

Author Maria Dismondy visits Chippewa Valley schools

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Author Maria Dismondy requested student volunteers during her visit to Ojibwa Elementary School on March 31. (Photos by NICOLE TUTTLE)

Author Maria Dismondy gave Ojibwa Elementary students in Macomb Township a sneak peek at her newest children's book "Chocolate Milk Por Favor" on March 31, the day before the book became available.

"When a new book comes out for me, it is really exciting. It is kind of like a birthday party or something," Dismondy said.

"Chocolate Milk, Por Favor" tells the story of Johnny, who goes out of his way to be unkind to Gabe, a non-English speaking student. Johnny must make a choice when Gabe starts to make new friends, and chocolate milk plays a role in the discovery of a real universal language.

"It was inspired by a former student of mine," Dismondy said.

Dismondy visited 12 elementary schools in the Chippewa Valley School District throughout the month of March as part of National Reading Month.

"They hired me to go to all of their schools and I like when a district does it that way, because I get to know the district, I get to know the staff. There is a lot of consistency in the month for me and for them, too. It has been fun," Dismondy said.

She prepared presentations for students in kindergarten through second grade, as well as those in grades three through five, each with age-appropriate content aimed at meeting Common Core Standards in literacy.

“I focus on a tool belt,” she said. “So we talk about what do tools do, and the kids usually answer that tools help us to fix things. And so I tell them when they leave today they are going to get six tools. Now a lot of them actually think I am giving them hammers and drills...But then we take a moment for them all to put on their imaginary tool belt, and then I put on a real tool belt. And then I go through a series of three writing tools. And three reading tools. I know March is Reading month, but you can’t talk about reading without talking about writing. So I give them age appropriate connections between each tool. So for example, I talk about ideas as a writing tool. I put it on my tool belt, they put their imaginary tool on their tool belt, and then I make a connection between my work as a writer and what they can do in the classroom with ideas.”

Dismondy also explained reading and writing tools to students with the help of student volunteers and puppets, tying in the importance of writing to entertainment such as music, apps and video games. She explained that she often invites students to write letters to her.

“I get a lot of letters in March. I am actually a little behind right now. But I love the art of writing an actual letter and so I offer that to children. And I give the teachers my P.O. box and they can write me at any time,” Dismondy said.

Dismondy, her husband, Dave, and her three children are Novi residents. She has a master’s in education. From 2000 to 2011 she worked as an elementary school teacher for lower elementary students in grades one and two. Dismondy said she also worked as a reading specialist for third- through fifth-grade students. She switched career paths in 2011 to focus on her family and writing.

Her first book was “Spaghetti in a Hot Dog Bun,” which was inspired by her experiences as a classroom teacher and by her own childhood. The book was written in 2008. In 2010, Dismondy worked with educational specialist Bob Sornson to write “The Juice Box Bully.” Dismondy then went on to publish four other children’s books and has sold over 100,000 books.

“I was published with a local publisher on my first two books,” Dismondy said. “I opened my own publishing company that produced the last four titles.”

Dismondy said that many of her books have an anti-bullying theme, as she saw a need for books that empower children.

“Spaghetti in a Hot Dog Bun” has been adapted into a children’s musical, which is currently touring elementary schools and local theaters across the country.

“It went live late fall of 2014 and was produced by a company based out of New York City called Stars Within Reach,” Dismondy said. “I was approached by the playwright Brandon Wood in 2013. I had to approve the script and music before it went into the workshop phase.”

Although National Reading Month has concluded, Dismondy has plans to keep on traveling to promote her books.

“I do on average 75 events a year,” Dismondy said. “I do travel out of state but only one to two times a year, because I am raising my three children and family comes first. I will be traveling to Florida soon for an event and I am taking my children with me.”

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