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Origami artist Christine Petrell Kallevig performs for Rush Intermediate School

BY ZANE CLARK

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This year the students of Eleanor Rush Intermediate School celebrated Read Across America with a unique visitor who folded their imaginations into wonderful, new shapes.

During two assemblies on March 6 students listened and watched as professional story teller, author and origami artist Christine Petrell Kallevig stood on stage and told stories while folding and presenting her own origami creations.

As a former classroom teacher and music therapist, Kallevig has authored five Storigami collections, two children’s novels, one origami picture book and two educational manuals. Based in the Cleveland, Ohio area, she now travels the country presenting student assemblies, teacher workshops, family programs and more.

“I work with all ages,” Kallevig said. “With older students I talk a little bit more about the geometry involved with origami. With the little kids it’s all about using origami like puppets and playing with the origami and teaching them more with the stories and making them feel like they don’t need to be afraid of it.”

Read Across America is the annual, national initiative to promote reading to children while celebrating the birthday of renowned children’s author Dr. Seuss. Kallevig said her unique process of showing origami as she’s telling stories helps students learn on multiple levels.

“It brings a visual aid into my presentation and shows them where to focus – a visual aid to look at because something unusual is going to happen,” Kallevig said. “Also, origami works as a bridge to the language.”

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Kallevig said her experience with performing at assemblies for so many years has enabled her to quickly understand what stories will be successful with each individual group of students. With the Rush students she was feeling a higher energy level, so toward the beginning of her presentation she immediately engaged the students by having them vote on which of two origami foxes to hear about.

“This second group that we had today I was planning to tell the story “The Paper Crane” but then I realized a lot of them were really very exuberant when they were entering and had a lot of energy,” Kallevig said. “Then I realized none of them had lunch yet and they’ve all been in school cooped up a little bit already, so I was going to need something a little bit more active.”

School Reading Specialist Kim Porter helped organize the event and said it was great because it was interactive and the kids really loved being able to participate.

“They were definitely engaged the whole time,” Porter said. “You can tell because throughout the story when she called on them to answer they answered appropriately.”

Porter said it showed that Kallevig was a former teacher because she was so warm and friendly, and Porter said she appreciated Kallevig’s ability to zone in a different aspect of reading and that was why the school definitely wanted her to perform there.

“We grabbed onto it right away because it was something different,” Porter said. “We get authors here every year, but we never had an origami story teller. Our kids are really into that.”

Porter also said events that promote reading, such as the assemblies, were important to students not only during Read Across America but also for the entire year.

“It’s to promote literacy,” Porter said. “Not just during this week, but everyday and everyday throughout the year – reading with your children and at home and at school. Reading is fun. It’s enjoyable and imaginative.”

Toward the end of one assembly Kallevig had teachers pass out small strips of paper so the students in the audience could follow her actions on stage to make their own origami creations.

As the students and their temporary teacher simultaneously completed their projects, the students turned their creations around to discover that if they followed the directions correctly, they had actually been folding their papers into the shape of a small heart.

Kallevig finished her show by telling the audience that the stories they are searching for are already there inside of them.

“Ladies and gentlemen, the stories that you are going to tell, the stories that you are meant to remember, the stories that you are meant to write, are already growing in your hearts as well,” Kallevig said. “Go forth and find them.”