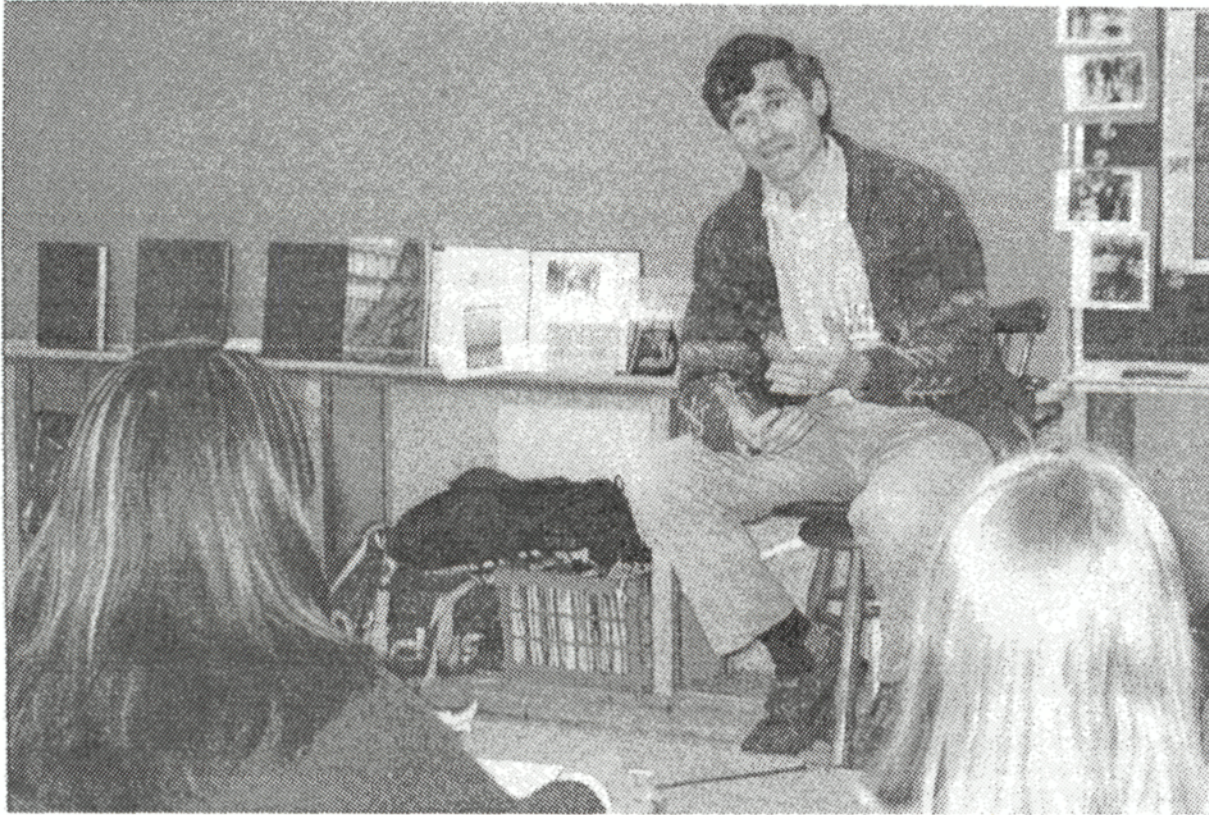


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Colorado author T.A. Barron gives some style tips to Olentangy Middle School pupils last week.

Olentangy pupils hear author

By SUE HAGAN
Gazette reporter

"When I finished one of my books, my 3-year old asked me, 'Is the story true?' What we do as writers is always try to find the answer to that question. ...Whatever you write, it must sound 'true.'"

About 20 Olentangy Middle School pupils listened eagerly to that advice and more from award-winning author T.A. Barron, who spent a day at the school last week.

After several assemblies and book-signing sessions, the author of nature books and young adult fantasy novels provided the students with practical writing tips and a big dose of inspiration.

Characters must sound real he told the group. "You, the writer, have to know your characters."

Earlier in the day, he described how he gets to know the people in his books. He creates a biographical

sketch for each character - what he likes to eat, where he grew up, what life events may have colored his outlook.

"It's likely that the sketch will not appear in the book, but if you don't know about that character, he or she will feel wooden," he said.

He added that using description will put the readers into the book, so they feel what the character feels.

"In my book, *The Lost Years of Merlin*, the young boy is in the water. He feels half drowned, and so should we."

Barron described how he wrote as a child growing up in Colorado. He said his desire to be a writer never left him, even as he took time out to backpack across Europe, Asia, and Africa, and later to enter the business world.

He returned to writing full time and published *Heartlight*, an action-adventure fantasy, in 1990. Several

other fantasy books have followed, plus two books on the glories of the Colorado wilderness.

During his visit with the students, he answered questions, looked at some of their work, and urged them to continue writing.

"There is no work I have ever done that is more challenging, difficult—or joyous," he said. "...If you want to write, a voice inside you will call. If you are open to that voice, you must follow it. Life is too short not to follow your dream."