

Poems become songs at school program

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MISHAWAKA — Students at Bittersweet Elementary School saw one of their poems become an instant song during a presentation at their school.

Jim Valley, creator of Rainbow Planet, a program geared toward helping students share their ideas through poetry and song, recently visited Bittersweet and three other elementary schools in the Penn-Harris-Madison School Corp.

One class of students at Bittersweet wrote a poem about a cat, which Valley converted into a song with the students. After he created the song, he taught it to the children and allowed them to perform it with him.

Students clapped and cheered when Valley announced the poem he was going to use at the performance.

"He does it on the spot," said music teacher Peggy Clark, of Mishawaka. "It's amazing. He takes a look at it and he reads through it with them and he makes up a song."

The students enjoyed listening to their poems, Clark said.

"It's their work," she said. "They're seeing their song come to life, which is wonderful. Their poetry is coming to life."

Valley, a composer, musician and entertainer, visited Elm Road, Madison and Walt Disney schools along with Bittersweet.

Performances were held at different times throughout the day for different age groups, and two performances were offered in the evening at Walt Disney and Bittersweet. Family members were invited to attend the evening performances.

During the performances, students had the opportunity to sing along with Valley and dance. Valley also taught students new hand motions and dances to correspond with his various songs.

"We've been working on Mr. Valley's songs for a couple of weeks, and it gives them (students) a chance to actually meet a composer and enjoy his work and listen to him explain what he does," Clark said. "They're adding motions to things, so it's been a wonderful learning experience for them."

During the program, children were encouraged to dance and sing along with Valley, who played an electric guitar along with his songs. Valley asked students how they were feeling, and taught them hand movements to signal their responses.

Though students had learned some of Valley's songs prior to his visit, he also taught them several new songs and encouraged them to participate by standing up and dancing at the performance.

"He relates really well to children," Clark said.

At the end of the performance, Valley had the students gather into a collective circle and join hands. He then had them repeat the phrase, "I am special, you are special, we are special together."