

The Learning Curve

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Your weekly guide to students, schools, teachers and triumphs in Bibb County's Public Schools

Teen Read Week celebrated at Appling Middle School



Appling students read stories to students at King-Danforth Elementary.

October 16 – 22 was Teen Read Week, sponsored by Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), a division of the American Library Association. This year's theme was Get Real at the Library, and Appling adopted a school theme to go along with that: Appling Readers are Leaders.

"Our purpose is to promote reading and use of the Media Center," explains Appling Middle Media Specialist Dr. Debra Touchton. Throughout the week, she helped organized daily events, contests, and reading activities to not only encourage them to read, but to get involved in the media center and the school. "We're trying to use what we have in the schools and community to promote reading and learning."

Each day featured a new topic involving community members and their jobs. "Whatever the day's topic, we bought books to support it." A highlight of the week was Anita Ponder of the Tubman African-American Museum coming to read to students with good grades, reading habits, and behavior.

On the last day of the week, Appling's Principal and Assistant Principals took turns reading their favorite books to the students. "We want them to set an example for the kids. If the theme is leaders, we want our leaders to read to them," explains Touchton.

To help promote student leadership, she arranged for a group of students to visit King-Danforth Elementary and read to students in Kindergarten through 3rd grade. "They'll read a book, carry on the discussion, and some of them will act it out." While Touchton is with them, the school's BETA club will be running the Media Center, "giving them exposure to working in a library."

Touchton is also showing them how the new library system works. "We're integrating technology," she told them. The computer programs will keep a log of who's coming in, why they're there, what the library is being used for, which teachers are using it the most, and what time is it used the most often. "We're collecting data that can be used to support student achievement."

Porter Elementary School celebrates Hispanic Heritage Month

"It gave them a way to really shine in the classroom," Porter Elementary Principal Donna Jackson beams as she watches teachers set up for a very unique spelling bee.

Running for a month, Hispanic Heritage Month begins September 15, the day Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua gained their independence. Mexico gained theirs on September 16 and Chile on September 18. According to Jackson, the school has a large Hispanic, so they began implementing lessons and activities in the classrooms to help educate the children. They were taught history, famous Hispanics today and throughout history, and music classes were taught songs in Spanish.

However, it was just little activities done here and there...until ESOL teacher Alice Walkemeyer began coordinating them and giving them a focus. "With Alice doing things for Hispanic month, [the students'] faces just lit up," says Jackson. "[The celebration] just kept getting bigger and bigger."

As a culmination of the month, Walkemeyer organized the school's first-ever Bilingual Spelling Bee. Opening with a song featuring lyrics in English and Spanish by 1st and 2nd graders, three students from each fourth and fifth grade competed to spell words from both languages. Judging was Alfonso Perez, the General Manager of El Cotije, and Sandra Hicks, another ESOL teacher. "I was hoping the English speakers would learn Spanish and the Spanish speakers would gain

more confidence," says Walkemeyer. Bilingual invitations were even sent home with all the students, inviting their parents.

Leading up to the spelling bee, students studied Spanish words and held a practice round to help them prepare. It was run much the same as any other spelling bee: a caller would announce the word, a student could ask for a definition or for it to be used in a sentence, they said the word, spelled it, repeated the word, and a judge would let them know if it was correct or not. The difference here was the words alternated with each student: English to Spanish and back again.



(l-r) El Cotija GM Alfonso Perez, Alice Walkemeyer, Glenda Aquinaga, Taylor Beacham, Jose Osorno-Diaz, and Principal Donna Jackson.

"They want to see how much the kids know about Spanish," said Perez right before it was set to begin.

To the students watching the competition, they don't seem to mind what language the word is: no matter what language, they are silently spelling the words along with the contestants. Gasps can be heard when a mistake is made, and as it gets closer and closer to the end, cries of "yes!" and "alright!" can be heard for every right word. One mother sits on the edge of her seat, wringing her hands every time her daughter steps up to the microphone.

As in other spelling bees, when the last two are standing, the rules changed a bit: they would go back and forth until one of them misspelled a word. The other contestant then had to spell that word right, as well as a second one to clinch the win. To many gasps and cries of astonishment, it was an English word that tripped them up.

"It took a lot of courage to stand up here," Walkemeyer told all of the contestants. "I know how hard it was to learn all of those new words."

"I'm so proud of all of you, and I'm so very proud to have Mrs. Walkemeyer here with us," added Jackson, which resulted in more clapping and cheers.

The winners of the 1st Annual Bilingual Spelling Bee (1st – 3rd) were Glenda Aquinaga, Taylor Beacham, and Jose Osorno-Diaz.

Halloween Festival hosted for the enjoyment of student readers at Miller Middle School

"You go first," says one girl nervously, backing up from the dark entrance.

Shaking her head, the other replies, "no way, you."

Seeing no help there, the first looks around, hoping help will come from somewhere. "Someone come with me," she pleads.

"Are y'all coming or not?" a voice hollers from the darkness, egging them on. A boy standing nearby, giving a nervous chuckle but refusing to back down from a challenge, steps through and disappears. The girls follow slowly, half dragging each other.

Within seconds, nervous giggles turn to a steady flow of shrieks and screams. Sirens sound, horns blare, evil laughter, chilling music, and even a blood-curdling scream too loud to come from the kids come from inside the structure where the three brave kids have ventured.

With final yell of fright, all three students come running out the other side, the two girls still holding onto each other and the boy trying to look as if he had just strolled out at an easy pace. Other students rush up to hug the girls and comfort them; the boy turns to their guide and bravely asks to go back in again.

The kids are not exploring some abandoned house on a deserted street at night, led by the local ghost hunter; it's the Jeepers Creepers Party at Miller Middle School. The windows in the library are covered in solid black paper blocking out all the light, the

smoke machine is running full force, creepy music is playing, and half the room is taken up by a haunted house built using bookshelves and tables. Inside, they are greeted with severed heads, a levitating body, plastic snakes, spiders that drop from the ceiling, a strobe light in one corner, students from Central High School set to jump out at any point, and, of course, Media Specialist Jennifer Brewer set to startle them with a bullhorn siren.

The school throws three major parties a year like this for any students who read a set number of books from the Accelerated Reader list and score an average of 80% after taking tests for each of the books. "We really want to promote kids reading," says Brewer, who says that under No Child Left Behind, students are required to read one million words a year. Plus, reading is essential because "[students] build vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension through reading."

Over the course of three days (each day a different grade level will attend the Party), about 100 students will go through the haunted house, take part in refreshments, and listen to ghost stories told by a faculty member. By the time the Fear Factor Party and the Water Party roll around, Brewer says the buzz over the events they plan for the students will have more and more of them reading and trying to attend.

After snacking on popcorn and chips, students begin bobbing for apples, coming up shivering. "I made that water *real* cold," Brewer

says with a chuckle. She couldn't have done all this alone, she says. Frito-Lay donated the bags of chips, Howard Scott and Karen Davis built the Haunted House, the Central students worked the inside, Judy Griffin made the candy apples, and Rosa Amaechi told the ghost stories.



Through the haze from the smoke machine, three student step slowly into the haunted house.