

'Muppet Babies' cartoonist Gilchrist inspires Loudonville students to follow imagination



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LOUDONVILLE — Inspired by what Theodor Geisel, aka “Dr. Seuss,” once did for him, Muppets cartoonist Guy Gilchrist hosted R.F. McMullen and C.E. Budd students at the Ohio Theatre, where he taught them how to draw cartoons and explore their imaginations.

“This is always really at my heart because ... when I saw Dr. Seuss, that really kind of got through to me,” Gilchrist said.

When Gilchrist was 8 years old, he attended a children’s literature festival where authors and illustrators, including Dr. Seuss, performed their craft in much the same manner as Gilchrist does now.

Funded by a grant through the Ashland County Community Foundation, Gilchrist added Loudonville as a stop on his six-week tour of the United States. He plans to travel to Greenville, S.C., and Boston next.

Gilchrist met with a full house of kindergarten-through- third-grade students as he walked them through the process of drawing some of his beloved characters like Kermit the Frog, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and Batman.

He encouraged the students to not give up if they became frustrated with their drawings as he believed mistakes were part of developing individual technique.

“Every time you make a mistake, you get smarter,” he told the students.

He broke his illustration technique down to individual shapes and guided the students’ drawings by comparing them to easily recognizable shapes like rocks, half moons or hamburgers.

Gilchrist’s performance came at the end of Right to Read Week at McMullen, an event that celebrates learning and reading with different daily activities and themes. Students even got to don their best headgear to Gilchrist’s performance since the week’s final theme was hat day.

“I love seeing them excited and you can tell,” said McMullen Principal Annette Gorrell. “They’re drawing, they’re realizing they can do something like this. So I’m excited to see them excited, that makes me all the more happy.”

Besides introducing artistic values to young students, part of Gilchrist’s message was for children to learn to be kind to one another and to be kind to themselves.

Gilchrist introduced the students to Nancy, a comic strip character he illustrated in the mid-1990s, while he read “Let Me Be a Light,” a poem on helping a friend through emotional struggles.

Drawing all his creations live on paper in front his audiences, as opposed to drawing on an electronic tablet, Gilchrist strove to show students that expensive technology was not required to create artwork that inspired them. He encouraging them to explore their imaginations.

“The reason that I like to do it old school like this ... (is) because that was the way that Dr. Seuss did it,” he said.

And no two shows are the same, since Gilchrist does not stick to a specific schedule during his performances. His foremost strategy is audience participation.

Even though Gilchrist encouraged students to continue to dream, he told them finding their dreams did not go without hard work, recounting Dr. Seuss’ advice to his class all those years ago.

“He said, ‘If you have a dream and you don’t ever do anything about it, then nothing will happen, but if you ... do something about it, anything can happen,’” Gilchrist said.

Ohio Theatre also hosted community members for a screening of “The Muppets Take Manhattan” Friday evening, the first Muppets movie to feature the Muppet Babies.

According to Gilchrist, since the Muppets have been around for over 40 years, the characters also forge a bond across generations of family members who have grown up with the likes of Kermit and Miss Piggy.

“I am drawing all of these characters and writing all of these stories, and every dream that I ever had came true,” he said.

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