

FEATURES

'Bailey School Kids' author offers lessons on writing, conservation

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MIKE LAWRENCE / THE GLEANER Jefferson Elementary kindergartner Brooke Neufeld reacts to story children's book author Debbie Dadey was telling as she visited the school Wednesday as part of their Earth Day celebrations, April 20, 2016.



MIKE LAWRENCE / THE GLEANER Children's book author Debbie Dadey speaks to students at Henderson's Jefferson Elementary Wednesday as part of their Earth Day celebrations. Dadey, a Henderson native, has written 162 children's books, April 20, 2016.



MIKE LAWRENCE / THE GLEANER A sea of hands from Jefferson Elementary students eager to answer questions from children's book author Debbie Dadey who was visiting the school Wednesday as part of their Earth Day celebrations, April 20, 2016.



MIKE LAWRENCE / THE GLEANER Children's book author Debbie Dadey autographing books during a visit Wednesday to Jefferson Elementary as part of their Earth Day celebrations. Dadey, a Henderson native, has written 162 children's books, April 20, 2016.

Henderson native Debbie Dadey is back in her old stomping grounds this week, talking to local students about writing and offering a lesson on caring for the environment.

Dadey, who has written or co-authored 162 books during her 26-year career, spoke Wednesday to students at Jefferson and Bend Gate elementary schools. She is speaking at Spottsville and Chandler elementaries on Thursday.

Dadey and Marcia T. Jones are the authors of the best-selling children's series the "Bailey School Kids," in which children suspect employees of their school corporation are monsters.

In the few weeks leading up to Dadey's visit, Jefferson students created a cereal box book report about stories from the Bailey School Kids series. Students decorated their boxes and gave a summary of their chosen book on the side panels. After Dadey spoke to the school at an assembly, one student's book report was chosen from each class. Those 18 students got doughnuts and had their books signed by Dadey.

Second-grader Gracie Palmer decorated her cereal box based on Dadey's book "Leprechauns Don't Play Basketball," drawing a four-leaf clover and scenes from the book. Fourth-grader Reagan Abbot not only decorated a cereal box based on the book "Mummies Don't Play Softball," but also decorated a large box which she slipped over her head and wore as a costume.

"The large box was kind of a last-minute thing," Reagan said. "My mom found this giant peach box and we decorated it together."

Dadey's visits are part of the Author for Earth Days program. Authors for Earth Day is an organization in which authors promote conservation through literacy.

During her talks, Dadey told students about three conservation groups, then let the students vote one to receive a \$200 from her in the students' name. Both Jefferson and Bend Gate selected Whale and Dolphin Conservation.

"Even if there was a kid out there who didn't like to read, there's a book out there for them," she said. "They just have to find the right one. I've received letters from all over the world that say they've never read a book all the way until they read our book. That's huge to me to make a difference in kids' lives."

After graduating from Henderson County High School, Dadey attended Henderson Community College before transferring to Western Kentucky University. She then went on to be a first-grade teacher and a school librarian in Lexington, Kentucky, where she met Jones.

"I had been writing a year and a half with Marcia," said Dadey. "We got a lot of rejections, but we kept trying. You have to be a little bit stubborn to succeed in anything. You have to say, especially in publishing, 'I'm going to make it good enough.' Then one day we had a really bad day at school, and that gave us the idea to write about a monster teacher."

Dadey and Jones wanted to write children's books with chapters because there was a lack of intermediaries between picture books and higher level novels for children. While Dadey was a librarian, she noticed several students enjoyed reading monster books, and from there, Dadey's first book was born. "Vampires Don't Wear Polka Dots" was submitted to Scholastic Corp., which published it in 1990.

"We had a lot of fun with that story and I think those are the most successful stories, the ones you have fun writing," she said.

Dadey has a new set of books called Mermaid Tales, with the newest installment coming out May 17 called "Twist and Shout." Echo, the heroine of "Twist and Shout," is featured on the cover of the book with crutches.

"This was very special to me because I believe in diversity in children's books," Dadey said. "Diversity in all sorts of ways is important for children to read about and how they might be different from the mainstream."

Dadey will be at Barnes and Noble in Evansville at 3:30 p.m. Thursday to read and sign her books.

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