

Children's books in spotlight at Caldecott Carnival

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English artist Randolph Caldecott was celebrated in the 19th century for his children's-book illustrations. In the decades that followed, his legacy might have languished had it not been for the vision of the American Library Association. With the success of their Newbery Award, which recognized outstanding authors of children's books, it became clear that there was also a need to honor outstanding picture book illustrators and the Caldecott Medal was born.

During the last 78 years, more than 300 books have been designated as either Caldecott Medal winners or honor books. Buck Lake elementary school encourages students and families to explore them all and the school's annual Caldecott Carnival allows them to do just that. Each year, dozens of family friendly arts activities are designed to align with a variety of Caldecott books.

This year, more than 800 attendees enjoyed musical performances and theatrical productions based on books like "King Bidgood's in the Bath tub." Families also painted trees like those in "A Tree is Nice," fabricated masks inspired by "Where the Wild Things Are," and designed their own "Jumanji" style board games.

Kindergartener, Kora Carracino gravitated to the "Frederick" style collage activity. The book features a poet-mouse and Kora's rationale for her selection was simple. "I just like mice." Her dad, Jason Carracino added that "she has an art table at home and she loves cutting out the pages that she colors and making paper dolls. She's been on us for about a month, that we can't miss this event."

James Pelt and his son Truewill Pelt had also been looking forward to getting creative together. They were both deeply immersed in a "Dave the Potter"



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Bryce Brown and his family making "Saint George and the Dragon" inspired artworks.

clay project, one of Truewill's favorite mediums. "I like working with clay," he said. "Modeling it and glazing it, the craft of it and seeing what comes out, it's exciting." His dad agreed and explained "I melt glass for a living. Clay is very similar to molten glass but I get to touch it and manipulate it with my hands." Truewill is a book lover and, though he's in the fifth grade, he reads at a 12th-grade level. He hadn't yet read "Dave the Potter" but he said "I probably will after this. It looks good."

"Saint George and the Dragon" inspired two art activities and kindergartner Bryce Brown was working on both. "I'm making a dragon. Knights fight dragons." His mom, Voletta Bogan, could see why he was drawn to this book and has recognized his chivalrous tendencies. "He's a door holder, definitely." Bryce's dad, John Brown, has also noticed an artistic inclination in his son and a recent enthusiasm for books.

He said "every night we read together and he enjoys it. He's picking it up and showing more of an interest because we do it on a constant basis. Now he's pulling us and saying, 'hey, it's time to read,' so that's a good thing."

Buck Lake art teacher Sonia McDowell and media specialist Karen Young would whole-heartedly agree. They team up every year to make this event happen. With a lot of planning, preparation, and help from other teachers, volunteers, and the PTO, they are able to offer the Caldecott Carnival to Buck Lake families at no cost.

"With this, it's about family," McDowell said. "Reading with your kids and creating with your kids, this is what's important. It's something that a lot of us, as a society, have forgotten, that personal interaction with other people, including our own kids and parents. Young echoed the point. "We noticed last year, there were no smart-



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Caldecott books on display in the Buck Lake Media Center.



phones out unless they were being used to take pictures. Our families were so engaged. We had email after email of people thanking us for having a family night and telling us how they had carried it over into their homes to do art and reading. When you put the two of them together, it's so powerful."

Recognizing how unique this event is, Buck Lake Principal Billy Millard especially appreciates the way it reinforces the overarching philosophy of the school. "This is about kids doing hands-on learning. It's about kids enjoying the arts and enjoying literacy. It's a family friendly event that is everything we're about in terms of education. To see our families active, engaged, happy, and doing things together is just great. I'm really proud of it."

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