

Actors bring lessons to life



Johanna Coyne/Advance-Register

Serenity Buchanan, 6, and Tyler Mourett, 5, help Pinocchio, or actress Amanda Davis, right, to learn to jump Monday. She and Chris White are of the Traveling Lantern Theatre Company of San Diego. They appeared at Cypress School for kindergartners through third-graders and performed "Pinocchio."

Theater group helps with reading comprehension

By Anita Stackhouse-Hite
Staff writer

Once upon a time ...
"A good children's story always starts with those four words," actress Amanda Davis said.

... there was a piece of wood that could talk.

She was talking to Cypress School students from kindergarten through third grade. That was how she and actor Chris White began their spirited rendition of the classic children's story "Pinocchio"

by C. Collodi. The author's real name was Carlo Lorenzini.

The actors are part of the San Diego-based Traveling Lantern Theatre Company, which specializes in children's theater. They performed the original version, which was written in 1840, Davis said.

"We're called the Traveling Lanterns because in the old days actors traveled by horse drawn [stage] and there was no electricity," Davis said. "The actors traveled with lanterns instead of lamps."

The Traveling Lanterns travel in

groups of two across the United States performing for children, one season at a time. "Pinocchio" is part of the fall season. Davis and White will be on the road for 2½ months performing for children in schools across Southern California.

The chunk of talking wood became a wooden boy named Pinocchio, who learned to dance and sing and play. His father, Geppetto, was a toy maker who carved him because he was lonely and wanted a real boy.

See Theater/3A



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Pinocchio, played by Amanda Davis of the Traveling Lantern Theatre Company, appears Monday at Cypress School.

Theater

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The children sat on the floor in the cafeteria and giggled, squealed and laughed while the actors changed costumes and played all the characters in the story. That included the wise cricket, the good blue fairy who lived in the woods, the policeman who arrested Geppetto and the fox who stole Pinocchio's five gold pieces.

Serenity Buchanan, 6, and Tyler Mourett, 5, came out of the audience to help Pinocchio learn to walk and skip. Najla Mu'min, 8, helped, too, by wearing the sandwich sign that advertised the "greatest puppet show on earth."

Pinocchio couldn't read the sign that said he could see the show for four pennies.

Najla walked through the audience with White, while he asked the children if they could read the sign. Almost every hand went up.

This theatrical spectacle was about more than entertainment. All the fun revolved around California education standards, Principal Valerie Brown said.

"This is another opportunity to bring performing arts to our students, something that is overlooked because we're so focused on standards," Brown said. "This works with language arts and reading because it deals with comprehension and analysis. The students will compare what they've read with what they've seen in the play.



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Amanda Davis, right, and Chris White are of the Traveling Lantern Theatre Company from San Diego. They appeared at Cypress School on Monday.

That's one of the reasons I don't want to give up school plays or choir."

What they saw in the play was real to them. The nearly 400 students gasped as one when the fox out-foxed Pinocchio for his gold pieces. A child in the audience yelled out, "No, don't go with him!"

In the end, they saw Pinocchio's nose elongate when he lied and the trouble he got his father into when he disobeyed and ran away. They saw him sacrifice everything to save his father from the belly of a shark. And then they saw the

wooden boy become flesh and bone after he had learned his lessons.

"Pinocchio learned the value of honesty, discipline and compassion," White said.

When the play was done Savannah Calistro was among the many parents to come for their children. Her son, Jaydin Shiloh, 5, said he enjoyed the play.

"I learned that Pinocchio got swallowed by the [shark] so he could be with his dad and help him," Jaydin said. "It was fun."

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