

CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES

■ **SAT, JAN. 17** — Star show: "The Sky Tonight" Strassenburgh Planetarium, 657 East Ave., Rochester, 10:30 a.m. Saturdays; \$5 adults, \$4 children & seniors; 585/271-4320.

■ **MON, JAN. 19** — Family fun day: celebrate the world's many cultures; craft activities include Chinese tangrams, the African game mancala, make a friendship bracelet & clothespin doll, Strong Museum, One Manhattan Sq., Rochester, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; \$7 adults, \$5 children 2-17; 585/263-2700.

■ **MON, JAN. 19** — Program: celebrate the life and dreams of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Rochester Museum & Science Center, 657 East Ave., Rochester; Almeta Whitis, storyteller, 11 a.m. & 1 p.m.; The Bush Mango Drum & Dance Group, noon; RMSC Players, 2 & 3 p.m.; \$7 adults, \$5 children 3-18; 585/271-1880.

■ **JAN. 31-FEB. 1** — Exhibit opening: "Where the Wild Things Are: Maurice Sendak In His Own Words and Pictures"; Strong Museum, One Manhattan Sq., Rochester; Sat. 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Sun. noon-5 p.m.; \$7 adults, \$5 children 2-17; 585/263-2700.

■ **FEB. 3, 11** — Days for Tots: Strong Museum, One Manhattan Sq., Rochester; Feb. 3: music and dance with Bart and Kevin, 9:30 a.m.; Feb. 11: puppetry and music with Gary the Happy Pirate, 9:30 & 10:30 a.m.; \$7 adults, \$5 children; 585/263-2701 ext. 314.

■ **THU, FEB. 5** — Storyteller: "Djed Snead" celebrate life and Black History Month; stories from Brer Rabbit to old Southern tales; media center, Albion Primary School, 324 East Ave., Albion; 4-5 p.m.; free; 716/637-3984.

■ **MON, FEB. 9** — Monday Kicks: for ages 2-6; "Learn through Numbers"; finger plays including "Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed"; sort & classify objects according to shape and color; Strong Museum, One Manhattan Sq., Rochester; 10 a.m.-2 p.m.; \$7 adults, \$5 children 2-17; 585/263-2700.

■ **FRI, FEB. 20** — Cool Kids: singing, dancing & comedy with the "Dinner Dogs"; learn about manners and the golden rule; The Forum, Genesee Community College, One College Rd., Batavia; 7-8 p.m.; free; 716/637-3984.

Essays encourage growth

Jennifer Burke/Catholic Courier

What began as a homework assignment for 9-year-old Kyle Smith turned into a \$50 reward and the chance to become a published author.

Smith's teacher, Annmarie Missell, frequently asks her fourth-grade class at Greece's Our Mother of Sorrows School to write responses to the monthly Kids' Chronicle essay question in the *Catholic Courier*. The *Courier's* staff judges all entries submitted, and the winner receives a \$50 savings bond and has his or her essay printed in a future edition.

"I like the faith-based questions," Missell said. "It reinforces what we learn in class and it gives them a chance to be creative about it."

In October, Missell assigned her students to write a response to the question, "If Jesus were to visit your church this weekend, what question would you like to ask him?" In his response, Kyle wondered why he was able to live in a peaceful country and enjoy freedom while other children his age lived in war-torn countries where they constantly had to worry about their safety.

"I didn't realize how much he was thinking about children in other parts of the world and how grateful he is for what he has," said his mother, Michelle Andrews-Smith. "When he saw it (in print) I think he even surprised himself. It definitely was a confidence-booster for him. We were really proud of him, proud of his thoughts and his words."

Andrews-Smith said she is glad that Missell uses creative assignments that prompt children to think for themselves.

"(The contest) gave the kids an opportunity to think about things they usually don't think about, like their faith and their relationship with God," she said.

Students interested in testing their minds and writing skills have more than one essay contest to choose from; as several Catholic groups in the diocese sponsor annual essay contests. The Knights of Columbus, the Ladies Ancient Order of Hibernians and Catholic Daughters of the Americas each offer essay contests with a different national theme each year.

For more than 10 years, Mary Jane O'Connor served on the essay-contest committee for Catholic Daughters of the Americas Court 931 Nativity of Our Lady — Brockport. The contest usually garners a good response, she said, with sometimes as many as 150 entries.

O'Connor said her Catholic Daughters court continues to offer



Mike Crupi/Catholic Courier

Mike Weber, a fourth-grader in Annmarie Missell's class at Greece's Our Mother of Sorrow School, works on a writing assignment Jan. 8 along with classmates Joe Grosser (from the back), Angelina Lippa and Lindsay Appleman. Missell often assigns her students to write responses to the monthly Kids' Chronicle essay question in the *Catholic Courier*.

Parenting

normally study ... and it's good for the kids to know how to write an essay," O'Keefe said.

Parents and educators aren't the only ones in favor of writing contests, however. Kyle said he enjoyed participating in the *Courier's* essay contest because "it was fun." He picked his topic, he said, because "I wondered what it was like to be a 9-year-old boy in Iraq and what it was like to live in a country where there was war."

Not only did Kyle have the opportunity to sharpen his writing skills, he was able to learn more about himself.


"I feel special because I live in the United States where I am safe, happy and free," he said.

the contest because it benefits students who participate.

"It's good preparation for a lot of things," she said. "I think the thought process as much as putting it in words is very beneficial. If the parents show an interest themselves, that makes it even better."

Mary O'Keefe, Monroe County chairwoman for the Ladies Ancient Order of Hibernians, said students who participate in the order's essay contest benefit by learning about both history and writing in general.

"This is the place that they study those kinds of things that they don't



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