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# Local Author Mentors Young Gig Harbor Writers' Fancy

By Marsha Hart (Community Life publications)  
Posted April 3, 2010 at 3:26 p.m.

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From left, Lighthouse Christian School's Madison McFarland, Lauren Kott and Jeffrey Hallstrom surround their mentor, Shirley Hanson, a local author. These students were among the many top achievers in a recent youth authors program at the popular Gig Harbor school.

GIG HARBOR — The 2010 Winter Olympics inspired Madison McFarland, a 10-year-old at Lighthouse Christian School to write. Her book was about a make-believe duck that participated in a duck Olympics and won.

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"It helped me to learn to always keep trying your hardest no matter what," she said.

She is one of 48 fourth-grade students who spent the past six months learning skills from volunteer and children's book author Shirley Hansen.

The students authored and illustrated their own books with her help. It all culminated in the Young Authors Conference, an annual event at the school.

"I jumped on the opportunity," said Hansen, a Gig Harbor resident. "I haven't done anything in so long that has made me so happy, the children learning, seeing where I started in assisting some of the children who had blank books and they said, 'I can't come up with an idea, I don't know what to do.'"

Hansen helped guide them through the writing process of first connecting with an idea, and following it through.

"I'm very impressed because this school, there's somewhat order in the class," she said. "They teach respect for one another. It's a very unique situation."

Hansen came up with a lesson plan on tips for writing fiction, and the process started.

She has been coming to the school sometimes twice a week since October, said Virginia Wurts, a fourth-grade teacher at the school. The students in her class, as well as Nora Bentler's fourth-grade class have been working with Hansen on what they call the Six Traits Writing Process. It includes brainstorming ideas, editing the ideas, using a voice, thinking process, vocabulary, and grammar to express thoughts and put them on paper, Wurts said.

"They were working on this twice a week for about 45 minutes to an hour plus taking it home," Wurts said.

"We're very blessed to have a lot of volunteers here, but I think it really confirms what an impact volunteers can make in a classroom," Wurts said. "So many of them have a wealth of experience and passion in their life work. When they bring this knowledge into the classroom, it speaks volumes to the children."

Each child was given the opportunity to present something to the group about their 24-page book, whether it was an overview of the story, something about their illustrations, or a reading from the book.

Getting to that point took time.

"We had to write lots of sloppy copies in our writing journals," said 10-year-old Lauren Kott. "It was more fun than hard, but sometimes it got stressful. I learned editing the most and how to edit. I didn't like it very much."

An adventure story about a time machine was the subject of Jeffrey Hallstrom's book.

"My book is about a guy named Billy," he said. "He invents a time machine and goes

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back in time to the Jurassic time period. A dinosaur picks up the time machine and breaks it. So they have to fix the time machine and he swallows the engine. So they have to go and get the engine out of him," he added with a huge smile.

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