



HICKORY
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Hickory Public Schools

Week in Review

February 3, 2017

“A snapshot of HPS good news”

www.hickoryrecord.com 75 cents

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

WHY WAS THERE PREJUDICE?



Oakwood Elementary School students watch as actress Camille Upshaw of Bright Star Theater plays the role of Martin Luther King Jr. after King's home was bombed during the civil rights movement.

Students witness key moments in civil rights movement

BY JOHN BAILEY
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HICKORY
Black History Month came to life for students at Oakwood Elementary School on Wednesday when they were entertained and educated by the Bright Star Touring Theatre company's performance of "Let it Shine: The American Civil Rights Movement."

Martin Luther King Jr., Elizabeth Eckford and Rosa Parks all stepped out of the past and told their stories about the civil rights movement between the years of 1955-68.

The subject and performances had a clear impact on many of the third-through fifth-graders in the audience.

Oakwood Elementary fifth-grader Quinn Mullis was moved to ask why people were afraid of each other during the civil rights movement in America; and why was there prejudice?

"I was just wondering because now people come together, but I was wondering if they were scared of them," Mullis said. "Sometimes, I know in the past in history people were scared of people and that's why they would beat them and so I was just wondering if there was a reason why they hated people so much."

Third-grader Aizen Nguyen had an

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Above, actress Camille Upshaw portrays Rosa Parks as she refuses to give up her seat as bus driver James Blake, played by actor Mark Sherlock, orders her to move to the back of the bus. At left, Upshaw portrays Elizabeth Eckford, a 15-year-old girl who was denied entry in 1957 to Little Rock Central High School in Arkansas because she was black.

History

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equally introspective question for the actors. He wanted to know who created segregation.

"I don't understand why they made segregation against black people. It just makes no sense," Nguyen said. "I liked when Martin Luther King (Camille Upshaw) did the speeches."

Jenkins and Oakwood Elementary schools worked together to write a grant to help pay for Bright Star Theatre's visits. The City of Hickory Community Relations Council covered the grant. The idea was sparked by Jenkins Elementary Parent-Teacher Association mother, Amanda Hamm, who was already familiar with the production.

"We're excited for our students to have this opportunity and liked that we could select the shows we wanted," Jenkins Principal Ryan McCreary said.

His school asked for the "Meet Dr. King" and "Struggle for Freedom: The Life of Dr. King" shows.

"Both offer information on the Civil Rights movement and ties in nicely with Black History Month and promoting concepts of leadership," McCreary said.

Oakwood Elementary Principal Jennifer Griffin said it would be difficult if not impossible to bring this kind of production to her students without help.

"We're approached a lot about bringing performances to school and we have to be very selective because of limited funding," Griffin said. "We also want to make sure we're emphasizing the content, the curriculum, in giving students something worthwhile."

Clise Plant is the Chair of the City of Hickory Community Relations Council and was excited when she saw the grant proposal submitted to the council. The Parent Teacher Associations from both schools also helped fund the production.

"This coincides with our mission statement in promoting diversity around the city," Plant said. "What better way to have kids involved with a performance because you can read about this stuff but it's also a great thing to see it in this fashion."

Plant said she hopes the Bright Star productions at Oakwood and Jenkins will be the first step to bringing it and its message on Civil Rights to other city schools in the future.

Bright Star Touring Theatre is a national, professional touring-theatre company based in Asheville and focuses on literary, curriculum and character-education based performances.

The theatre group's show in Hickory was designed to provide an honest and accessible portrayal of the American struggle for Civil Rights, according to a Bright Star press release. The Freedom Riders, "Bombingham," the Montgomery bus boycott, and the March on Washington are just a few of the key events that will unfold before the audience.

Actors Camille Upshaw and Mark Sherlock played all the roles in the production at Oakwood Elementary.

"It's nice to be that one to teach and to bring these things into schools because I think it's very important for all children to know what this country was built on," Upshaw said. "I've witnessed so many kids learning so many new things over the past month."

Both actors do extensive research to make sure their portrayals of historic figures were as accurate as possible.

"Any time I've gotten the chance to work with kids or feel like you're reaching out to the community, making a larger impact, that's something to pursue," Sherlock said.

Black History Month, or National African-American History Month, grew out of the Negro History Week organized by Harvard-trained historian, Carter G. Woodson in 1925. His hope was to raise awareness of African-American's contributions to civilization, according to africanamericanhistorymonth.gov.

The Black Awakening of the 1960s dramatically expanded the consciousness of African-Americans about the importance of black history, and the Civil Rights movement focused Americans of all color on the subject of the contributions of African-Americans to the country's history and culture.

The celebration was expanded to a month in 1976, during the nation's bicentennial.



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



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**Bright Star Theatre Touring Company
bringing Black History Month alive
at Jenkins and Oakwood Elementary Schools!**



*School Spotlight:
Submitted by Lindee Parsons, Northview Media
Coordinator & Communications Liaison*

Northview Middle works to W.I.N.!

W.I.N. Is...

- Protected 50 minute instructional block once per week
- Small group focus (12-15 students)
- Facilitated by all staff members
- Student driven
- Academic Intervention: skill specific & conceptual based remediation &/or enrichment
- Social / Emotional Intervention: Exploration of individual strengths/weaknesses, goal setting
- Critical Thinking Enhancement
- Collaborative
- Student Advisory Program
- Included in formal teacher observations
- Outcome based guided by posted learning targets
- Subject to student and staff accountability measures

