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Title: Chelsea District Library Hosts Nationally Touring Art Exhibition!

In the past decade, acclaimed artist Judy Gelles interviewed and photographed more than 300 fourth grade students from a wide range of economic and cultural backgrounds in China, England, India, Israel, Italy, Nicaragua, St. Lucia, South Africa, Dubai, South Korea, and multiple areas of the United States. She asked all of the students the same three questions: Who do you live with? What do you wish for? What do you worry about? Their varied stories, collected in the exhibition *The Fourth Grade Project*, touch on the human condition and urgent social issues. *The Fourth Grade Project* opens February 1 at Chelsea District Library.

The students' stories capture the gamut of societal issues that we face today: violence, immigration, the demise of the nuclear family, global hunger, and the impact of the media and popular culture. The combination of frontal and reverse portraits allowed for the development of both personal and universal stories, and is derived from the subjects' caretakers' reactions to photography in each country. In the US, photographing from the front can be problematic because of privacy issues. In China, it is considered disrespectful to photograph from the back. In India, parents and teachers made no objections to either frontal or back portraits. In all of the portraits across the spectrum of countries, the children are presented as individuals; however, their stories speak to greater pervasive truths within our society. Told in their own words, these children's stories touch on some of our most pressing social issues and reveal common human experiences, including the impact of family and friends, our desire for acceptance, and an enduring hope that we will grow to make our community and world a better place.

"A notable commonality across all schools is that every group of fourth graders has very little contact with or knowledge of people from cultural or socioeconomic backgrounds different than their own. Nine-year-old children are on the cusp of adolescence. They are able to think

critically and consider relationships to be very important. They are socially conscious, interested in helping others, and openly curious about the world. It is also a moment in children's development when worldviews start to become entrenched and paths for the future start to become more set. The project allows students to learn about others' lives in a uniquely personal way and to use the project as a catalyst for their own explorations." Gelles said.

Inspired by *The Fourth Grade Project*, CDL Youth Librarian Jessica Zubik coordinated with South Meadows Elementary students and staff to lead a local variation of the Project. Over 170 students were photographed and asked the questions: What do you love about your family? What are you curious about? And, what do you wish for? These photographs will be displayed throughout the library in a special Grand Opening event on February 4 from 5–7pm. This event is open to the public and will allow for browsing the artwork of Judy Gelles alongside our own local student project.

The Fourth Grade Project will be on display at Chelsea District Library in the McKune Room from February 1–March 16 during regular library hours. We invite our community to come, explore, and ask yourselves, *What do you wish for?*

About Us: Chelsea District Library (CDL) is a not-for-profit organization whose mission is to engage, inspire, and equip through evolving services and resources. CDL currently serves 16,126 residents in the Chelsea library district—City of Chelsea, Lyndon and Sylvan Townships, and the portions of Lima and Dexter Townships within the Chelsea School District. For more information visit chelseadistrictlibrary.org.

About ExhibitsUSA: This exhibition is toured by ExhibitsUSA, a national program of Mid-America Arts Alliance. ExhibitsUSA sends more than twenty-five exhibitions on tour to over 100 small- and mid-sized communities every year. These exhibitions create access to an array of arts and humanities experiences, nurture the understanding of diverse cultures and art forms, and encourage the expanding depth and breadth of cultural life in local communities. For more about ExhibitsUSA, email MoreArt@maaa.org or visit www.eusa.org.

About Mid-America Arts Alliance: Mid-America Arts Alliance (M-AAA) strengthens and supports artists, cultural organizations, and communities throughout our region and beyond. Additional information about M-AAA is available at www.maaa.org.