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Schools Celebrate Reading Seuss Style

By T.R. Audley



Sleepy Hollow School second graders ready to read Photo Trina Audley

For elementary students in Lamorinda, the first week of March brought a birthday celebration. Instead of cake, however, students devoured books. Party favors came in the form of funny words and fond memories.

Special guest readers and other once-a-year events marked the National Education Association's (NEA) twelfth annual Read Across America Day celebrated on or near March 2, the birthday of Theodor Seuss Geisel. Better known as "Dr. Seuss," Geisel revolutionized the early reader experience with colorful illustrations and rhythmic, rhyming stories.

Designed to foster reading enthusiasm, the NEA calls for "every child in America to be reading in the company of a caring adult." Many Lamorinda elementary schools chose community and educational leaders to visit classrooms and read. Other schools celebrated with pajama days, read-a-thons, parent-child book club meetings, special assemblies and, of course, green eggs and ham for breakfast.

At Burton Valley and Springhill Schools in Lafayette, guest readers included Superintendent of Schools, Fred Brill, and other school board members. Two superior court judges, Police Chief Mike Hubbard, and veterinarian Dr. Pam Wittenberg visited Burton Valley, said Reading Specialist Mette Thallaugh, as well as cheerleaders and athletes from UC Berkeley and Saint Mary's College, and Clifford the Big Red Dog. Springhill's Reading Specialist Jill Tarkoff included Congressman George Miller and local fire fighters to their reader roster.

Principals, librarians and reading specialists also topped guest reader lists at many schools; two of Lafayette School reader annual favorites are Music Director Susan Comber and Head Custodian Dave D'Angelo. "You have to hear Dave pour on his New Jersey accent when he reads The True Story of the Three Little Pigs," reported Reading Specialist Carol Harris.

Stanley Middle School Principal David Shrag read to Lafayette School fifth graders to help calm middle school transition jitters, while other fifth graders and parents culminated their study of Christopher Paul Curtis' Newberry award winner Bud, Not Buddy at the annual parent/child book club meeting hosted by teacher Scott Moe.

Some schools simplified celebrations, focusing on early readers in lower grades. At Los Perales and Rheem in Moraga, kindergarteners enjoyed Seuss books such as Cat in the Hat which employs only 220 site words that they can read. Camino Pablo third grade classes also enjoyed reading Seuss for the day. At many schools, upper grade students became special readers as well, visiting their school "buddies" in the lower grades to present personalized book choices.

Traditional school-wide celebrations also served to make the week memorable. At Sleepy Hollow School, teacher Kay Aacker helped guide second graders who, in handmade trademark Seuss hats, led a school assembly to teach "Who Was Seuss?" Also in Orinda, Del Rey School Librarian Lisa Michaels posted an eight-foot-long list of Seuss books where students could mark their favorite. Colorful graphs displayed results at the week's end.

As a finale, Lafayette School PTA board members prepared their annual Green Eggs and Ham breakfast for over 400 parents and students. The Cat in the Hat came to life at breakfast to greet families.

(Rumor is he cleaned his plate.)

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