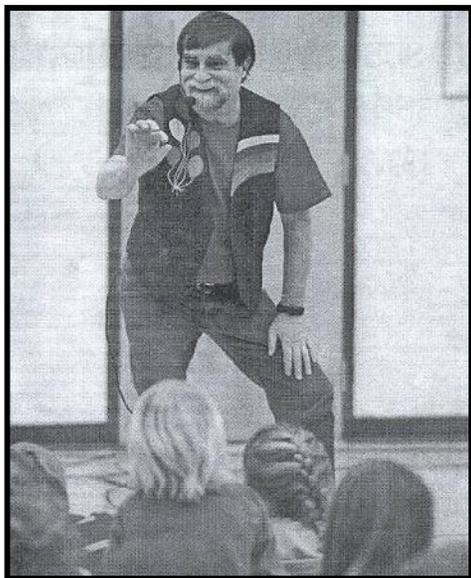


EDUCATION

Encouraging Our Youth to Discover the Joy of Writing

SEAN CONNOR/CAPITOL NEWS

Max Tell enchants primary students Thursday morning at South Kelowna Elementary School with songs from his children's music CD, *Dragon with a Flagon*.

Children's entertainer Max Tell to talk with teachers about how they can inspire their students to read and write.

By Barry Gerding
EDITOR

There is a world of possibilities that are closed off to children who aren't encouraged to read and write.

Max Tell, a professional writer and children's entertainer, has taken it upon himself

to try and connect more children to those possibilities.

Along with giving two singing and storytelling performances to South Kelowna Elementary school students on Thursday, Tell conducted two workshops with Central Okanagan school teachers on Friday to talk about how to encourage students to enjoy writing.

“What I try to do is get across that for children, writing should be looked at as play, and less as required work,” said Tell, whose real name is Robert Stelmach.

“Learning to write is a lot like participating in sports — what you get out of it largely depends on what you put into it,” he said.

Tell, who resides in White Rock, British Columbia and has performed many times in East Asian countries, says when he talks about writing, his intent is not to teach students the rudiments of writing a formal essay, but more about how to writing is a valuable form for them in which to communicate.

“It's pretty simple. If you don't read and write, you can't communicate,” he said.

Tell says while there is a structure in any writing in school, there is still room to give students some free reign to their imaginations.

“One of the lessons I talk about is getting the class to agree on a genre for a story, whether it be a mystery or a comedy, and then come up with a beginning and an ending, and let the students in turn each determine what will be the story in between,” Tell said.

“The poet Robert Frost said even tennis courts have lines. There is structure to writing like there is for everything else in life, but there is also opportunity for personal expression that needs to be encouraged.”

Outside of school, Tell is a big proponent of reading every day to your kids, and for young people to keep a daily journal, just that has a 300-500 word story about their day.

“I don't care what they are writing about when it comes to a journal, just that they are writing and expressing themselves in the written word,” he said.

Tell said he struggled in school as a youth, and at one point a principal told him flat-out that he was wasting his time thinking about going to university.

“I had a lot of people in my life who have helped me, and what I do now is my way of giving something back. If what I talk about reaches just one child and helps turn their life around, it's all worth it.”