

Children carry on storytelling tradition during Heritage Week

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ST. GEORGE — Once upon a time in a not-so-distant land a group of children shared stories on a sunny afternoon.

Heritage Week continued Tuesday with the annual Washington County School District Storytelling Festival. The St. George Social Hall, Opera House and Museum were filled with children telling dramatic tales.

The four categories were folk or tall tale, fantasy or fairy tale, adventure or mystery and humorous stories. Ninety-six children in the third, fourth and fifth grades lit up the stages with expression and energy. The students in attendance were those that had won their schools' individual storytelling competitions.

Sunset Elementary student David Beard shared a humorous story of one child's Wild West adventure during summer vacation.

"I can hardly wait 'til summer vacation," Beard told the audience with a grin as he led a huge imaginary bull behind him.

Beard said he enjoys telling stories.

"It's fun and you can really feel good

about it when you're done," he said.

David's mother, Lori said she is happy David participates in the contest.

"He enjoys it and it's great for self-esteem," she said.

East Elementary student Kimberly Empey said she likes to be involved in the festival, especially so she can hear all of the interesting stories.

"I think it helps her enunciation and her ability to be in front of a group," said her mother, Claudia Empey.

Story telling judge Sherlene Clove said self-esteem and poise are just a few of the benefits of learning the art of story telling. Clove said awarding points in the various categories is sometimes difficult.

"They are all winners," said Clove. "They all do such a wonderful job."

Students are judged in categories such as poise, vocal expression, eye contact, knowledge of story, appropriate hand movement, good ending and creative treatment of the story. All children received a medallion and a certificate of participation upon completion. Individual awards and score sheets will be given at each school.

Organizer LaRee Jones said she was

pleased with the festival.

"It just gets better every year," said Jones.

Jones said the festival, now in its fifth year, was added to Heritage Week as a way to encourage the oral tradition of storytelling.

Depending on the individual school, children prepare in different ways for the festival. Some schools incorporate the techniques into literature units. Other schools incorporate it into their gifted and talented programs.

At Sunset Elementary, first grade teacher Linda Erickson was part of a story telling committee. Committee members coached students from November through January on the finer points of telling a story. During their lunch hour, students came in on a voluntary basis to practice voice training, hand movements and eye contact, said Erickson.

BEDTIME STORIES

Tuesday evening was dedicated to the older students. Eleven students from Desert Hills Intermediate shared stories and skits.

Madison Thompson, kindergartner at Sunset Elementary, did not fit the age crite-

ria for the daytime story telling group nor the evening group. However, she exhibited her story telling abilities at the start of the bedtime story program. Thompson's teacher, Elna Rae Page, played the talent scout.

"One day this little girl came up to me and said she wanted to tell me a story," said Page. "She is a good story teller."

Students chose from a wide variety of material. A group of five girls performed scenes from the movie "Ever After."

Lindsey Taylor and Shanan Steiner brought an old Abbott and Costello routine to life. The girls dressed in vintage looking outfits to perform "Who's On First?"

Stephan Authement and Cavett Richards both wrote and performed their own original stories. Cassandra Nielson and Chonni Davis performed more traditional bedtime stories.

Desert Hills Intermediate teacher Kayron Lewis said her students learn a great deal by participating in storytelling and theater.

"They learn how to support each other," she said. "This way they get praise and it encourages them to do more."