

Bensley Elementary teachers practice what they teach

By Sande Snead
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

School teachers and books go together like peanut butter and jelly, so it was a natural fit for Chesterfield County school teachers to start a book club six years ago. The Bensley Elementary Book Club meets every other month or so at various members' homes.

At the beginning of the year, the club polls members for suggestions of books to read during the year. Most of the members are women, and most of the books they choose to read are fiction.

"We have some men in the group, and our P.E. teacher picked a nonfiction book, 'Killer Angels,'" said Laura Johns, the book club member who hosted this month's meeting. "That's a book I would have never selected on my own, but I really enjoyed it. The book club exposes us to a variety of literature."

While the first hour of the book club meeting is generally spent noshing on snacks and socializing, the second hour is devoted to discussing the book of the month.

There have been some variations on the agenda. For example, the club read Alexander McCall Smith's "No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency," which is set in Africa, so they invited teachers Katie and Paul Keller to speak to them about their experience living in Africa near Gaborone where the book is set.

"It was really helpful to have them come and talk to us because they could explain a lot of the cultural differences," said Dawn Henderson, family service provider at Bensley Elementary and a charter member of the book club.

Another meeting was devoted to giving feedback to Gerald J. Berry, author of "When Eagles are Silent." Berry is married to the school's guidance counselor, a member of the club.

"The book is futuristic, and the premise is that a man goes off into the mountains hunting and when he returns, everyone is gone," Johns said. "We shared our thoughts with the author, and he used some of our suggestions in the sequel, 'The Eagle's Scream.'"

Johns said some of the club members are avid readers polishing off a book a week or more. For the rest of the club, their meetings simply force them to make time for a hobby they love.

Henderson said discussing the books helps her to understand them better as well.

"You get other peoples' ideas and opinions about the books, and it gives you a better understanding," Henderson said. "There are always things that they noticed that I didn't."

Johns added, "It's also a relaxing way to build relationships. Plus, we want our kids to love reading, so we are being good role models."



Elli Morris/Chesterfield Observer

Bensley Elementary School staff members (from left) Elizabeth Berry, guidance counselor, Christina Allen-Roach, Title 1 writing teacher, Dawn Henderson, family service provider, Laura Johns, kindergarten teacher and Diane Woodruff, music teacher, discuss "I Got Somebody in Staunton."

Indeed, Bensley Elementary was awarded a Reading Excellence Act grant from the Virginia Department of Education for the 2001-02 and 2002-03 school years. The grant is designed to improve instructional practices among teachers and staff, to increase reading achievement among students, and encourage

family involvement in reading.

This month's book selection was "I Got Somebody in Staunton" by William Henry Lewis. It is a finalist for the PEN/Faulkner Award and the current pick for Go Read Richmond (www.goreadrichmond.com) as well.

Real world learning



Page Dowdy/Chesterfield Observer

Fifth grade center-based gifted students at Greenfield Elementary School, including (from left) Anthony Carson, Michael Marcy, Barrett Mills and Andrew Drummond, recently applied their knowledge of force, motion and simple machines by building an amusement park ride. The students then used Beanie Babies to test their creation.

Learn the legalities and realities of Beach Week

A workshop on the "Legalities and Realities of Senior Beach Week" will be held Tues., Jan. 30, from 7-8:30 p.m., at Midlothian High School, 401 Charter Colony Drive.

Parents of high school juniors and seniors concerned about the dangers of underage drinking and the safety of their children who want to attend "Beach Week" are invited to attend this free workshop with their teens.

The workshop will focus on the many aspects of Beach Week, including signing

contracts, personal liability, safe places to travel and law-enforcement issues. Important information for both parents and teens will be provided by a representative from the medical community, a lawyer and a police officer.

Legalities and Realities: Senior Beach Week is sponsored by The Regional Drug-Free Alliance, the Chesterfield County Police Department and Substance Abuse Free Environment, Inc. (SAFE).

For more information, call 796-7100.

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