

Cartoonist tickles students' fancies, teaches value of words

St. John's sponsors year-long Writing Fair

By Teresa A. Parsons

Smokey the Saucepanther isn't yet a household name, but there's hardly a student at St. John the Evangelist School on Humboldt Street who hasn't heard of his adventures.

Because they created him, any member of the third grade could tell you that Smokey is a combination jungle cat and cooking pot. Not long ago, he was returning to his treehouse from the store after loading up on eggs when he ran into a dinosaur-like monster lurking near his refrigerator. Terrified, he took off running, popped his lid, and lost his eggs.

That's when the story gets confusing and even more interesting because each student wrote his or her own endings.

Amy Schrader says a milk carton jumped out of the refrigerator and started running to Smokey's aid. Colin Cusack reports that a friendly cup vanquished the monster by scalding it with hot coffee. According to Kevin O'Dell, all that monster wanted was a spoon.

While the tone of the story was fanciful, its aim was dead serious — to exercise students' imaginations and sharpen their writing skills.

By bringing their ideas to life in pictures, special guest John Kastner, a freelance illustrator and educational consultant, helped children make the connection between images and language.

Kastner is one of more than a dozen "wordsmiths" scheduled to visit the school during a year-long Writing Fair — the brainchild of Sister Barbara Hamm, principal.

Sister Barbara picked up the idea of a writing fair from a magazine article. But rather than concentrating a whirlwind of activity into a few days as the article suggested, she decided to make St. John's writing fair a year-long series of events.

"I thought it would be a better learning process to spread it out rather than to bombard the children too much at one time," she explained. "I also wanted the children to enjoy and appreciate each speaker."

She gathered a committee of teachers and parent volunteers, who identified and invited 15 local writers to visit the school, and talk to students about writing and their careers.

"We were looking for people who were visible and popular among the children," said Paulette Raniewicz, a parent and volunteer. "We tried any occupation we could think of that people would use words for."

They came up with 14 yeses and one polite no from the prospective instructors they invited — television and radio newscasters, newspaper reporters, authors, poets, technical writers and one cartoonist.

In some cases, students will be the



Michael Miller and Ryann O'Reilly volunteer facial expressions during a cartooning demonstration.

Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal



John Kastner, right, demonstrates different types of motion to a third-grade class at St. John the Evangelist, Humboldt.



Amy Schrader completes her version of the cartoon begun during the demonstration.

guests, visiting television studios and newspaper offices.

Aside from guest speakers and field trips, each of the school's 233 K-6 students is immersed in individual writing projects. Younger children are writing stories, journals, and letters to pen pals. Older students are publishing class news-

papers and are planning a videotaped news broadcast later this year, complete with commercials.

The fruits of the Writing Fair will be on display for parents and friends during a "walk through" February 5 in honor of Catholic Schools Week. Later in May, parents will have another chance to view

their children's work at St. John's annual dessert social.

"This is just a reinforcement of what teachers here are always doing," said Paulette Raniewicz. "These are the most visible people ... but it shows the children that you have to use writing with almost anything you do when you grow up."

TV series to examine struggle of faith in the Soviet Union

The state of religion in the Soviet Union — from officially tolerated expressions of faith to secret ceremonies participants attend at their own risk — is the subject of "Candle in the Wind," an unprecedented documentary essay which premieres on WXXI-TV on Saturday, December 20, at 9 a.m.

Narrated by John Carradine, this documentary provides a behind-the-scenes view of

religion in the Soviet Union — from clandestine prayer meetings to officially permitted Orthodox Church services; from Jewish "refuseniks" who suffer the consequences of failed emigration attempts, to militant Muslims whose religious practices are viewed with greater tolerance because of their numbers.

"Candle in the Wind" is a six-part film essay which begins by tracing the official state position on religion from czarist times through Lenin, Stalin and up to the present

Soviet regime. The series then concentrates on the plight of adherents to the three major religious faiths of the country.

Despite Soviet objections to the finished project, "Candle in the Wind" attempts an unbiased appraisal of religion in the USSR. This program has been screened and endorsed by members of Amnesty International, the British Council of Churches, Christian Solidarity International, the Ethics and Public Policy Center and other groups.

Glee club to present concert at St. John Fisher College

Traditional songs sung a cappella will highlight the annual St. John Fisher College Christmas concert on Friday, December 12, at 8 p.m. in the Kearney Auditorium on the Fisher Campus.

Special numbers by smaller groups of singers will be interspersed with carols and other traditional melodies.

The concert is free and open to the public.

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