

Friends of Taktse *UPDATE*

June 2011

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Flights of Imagination

by Gawa Topden, grade 9

There is a room at Taktse where you can dive into the cold, blue sea and feel your heart tremble at the sight of gigantic creatures of the deep, or experience the triumph of conquering the highest summit. You don't have to pay for an airline ticket, but you can travel around the world—eat a hamburger in New York or sushi in Japan, as you choose. You've guessed it—I'm talking about our wonderful school library.

Rosy pink walls, a semicircle of fluffy cushions, warm shafts of sunshine, and ah! the spectacular view of snow-capped Mt. Kanchenjunga. Shh! Pin drop silence! If you listen carefully you can even hear the prayer flags fluttering in the wind. The library is the heart of our school.

It takes my breath away to find that magically, in the night, shelves of new books have arrived. And sometimes there is the thrill of discovering a hidden treasure between old, familiar books.

I love the anticipation of a new book in my hands, as I turn the pages and wander into another world. When I'm feeling low, I pick an exciting adventure like The Tale of Despereaux, scurrying through hallways, sword in hand, to rescue the princess. When I'm feeling reflective, I read books like Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian or To Kill a Mockingbird to understand racial

discrimination or other weighty issues. If I need encouragement, I drink deeply from Chicken Soup for the Soul, or gain some perspective from the experiences of teenage characters.

For some people, books are merely rows of words stretching endlessly on printed pages. But I dive in, and get transported into another time and place. Books expand my experience of other people and cultures, and teach me to look at things from different perspectives.



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Taktse's Book Wish List

Saraswati's Way, by Monika Schroder

Chachaji's Cup, by Uma Krishnaswami

How They Croaked: The Awful Ends of the Awfully Famous, by Georgia Bragg

The Bird King, The Red Tree, The Lost Thing, and The Rabbits, by Shaun Tan

Keeping Corner, by Kashmira Sheth

Tell Me the Day Backwards, by Albert Lamb

Books by Indian authors: <http://www.poojamakhijani.com/sakidlit.html>



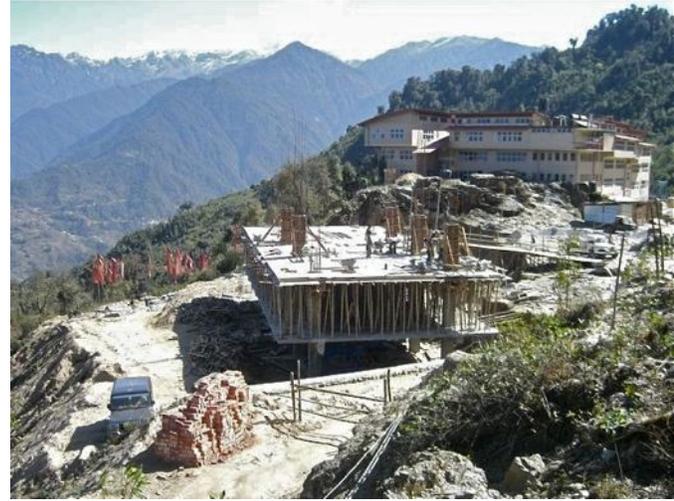
Share your favorite books and videos with Taktse students! Contact Lonnie: lonnie.friedman@comcast.net



Building for the Future

by *Pintso Lauenstein, Principal*

A new building is rising on the hill behind my office. For the past six months I have watched it grow under the expert supervision of our dedicated Board member Lok Babu, who presides over the construction from a tin shack, organizing the workers, keeping the equipment running, ensuring that materials are recycled, maintaining accounts, and praying for fair weather.



The building will be constructed in two phases. The first phase is scheduled for completion in June 2013, depending on the availability of funds and the vagaries of the monsoons. When complete, it will address our immediate needs for classrooms, a science lab, another dormitory, and faculty housing. Dedicated

teachers who inspire students and engage them in critical thinking are essential to Taktse's mission. Providing them with living quarters on campus will help retain our best teachers and attract talented new teachers.



The second phase, which we hope to complete by 2016, will provide art, music and computer rooms, additional classrooms, and a teacher training center. It will also provide additional capacity to eventually add 11th and 12th grades. Being a K-12 school would help attract more students to attend Taktse. Increased enrollment will allow us to better compensate our teachers as well as offer more scholarships.

The total cost of the new building will be approximately \$800,000 (\$450,000 for the first phase and \$350,000 for the second phase). We have already raised about \$225,000, so we need to raise another \$225,000 to complete the first phase.

When both phases are complete, the total square footage of the building will be approximately 36,000 square feet. This will allow Taktse to increase enrollment from 150 students to approximately 250.

The entire Taktse staff and I are humbled by the outpouring of support from around the globe. Thanks to generous donors, we can undertake the realization of our shared vision for a new model of progressive education in our corner of India.

The new basketball court, completed this past March, has been a fantastic addition to the school. It has been in constant use for games and events involving the entire school. It's hard to imagine how we survived without it. Our students have played several friendly games with other schools, which really boosts school spirit.



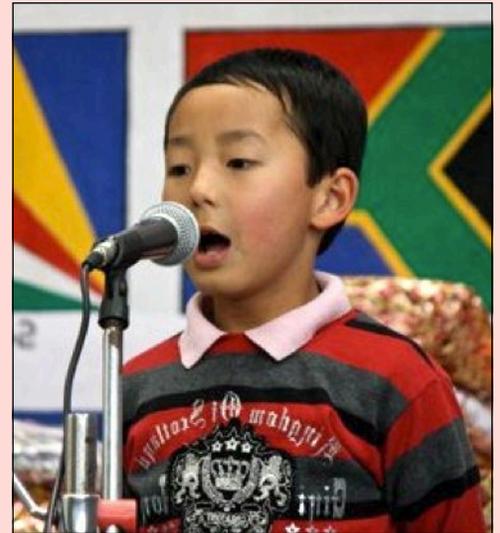
Taktse's Farm

We have a completely organic farm at Taktse! Students will help with planting and harvesting of cabbages, squash and other fresh vegetables, which provide a healthy supplement to their diet, and a healthy respect for the effort it takes to produce food.

Volunteer Ben Hunsdorfer started the farm, and Founding Board Member Lok Babu designed and supervised the construction of a barn, which houses 12 cows that provide the school with fresh milk, some of which is made into buttermilk curd, and used daily in the dining hall.

The recent birth of a new calf was a thrill for the whole Taktse community. Simrin Tamhane said the calf is "mostly brown, but has a white patch on his forehead which makes him look even cuter." Mr. Lok Babu introduced students to the newborn calf, answered their questions, and served them delicious tea using our own fresh milk.

Mr. Lok Babu is currently building a hen house. We're looking forward to fresh eggs!



Elocution Contest

We are so proud of our students who performed brilliantly in the elocution contest sponsored by the Inner Wheel Club of Gangtok, the women's arm of the Rotary Club, on March 28th. The objective was developing public speaking skills and overcoming stage fright. Students from more than ten schools competed. The Taktse students were confident and only a bit nervous. They thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

Congratulations to Rikzim W. Dorjee for first prize, Tsharanla Shangdarpa for second prize, and Rigzin Onchen for third prize in their respective age categories. Also congratulations to Tshering Yangden and Siddhant Upadhaya for participating courageously. Bravo to Rai Guruama and Shiksha Guruama, the teachers who coached elocution!



Team Building Adventure

In March, 25 students (grades six to ten) and six teachers spent four days at the Himalayan Center for Adventure in Chemchey, South Sikkim. "Principal Lauenstein encouraged students to participate in this amazing event and develop their team building skills, test their courage and expand their limits," said Pooja Tamang.

Their self-confidence grew as they scaled walls, jumped ditches, climbed ropes, and rappelled down an overhanging cliff. They had to overcome their shaking legs and instinctive fear. "I cannot believe I rappelled down that 160 foot cliff!" exclaimed Sagun Limboo with a proud grin. "Jumping down from that overhanging cliff was exhilarating!" chimed Smriti Pradhan. "I want to do it again!"

At Taktse, teachers don't ask students to do what they themselves would not do, so they too had to overcome their fears. The photos don't do justice to the difficulty of many of the feats performed by students and teachers alike. "I am so proud of our kids. They were absolutely brave and they survived," said Ms. Chettri. "This is the first time little kids like Metok and Arial did the traversing and commando bridge, and with surprising confidence," praised Mr. Sherpa.

The obstacle course emphasized teamwork. Older students stayed back to help younger kids on their teams.

The trip included morning meditation, hiking and camping overnight in the wild. As with almost every Taktse experience, students took breaks to write about their impressions (read **A Leap of Faith** by Chimmi Tobgay on the following page).

Students buried a time capsule with letters from the present to the future, to be unearthed when the next group of Taktse students visits this hilltop.



"This first ever adventure trip at Taktse was a huge success. The teachers and students really look forward to doing more outdoor activities," said Akashdeep Gazmer.





A Leap of Faith

by Chimmi Tobgay, grade 9

Hanging on a rope in mid-air is a matter of life and death. I held the rope tightly, and prayed I wouldn't die.

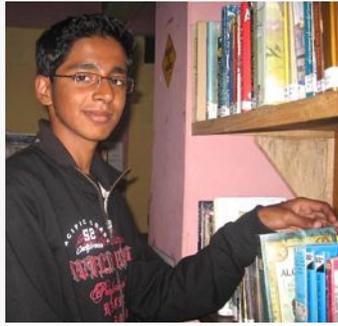
We Taktse students were on a four day adventure trip. We had rappelled down a 60 foot cliff the day before, but rappelling down this 160 foot overhanging cliff was crazy. Looking down, we could hardly make out the ground far below.

I was rigid and petrified, barely able to hear the instructor. He started counting calmly as if it were nothing scary. I scarcely heard him say "three" when I jumped. In the back of my mind, I could hear myself screaming.



I felt a cold rush of air. The next moment I was dangling in mid-air. I was bewildered. Should I try to rappel down, or just say that I was stuck? At last, I collected myself enough to rappel down slowly.

When my feet finally hit the ground, I looked up at the towering cliff from which I had just descended. I felt shaken yet euphoric, scared but fearless. I was barely able to contain my excitement as all those feelings swarmed in like bees.



Becoming a Reader

by Kushan Kaybee, grade 10

I wasn't much of a reader last year. I had to be forced to read even for five minutes, but this year I am becoming an avid reader since I got hold of Skullduggery Pleasant by Derek Landy.

I chose to read this book after an engaging book talk by Wendy Cooling, Roald Dahl's editor from Britain. When she was visiting Taktse, she gave a book talk to us tenth graders and described the books she had brought with her. There was something about her special way of talking, her strong British accent, and her height that really got me hooked. It was the first time in my fifteen-year life that I had ever taken an interest in several books at the same time.

Skullduggery Pleasant was the main book that roused my interest. After reading it, I asked Ms. Yangchen, the Taktse librarian, for another book and after that another. I realized that I had finally begun to read regularly.

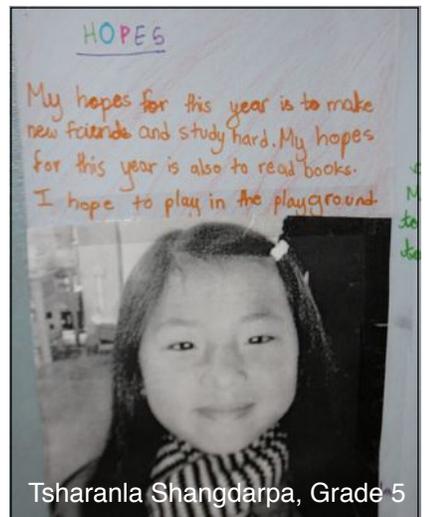
Ms. Yangchen told me that over five hundred new books had just arrived, and that some books would probably interest me. In addition to the books that were bought by the school at the three-day Bookaroo literature festival in Delhi, Wendy Cooling also donated some.

I am presently reading the Alex Rider series by Anthony Horowitz. They have turned out to be my favorite books as they are so gripping and I love the idea of a junior James Bond. Choosing the right book from the new arrivals has become very easy, as Taktse now has a huge range of books in the genre I prefer. Now I can easily pick a book and start reading, which I wouldn't have done last year.



Check out Taktse Readers on YouTube!

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lc3OJ6gzRt8&feature=share>



Tsharanla Shangdarpa, Grade 5



Team Spirit at Taktse

by Jack Lindsay

After weeks of getting up at 5:45 a.m. for practice, the boy's soccer team finally competed in a soccer tournament. They played against schools up to eight times Taktse's size. I was proud of the fact that they didn't get destroyed.

They lost the first game, 2-0, and tied the second game. In fact, they almost won the second game. Even though they didn't make it past the first round, it was a huge step for the Taktse soccer team to just be competitive at a level that they haven't been in the past.

The boys trained hard and played really well, but most of all they represented Taktse well, and the entire school is proud of them.



Hoop dreams on Taktse's new basketball court



Soccer Program

by Mr. Namgyal

The Taktse Team was formed in 2008. The players range in age from 12 to 14.

Soccer coaches include Mr. Ezra, Ms. Chettri, Jack Lindsay, and me.

Beginning last year, we have been taking the kids to outside matches, getting them more exposed to inter-school competition. As a result, we are getting stronger and more confident. Check out their skills at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ksBhw3JtPLo&feature=youtu.be>

Last year Taktse played a friendly match with St. Xavier's of Pakyong. The final score stood 7-5 in favor of St. Xavier's. Although Taktse lost, the boys gave a good account of themselves.





My Student and I

by Ms. Shubra Chakrabarti, Senior Hindi Teacher

Being a teacher, I experience a lot of incidents every day. Some leave quite an impression. I would like to share one such incident with you.

Recently a new student came to my class. She looked somewhat different from the other students. She said she came from Thailand and did not want to learn Hindi or any other subjects.

At first I got angry with her and insisted that she had to learn. She sat sullenly in my class, but her face was like a bird caught in the cage. Looking at her, I felt so sorry that I decided to try a different approach with her.

First, I told her, "Your country is very beautiful, and your smile is very attractive." Then I proposed that during the 45 minutes of class she would not have to sit full time, but rather sit for only 15 to 20 minutes. The condition was that during this time she would have to make an honest effort to learn Hindi. After that her attitude changed, and she very quickly started picking up the language. Since that day, whenever she sees me, she gives me a sweet smile and has started learning Hindi joyfully, as well as taking an interest in other subjects.



Note: Although English is the main language at Taktse, Hindi is a required subject up to grade 8.



Museum of Family Artifacts by Ms. Dingtsa's 3rd Graders

See the YouTube video at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sVNI6HUuPul&feature=youtu.be>

Sheila McBroom: Bravo team Taktse! The third graders' Museum of Family Artifacts video is fabulous! I am impressed with the teacher's ability to gently prompt the children to respond in correct grammatical and informational sequence.

Diki Wangmu: The Family Tree project makes us strive to become better parents.



Morning Assembly

by Zoe Lauenstein

A brass gong hangs silently in an empty school courtyard. Snowy peaks of Mt. Kanchenjunga, the protecting deity of an ancient kingdom, loom in the distance.

At 8:45 a.m. a teacher hits the gong with a wooden mallet. A deep clang reverberates through the courtyard, and resounds down terraced rice fields, up pitted roads, back atop dew-drenched subalpine conifer forests, and seeming to reach even the frozen

ramparts of the Himalayan peaks in the distance.

“Attention!” the teacher calls to a courtyard full of giddy school children ranging in age from four to seventeen. The students shuffle into ranks by grade. “Stand at ease!” the teacher commands; each student falls into precise order.

“Caps off. Get ready for the [national anthem](#).” The student body begins to sing the Sanskrit anthem “Jana gana mana adhināyaka jaya...thou art the ruler of the minds of all people, Dispenser of India’s destiny...”

At the beginning of each day, Taktse holds a 15-minute morning assembly, engaging students and faculty alike. As a western onlooker, such an assembly seemed familiar to me. In fact, morning assembly at Taktse is much more. As described by Mr. Lauenstein, Head of School, “Students and faculty participate in an activity that encourages us to think, to be kind, to make us laugh, to make us brave, and to make us joyful.”

Assembly at Taktse is inspired by meetings at the Waring School of Beverly, MA. Sam Lasman, a Waring graduate, introduced morning assembly at Taktse while serving as a resource person. Taktse assemblies are fun and interactive, with an overarching goal of community-building through participation and learning.

A different pair of faculty members leads each assembly, which follow one of several formats: class presentation, games, reading assembly, writing assembly, holiday assembly, or video assembly. Class presentation assemblies incorporate three elements: an introduction, a presentation, and a word of the day.

I assisted the fourteen Grade II students when it was their turn to lead morning assembly. First, a student named Naryani bravely narrated part of her favorite book, Pinocchio, in front of the entire student body. Then, four students, Prashanti, Wangchuk, Solyop, and Paljor, presented a picture slideshow of their field trip to the Gangtok Post Office, fire station, and a dentist’s office. They shared their experiences and reflections with laughter and joy. The entire class finished by singing a Hindi song, and announcing the word of the day: **extraordinary**.

Extraordinary: very unusual or remarkable; unusually great; special, as in “Pinocchio was an **extraordinary** boy, a wooden puppet who dreamt of becoming a real boy...”



Taktse assemblies provide opportunities for students and teachers to build a repertoire, gain facility in public speaking, and watch each other lead. It is a departure from the drill and announcement style assembly prevalent elsewhere. I am awed by the performances, and inspired by the **extraordinary** growth in mind and spirit of the budding Taktse community.



