

Kaufmann teaches how to tell a good story

ROB DANIEL • IOWA CITY PRESS-CITIZEN • DECEMBER 13, 2010

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Good storytellers should look anywhere for inspiration, John Kaufmann said.

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"See Sarah's boots," he said, pointing at a Kirkwood Elementary fourth-grader's feet. "They're kind of poofy. They are life-saving boots."

The session Dec. 1 was part of a lesson about storytelling Kaufmann gave at Kirkwood Elementary. This year's M.C. Ginsberg artist-in-residence in the Iowa City School District, he is spending a few hours each week at each elementary school in the district, teaching students the ins and outs of storytelling.

"I've always loved storytelling," said Kaufmann, a former planetarium supervisor in Seattle whose wife, theater artist Brynn Hambly, was the Ginsberg artist in 2008. "That sense of facts and

figures, to me stories are a bridge to connecting with people."

In a Kirkwood Elementary fourth-grade class Dec. 1, Kaufmann, who completed his master's degree in theater directing at the University of Iowa in May, created, among others, a story about a boy who won the big football game despite always crying when he was tapped on the shoulder, based off a suggestion from a student.

"Exaggeration is great for storytelling because you can take moments from your life and exaggerate them," Kaufmann told the students. "You can take ideas from other people and add to them."

The students said they had fun learning from Kaufmann.

"It was fun because he was doing moves," said fourth-grader Xya Hatley, 9. "It was so funny."

Classmate Lucas Sorensen, 9, said he liked being able to "translate" Kaufmann's jibberish in a skit in which Kaufmann played a visitor from Jupiter.

"I like how he took time out of his schedule to teach us how to work with our stories and make them longer," Lucas said.

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