a core value system, CE is now among the best results in the central NY region on NYS standardized assessments. Indeed, CE has recently been named a 2010 USDOE Blue Ribbon School – the highest honor for academic excellence bestowed by the federal government and made the NYS “Highest Performing Schools” list. Our success, particularly the transformation of our school culture and the re-writing of the Cleveland story, has been made a reality by embracing the children and families of our community by building a climate of character one relationship at a time. The sense of pride, trust and love cultivated in our school community directly correlates to a powerful positive culture and core belief that together WE ARE CLEVELAND!



Signature Practices

Lesson Plan: [Character Education - Character Plays](#)

Students will read *Stories to Light Our Way: Journey to the World of Good Volume 1*, identify the theme or moral, and create/perform a play while the remaining students evaluate their performance



In the year 2006, after a long history of poor academic achievement, low morale, unimpeded behavioral issues and negative school culture, Cleveland Elementary, in the Central Square School District, was characterized as a failing school. Among the lowest performers on NYS standardized assessments, Cleveland Elementary and the Cleveland Community experienced both a self-imposed and culturally assigned stigma. At the center of the illness, a climate of negativism and frustration, existed a flame of hope unwilling to extinguish yet unable to flourish. So was the story of Cleveland. Five years later, following a sweeping culture change, and vast integration of character education initiatives and the belief in the power of positive attitude as a core value system, CE is now among the best results in the central NY region on NYS standardized assessments. Indeed, CE has recently been named a 2010 USDOE Blue Ribbon School - the highest honor for academic excellence bestowed by the federal government and made the NYS "Highest Performing Schools" list.

One of the pillars of change in our approach to character education has been the integration of Ralph Singh's *Stories to Light Our Way*. First introduced to Cleveland Elementary staff in 2011, these stories have provided an avenue for our teachers to work character education into their teachings. These stories can be easily included in the ELA and social studies curriculums. Not only do they stress the strands of listening and reading, they provide students with a historical perspective through the narrative at the end of each story. Additionally, the inclusion of essential questions with every story allows teachers to target specific character traits within a given lesson.

Many view storytelling as a lost art. Students can not only absorb stories but share them with others. Buddy reads between intermediate and primary classrooms and the acting out of some of the stories are commonplace in our school.

Some might ask how one uses these stories in the age of Common Core. These stories epitomize what the Common Core is all about; you're creating a learning experience that spans content areas and is multi-disciplinary in addition to being deep and rich in experience. Furthermore, it is self-driven and this authentic experience weaves character education right into the lessons. The only caveat is that it does require the leadership in the room to relinquish some of the control and allow the students to explore the stories on their own. However, the same could be said about the approach to teaching the Common Core.

I challenge my fellow administrators to explore the use of Ralph Singh's *Stories to Light Our Way* as they have assisted our school in creating a highly-successful, positive school community.

Mr. Michael A. Smolnik
Principal - Cleveland Elementary School
United States Department of Education 2010 Blue Ribbon School
2013 National School of Character
Central Square School District
140 Bridge Street
Cleveland, N.Y. 13042
(315) 675-3176 – Office
(315) 675-3018 - Fax

A Cleveland, NY Elementary School Finds Building Character Boosts Performance

Waer.org | September 6, 2013

Public Schools started this week...and one Central New York school is trying to pack in much more than the Core Curriculum. Cleveland Elementary in Oswego County has a commitment to "Character Education."

Diane Maw's first grade students started the day Thursday with a story about a turtle who couldn't keep quiet. *"In the end, the turtle, Snappy cannot keep his mouth shut and he falls."* Which leads to a lesson on self control.



"Most of them related it to riding a bicycle, trying to ride with no hands, riding a skateboard."

And that little bit of six-year-old introspection Maw says, can set a foundation.

"It lends itself to further discussions, where I will relate back to Snappy. And Say 'remember when he lost control.'"

CHARACTER EDUCATION MATERIALS HELP

The story comes from the [Wisdom Thinkers Network's "Stories to Light Our Way."](#) Fourth grade teacher Helen Bolen finds the discussions can engage students for other parts of the curriculum.

"At this age, 9- or 10-years-old, they appreciate that I am interested in what they think. There's a lot of power in that. I'm not just giving them information; I'm forcing them to think about the information."

The simple messages teach tolerance, compassion, problem solving...and might include diversity of cultures and religions.



"I think they're starting to realize that there's something out there bigger than they are, their little community. And this is great because it's multicultural and we don't have the diversity here."

Cleveland elementary principal Michael Smolnik talks about creating citizens...that benefit the community...which he says has brought support and pride from the residents.



"I know there's tremendous pressure there in terms of graduation rate and getting kids college and career ready. But a lot of these things have provided us with that foundation of caring and trust and school connectedness, which again, in turn, allow us to push the limits academically."

Smolnik says it all can also make students more connected to their schools and education...and he believes character education is a national movement.

NATIONAL RECOGNITION

Cleveland Elementary's success was rewarded as a 2010 national [Blue Ribbon School](#) by the US Department of Education for academics...and named a 2013 National School

of Character by the [Character Education Partnership](#).

Wednesday commentary: Hostages to violence must be freed
Syracuse.com | December 19, 2012 | By Ralph Singh

Ralph Singh, of Elbridge, chairs the Wisdom Thinkers Network, a group dedicated to making connections through the wisdom of stories. The network recently held a series of roundtables, "Re-Enchanting Humanity, Stories for a Sustainable Future," at Syracuse University.

We in the United States, as in much of the civilized world, are holding our children hostage to violence. The stories we choose to tell, and how we choose to tell them, determines the course of civilization. There should be little doubt that we have created a culture of violence. Numbing as the horrific killing of the children of Newtown has been, we will soon return to normal. We always do. After all, we have been desensitized to accept violence as collateral damage in a war on terrorism, a necessary evil to maintain our freedom.

But how about the war on youth that rages in poor, disenfranchised communities around the world, and at home in communities of color? We should not be surprised that it has spilled over to suburban and rural areas. Our states of mind are deeply related to what is imprinted on them. And in times of frustration, we turn to how we've been conditioned to act, by the games we play and the news we watch.

An international editor once told me, "It's not news any more unless 100 are killed." Hard news — easy to report, hard to stomach. But still the fascination is so great, it sells. After all, peace is boring — it lacks excitement.

While violence has become normal, does it have to be? Can't we change the dominant narrative from one of fear, greed and conflict to one of love and peace? That question has been asked for millennia — and those who have challenged the status quo are usually scorned and often put to death.

In the midst of the suffering and our propensity towards violence, what can be done? I believe we can change the story — we can reach back and draw on the collective wisdom of our traditional stories: from Bible stories and their equivalents in all traditions, to ethnic and cultural fables providing ethical lessons that have held cultures and civilizations together for thousands of years. Some may call them myths, but I'd rather see the reality of stories that teach us to forgive, to show self-control, to Wednesday commentary: Hostages to violence must be freed live in community with others regardless of what they look like or where they come from — and dismiss as myth the current stories of violence we call news.

We consistently degrade the human experience. Without positive stories to inspire us, we will decay, and so will our civilization. The great modern Seer, Baba Virsa Singh ji of Gobind Sadan, called the human mind the most poisonous substance polluting the atmosphere. "When a river overflows its banks, it causes great damage to the surrounding areas," he said. "But when the mind is not controlled, it can destroy entire countries."

Does spreading fear of the other and arming ourselves against the enemy within create a more secure nation and world? We might well ask, who is the enemy? To quote a great American philosopher, Pogo, "We have met the enemy and he is us!"

While love and peace must begin within each of us — and be cultivated through our personal spiritual practices — stories can provide the bridge to enact love, just as they have been used to incite violence. Each time we see a violent act, the question has to be asked: Isn't it enough? Haven't we reached the limit of tolerance? Isn't it time to try to change the story?

Democracy is not a spectator sport. Being a citizen requires great thought and even greater action. The spate of killings this year and the continued killings around the world suggest the human race is not on the right course. It is up to us to choose how our story is written. This is what will give meaning to the death of innocents.

Character Ed. Before Higher Ed': Wisdom Trumps Knowledge

Huffingtonpost.com | Published October 7, 2013

When President Obama visited Syracuse last month, touting Higher Education for everyone, I felt like rolling out a banner, "Character Ed. before Higher Ed."

While, no doubt, higher education has always been a key factor both in individual social and economic mobility, in creating a viable workforce, and nurturing future leaders, it is not the only ingredient. Individuals and societies, even corporate societies and governments, need to run as much on values and ethics -- the "wisdom" behind the knowledge -- as they do on the knowledge itself. And I would argue that given the current state of affairs, despite our great expanse of knowledge, we are definitely short on wisdom.

Secondly, though higher education is desirable, getting there is half the fun. Even if we could afford universal education, getting all children ready is another story. I feel all children have a special gift. It is our job as adults to help them find it and then nurture it. But I also feel that some children's gifts lie in a trade, an art, or some form of entrepreneurship that may not take them on a traditional higher education route. We should not make them feel inferior. As a matter of fact, in the new world order, their skills may be more valuable than those of us who did follow the traditional path up the ladder.

What is needed at all levels is to teach and encourage our children (and adults) to think and think critically. To stimulate their imaginations, inspire discussion, ask their opinions and guide them in discussions. The easiest way to do this is through stories. Stories are our cultural DNA -- they have bound civilizations together -- and they ground our character development, providing an arc from childhood to adulthood.

I like to say, the stories we choose to tell and how we choose to tell them, determines the course of civilization. And right now the stories we tell our children -- directly or indirectly -- are filled with conflict and values based on dollars alone. Through these stories we have bred a generation whose focus is mainly on the self not on our society. It's as if compassion has been bred out. While schools are pushing service learning, the rest of the world around is dominated by conflict and fear of the unknown born out of ignorance. Ignorance of omission - meaning no one has bothered to educate us about a particular subject, or ignorance born out of propaganda, intentionally skewed messages to achieve a desired political or economic result. And frankly the hatred and fear of the "other," that so dominates our culture is one of the primary causes of bullying and much worse. We pass laws to outlaw bullying in school, but perpetuate it in our culture. While we try to teach our children peace and conflict resolution, the news is dominated by anything but.

I loved learning, was a good student, and had the privilege (and I mean privilege) of a great education. But it was what I learned after my formal education that made me the person I am today.

Education should and must be focused on nurturing good global citizens. This is a matter of values along with knowledge. And given key studies which show that character education or social emotional education actually creates a learning environment where academics improve -- scores go up -- why not provide equal focus and at least some money to fund character education.

In the quest to create a strong foundation, we are cramming all students into square holes, instead of providing a more well-rounded hole which can support everyone. It even creates a better environment for teachers. And we know that happy teachers make happy students.

That is not to say we have to lower our expectations. We should raise them. Studies have shown equally that by not demanding performance or not expecting the best, we are basically communicating to the child -- "you're not good enough to succeed" -- and even worse -- we show we really don't care.

The Common Core's web page proudly announces -- "Preparing America's Students for College and Career."

How about preparing them for life in the process! In truth, character education is higher education.

Endorsements and Testimonials

Stories to Light Our Way is a wonderful resource for introducing young people to the wisdom and moral lessons found in the world's religions and cultures. The stories are presented in ways that allow children to learn about the beliefs and values that have shaped human experience for centuries. The Wisdom Thinkers Network's approach to story-telling is an educationally and constitutionally sound way for public schools to build good character and encourage cross-cultural understanding.

Charles C. Haynes
Chairman, Character Education Partnership
Senior Scholar, First Amendment Center
Director, Religious Freedom Education Project

Ralph, I really love your stories. Your ability to capture the essence of each tradition's universal message allows us to appreciate how much alike we really are without overwhelming us. Stories to Light Our Way, is a real gift to our children and teachers who want a simple resource to build a classroom and community culture which honors diversity and discourages bullying while nurturing good behavior that can extend to and include the family.

Dr. Michele Borba
Internationally recognized author, speaker, & educator
on parenting, character education and bullying prevention
<http://www.micheleborba.com/>

I consider Stories to Light Our Way a real gem. Your collection and retelling of key stories from some of our world's great religious and cultural traditions fills such a need as our world grows smaller, though not necessarily kinder. The fact that your work aims explicitly at fostering moral and spiritual growth – at furthering that kindness – makes it all the more meaningful. You have done us all a service, and I want to express my gratitude on behalf of CSEE and of a number of schools, and young people in them, that I know will benefit from your efforts.

David Streight
Executive Director
Center for Spiritual and Ethical Education
www.csee.org

Stories to Light Our Way is a wonderful resource to support K-12 students – and adults – understanding and appreciating the wisdom that is reflected in the world's religions and cultures. Stories are one of the most powerful ways to learn. And, these stories promote social, emotional and ethical as well as intellectual learning: the foundation for school – and life – success.

Jonathan Cohen, Ph.D.
President, National School Climate Center: Educating Minds and Hearts Because the Three Rs are Not Enough; Adjunct Professor in Psychology and Education, Teachers College, Columbia University
www.nsccl.org

An excellent learning tool that enables students to be engaged in creating a community of empathy through the shared wisdom of stories. I have observed teachers use the stories from The Wisdom Thinkers Network to incorporate behavioral lessons within ELA and Social Studies classes.

Dr. Philip Fusco
Assistant Director
The NY State Academy for Character Education at The Sage Colleges

Stories to Light our Way: Journey to the World of Good is an appealing children's anthology of poignant stories from around the world which illuminates a pathway to wisdom while inferring the universality of character development throughout the earth's cultures.

Barbara Luther

Director of Professional Development

Character Education Partnership

Washington, DC

www.character.org

I really love your CD you so graciously gave me a couple of years ago. The quality and richness of the music, the sound of the MC's voice and your beautiful voice, the wonderful stories with great meaning/moral message, and even the way you pause at the right time, and take your time etc. is really very special. Your message is loving, and I wish there were more CDs out there like yours.

Kit Rogers

National Storytelling Network

I am writing this letter on behalf of Ralph Singh, who has shared his project, *Stories to Light Our Way: Journey to the World of Good*. As a 35-year veteran educator, an Education Professor, a Responsive Classroom Consulting Teacher and former staff development specialist at BOCES, I see numerous applications for Ralph's work. The stories are derived from a variety of cultures and faith traditions, and they teach universal values such as forgiveness, generosity, kindness, courage, and self-control. These interface perfectly with the social skills taught in Responsive Classroom, the Community of Caring, Character Counts, Wise Skills and a variety of other character education and anti-bullying programs. As well, the stories integrate beautifully with the Common Core Standards in Language Arts, specifically ELA Literacy Standards, which require students to:

"Recount stories, including fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures; determine the central message, lesson, or moral and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text" CCSS.ELA-Literacy RL.3.2. and "Describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges" CCSS.ELA-Literacy RL.2.3. (©2012 Common Core State Standards Initiative)

The stories can be adapted for a variety of grade levels and can be used as vehicles for teaching a number of NYS Social Studies Standards as well. I see application in the teaching standards dealing with World History, Geography, and Civics, Citizenship, and Government.

The stories are accompanied by a series of thought-provoking questions and an audio CD, thus allowing them to be adapted for students with disabilities and students needing to be challenged. I hope you can help communicate the value of these stories to teachers, counselors, and administrators in Elementary, Middle and High School.

Lauri Pepe Bousquet

Visiting Assistant Professor

Dept of Education

Le Moyne College

Syracuse, NY

Teachers' and Principals' Comments

- > "Whenever a child is sent to the office, they're upset. I sit them down, put on a story, and within 5 minutes they've calmed down and we have a context to talk about their issue. Stories to Light Our Way, is an invaluable tool for any principal or classroom." **City School Elementary School Principal**
- > "In the 6 months we have been using the stories, we have seen both positive change in student behavior and in our class culture." **Elementary School Principal**
- > "The study guide makes it really easy to incorporate the stories into any part of our day. The essential questions and sample questions get the discussions going and we can guide it from there" **4th grade teacher**
- > "I love sharing the little paragraph of where the story comes from - the children are amazed that these have been around for hundreds if not thousands of years."
- > **2nd grade teacher**
- > "They are easy to use and as opposed to taking away from our Common Core requirements, 10 minutes on a story creates such a positive community that you'll get 6 times more output during the day!" **Elementary School Principal**
- > "I'd like to see my 5th graders teaching the stories to younger children. We find them easily adaptable to every elementary grade level." **5th grade teacher**
- > "I use it regularly for ELA - it's helped the children tremendously. It can easily fit into social studies as well." **4th grade teacher**
- > "The stories have helped the children quickly internalize behavioral messages that have otherwise been difficult to teach. It has not only benefited the children but helped change the atmosphere here. They will carry these stories with them the rest of their lives." **Youth Director, Afterschool and Summer programs for city schools**
- > **RE: Quest for the Golden Rule - Bark Academy, second grade anti-bullying games**
Some of our students were struggling with making friends, and the program addressed this explicitly. It provided a good basis for discussion, and the kids loved it and said it was fun! If two students were not getting along, I was able to refer back to Bark Academy--when someone treats you disrespectfully, it is still in your best interest to treat the person respectfully....and ask an adult for help.
- > We've seen a positive change in behavior while easily using the simulations to improve both literacy and listening skills. **2nd Grade NAES school teacher**

- > Several years ago I used a handful of these stories with a small group of third-graders. The group was comprised of students who had a tough time reading at grade level. Some were officially identified with reading, writing, or speech/language challenges, others were not officially identified and were struggling just the same. They were a mix of English language learners and native English speakers.

I asked them if they would mind listening to some stories over the next few weeks and giving their feedback to help a friend of mine. They were quite willing to do that, and felt proud that someone had asked for their help/opinions. Over the next few weeks we would take ten or fifteen minutes a few times a week to listen to a story, close our eyes and visualize it, think about how it made us feel listening to this story, think about what came to our minds as we listened to the story, and share our thoughts, feelings, learning's. Some things that I noticed:

- students began to compare real-life situations to those in the stories
- students began to see themselves, or those around them, as similar to characters in the stories
- students began to make connections to how situations were handled in the stories to how they could handle their own real-life situations
- students began to feel more trusting of being themselves within our group
- students began to help and encourage each other more than put down or compete against one another (both academically and socially-emotionally)
- students loved listening to the stories.

As struggling readers and some English language learners, to be able to hear the story and understand it that way took the pressure off of having to struggle to read it themselves. This way they had access to the story, with no embarrassment or frustration.

These stories could be used in various ways/settings:

- in a classroom setting, whole group, as part of character development/lifeskills/citizenship lessons
- in small groups or one-to-one for students facing social/emotional challenges
- integrated into grade-level Language Arts Common Core units, particularly those that have a focus on folktales/fables
- with parent groups to support/connect learning in school to home life

**Elementary Teacher
Syracuse City Schools**

Teacher to Teacher

- > After reading one of the stories or watching the videos online it is very important to have discussions. I like to relate the stories to something that has happened to me or even in our classroom. This will usually open up discussions. If the kids can relate to themselves they have a better chance of remembering how they can handle similar situations.
- > Take this opportunity to have the kids write about what the problem was, how they would solve the problem, has anything like this ever happened to them. Then have the kids share and again have open discussions. This might start out as a teacher directed activity but in the end it's the students who should lead the discussions.
- > As far as behavior and academics I think these lessons lend themselves to the importance of responsibility and respect. Children learn that they are responsible for their own actions and those actions have consequences, both good and bad. Many of my students have referred back to a story I've read and told me how it is influencing their actions.
- > Tie stories to the other literature read throughout the day. Constantly refer to these stories and how the characters in their books compare to the Wisdom Thinker stories.

Biography



Ralph Singh Inspirational Speaker

Chairman and CEO of Wisdom Thinkers Network, a diverse group of acclaimed thought leaders in business, education, science, poverty alleviation, environment, community, and religious organizations who believe stories have the power to change the world. By reweaving the wisdom of our traditional stories, both sacred and secular, and our new understandings into education and public life, we feel we can strengthen our social fabric and foster a more compassionate, inclusive, civil society. Ralph has spent the last 40 years of his life promoting spirituality and values in education and public life, and bringing people of diverse backgrounds together to find a shared narrative towards peace. He currently consults with educational, community, and religious leaders to develop curricula and resources that foster an

understanding of shared values in schools, using the teachings and wisdom stories from the world's spiritual traditions and cultures. As Chair of Wisdom Thinkers, Ralph convenes roundtables of thought leaders and community members to break down the barriers to civil conversation and move toward a shared narrative. Sharing their personal journeys creates an instant sense of community in which it becomes easier to address the difficult questions which may divide us. He is known for his creative ways of framing issues to allow all voices to be heard and respected. He likes to be known as an ordinary person who has enjoyed (and continues to enjoy) extraordinary life experiences: from the powerful vision that drew him from New York to the feet of one of the world's greatest spiritual masters, His Holiness Baba Virsa Singh, in India, where, at the age of 22, he became Babaji's first foreign devotee, to his involvement in the community building efforts surrounding the post 9-11 arson attack on his spiritual community Gobind Sadan, USA, North of Syracuse, NY. Ralph has authored and edited five books, including "A Path to Follow, A Life to Lead" about his life's journey. As a former National Council Member and Chapter President of UNA-USA, Ralph helped establish the Central New York MUN at Syracuse University, which now draws over 500 students from the U.S. and Canada. Committed to justice and community building, he chaired the local Human Rights Commission, coordinated an award-winning program to break down barriers between the able-bodied and disabled communities, and developed programs for drug awareness and poverty alleviation. He speaks regularly on diverse subjects related to spirituality and civil society, maintains a Huffington Post blog in addition to his own Exploring Spirituality blog, and contributes commentary and articles regularly to local media outlets.

To have Ralph convene a round-table, speak to your school or organization, or consult with your staff about using stories to build character education and anti-bullying programs

Contact him at: 888-793-7257 ralph@wisdomthinkers.org | www.wisdomthinkers.org

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