

Students create a storytelling village

By **ANDREW HACKMACK**

A story is so much more than written words. That's the lesson sixth graders at Forest Road School learned during a special workshop series. The students then took this lesson and put it into practice.

Barry Marshall has been a storyteller for decades and visits school throughout the tri-state area sharing his expertise. He and his partner Dr. Jeri Burns are The Storycrafters, based in Philmont, N.Y. Marshall spent five days at Forest Road turning the students into story telling experts themselves.



PROFESSIONAL STORYTELLER BARRY MARSHALL recently conducted a series of workshops with sixth grade students at Forest Road School.

Marshall said the basis of storytelling is to play off one's imagination. A storyteller should use imagery and vivid descriptions to make the tale come alive for the listeners. "The goal is to get them to tell the story in their own language," he said, adding that they should be able to do so without having to read it from a piece of paper in front of them.

Students chose traditional folktales that they would read to other students in the school at the end of the program. Marshall spent four days working with the sixth grade classes to teach them the necessary skills to be successful storytellers. On Feb. 12, the fifth day of his visit, the students were let loose at Forest Road.

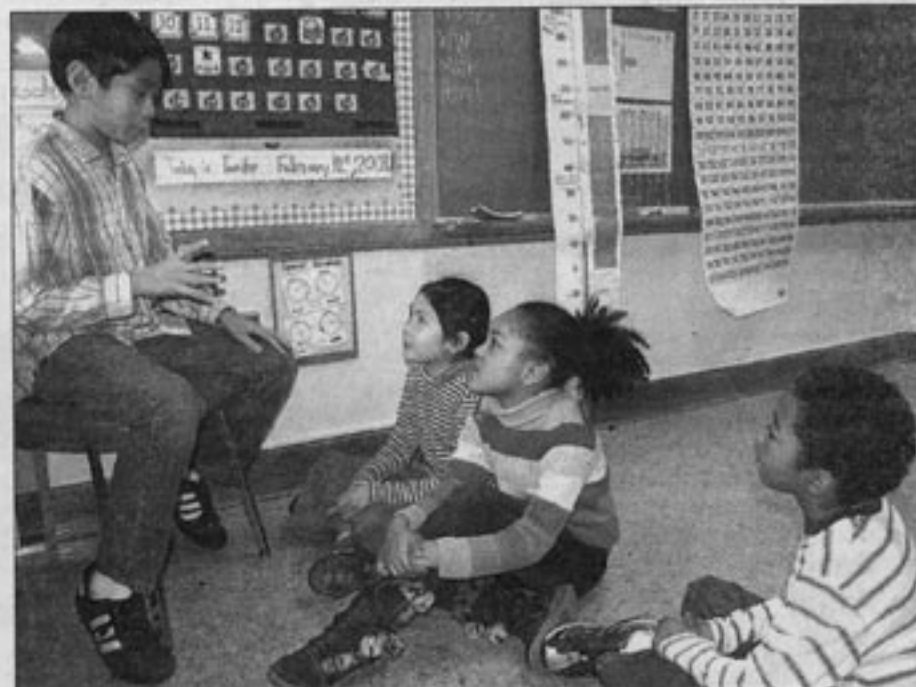
"Basically the sixth grade takes over and we create a storytelling village," Marshall said.

The teachers of the classes Marshall visited are Linda Kessler, Bruce Lesser and Dennis Terrell. Kessler said the students really seemed to enjoy the experience. "They were very excited about going to the other grades," she said. "They became, what I would say, authentic storytellers."

Kessler said the children learned that they don't just memorize a story, they tell it from the heart. She said by the final workshop session all the students had their story memorized. Of course, she said, it helped that their homework assignment was to tell the story to whomever they could the week-end before.

The workshops fit in perfectly with the sixth grade curriculum, Kessler said, in which students learn how to make meaning of a story. What better way to do so than to basically craft the story themselves.

"They learned how to make a story



SECOND GRADE STUDENTS NEFISSA KEMECH-CHARLES, Isabel Planes and Kyle Rodriguez listen intently as sixth grader James Planes shares his story.

sound interesting," Kessler said, "and to get people excited to hear about what they have to say."

Sixth grader William Burkett said telling his story to the younger children was a great opportunity and very rewarding. "It was a very exciting experience being able to look down at the kids and seeing them absorbed in the story," he said.

Burkett said through his storytelling he felt like he was taking the kids on a journey. Fellow sixth grader Danielle Longo said she learned that the listeners should be able to visualize every aspect of a story. That can't

happen without a good storyteller. "You have to really be the story," she said.

Ann Kim described it as making "a movie through words." Even the most boring of tales can be made interesting with the right storytelling.

Kessler said the students got so much from the experience because they had a really good teacher in Marshall. "He was absolutely fabulous and he made stories come to life," she said. "He had the kids mesmerized."

Photos by Andrew Hackmack/Herald