

Writing Pep Talk

Author shares her insights with Sherwood students



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Author-illustrator Jennifer Hartvickson gets the kids involved during her appearance Tuesday at Sherwood Elementary School. Below, a drawing from 'Mister Lemur's Train of Thought' is seen behind her. Bottom left, Hartvickson signs some of her books. Bottom right, Sherwood student Cerenity Hernandez, center, and fellow fourth-graders listen to the talk.



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Sherwood Elementary students got a high-energy pep talk on writing Tuesday from "Mister Lemur," author-illustrator Jennifer Hartvickson. Getting started, practicing a lot and proofreading — common stumbling blocks — all got a starring role.

Like many schools, Sherwood incorporates daily writing to expand students' vocabulary and improve their grammar, Principal Carrie Albert said.

Daily reading, they found, just wasn't enough.

The assembly fit "perfectly" with lessons, said Kelly Gossett, who teaches second grade at the north Modesto school. "Teaching doesn't have to be drill after drill," she added.

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WRITING

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“Putting it to life makes a fun connection for them to want to learn, not to have to learn — which is not included enough in schools these days,” Gossett said.

Her second-graders will be doing some follow-up creative writing, editing and poetry.

First-grade teacher Joyce Rowe said she appreciates Hartvickson’s simple, upbeat poetry. “The rhythm and rhyme of language expression, the excitement of being an author and illustrator,” were all things Rowe said her students would take back to the classroom.

Sherwood parent Ted Perrone said he enjoyed the presentation. “It’s great. It nurtures this love of reading and writing,” he said.

Between assemblies,



A lemur and the featured book sit at the signing table Tuesday.

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Hartvickson said she enjoys helping kids connect with their inner authors. “I think it’s really neat to show them through the process,” she said.

Hartvickson, who grew up in Angels Camp, and husband Hans publish children’s books under the pen name Mister Lemur. She has a master’s degree in education and a love of nature and travel.

A trip to the lemur’s native habitat of Madagascar inspired the Mister Lemur stories, she

said. A simple story expanded to 66 stories. A print book became a digital book. A book of poetry became songs on an album, which she calls “a passport.”

“We really are opening up the world for them,” Hartvickson said, linking traditional rhythms from around the globe.

Storytelling can take you anywhere, a central theme of Mister Lemur, shines through in Hartvickson’s own tale, which all started with writing.

“When you write, you can make that into music, movies, apps, stories,” Hartvickson said. Kids have given her ideas for TV shows, streaming videos and new characters.

One teacher made a fractions lessons with her story about a lemur who wanted to be tall but only had 75 cents for the \$1 stretching machine. The machine left one arm short, “that’s a quarter of him” she explained.

Hartvickson urged assembly attendees to join in the storytelling journey by submitting their stories through teachers and voting for their favorite entries online. It was an offer given earlier in the day at assemblies at Our Lady of Fatima School in Modesto.

Because writing, she knows, is where a lot of learning happens.

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