

Author weaves his writing magic with students

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Sixth graders at Wood Dale Junior High School Thursday jetted to a far-off galaxy, swam under the sea and landed on to a magic island of medieval wizards.

They didn't need a toothbrush or a backpack or a snack. All they had to carry on this adventure were their imaginations. The guide was a master of creating pictures with words, not paint, T.A. Barron.

The author of a popular fantasy series of books on the lost years of Merlin the Magician and a series of adventures of a girl named Kate brought fantasy to life at the Wood Dale school Thursday.

For better than an hour, the former executive turned author, who looked like he could be comfortable with a backpack or a pad of paper, wove his magic.

He got laughs from students when he told him of the first work he created, a magazine in elementary school with "the stupidest name." It was "The Idiot's Odyssey or the Adventures of My Dog Frecklepuss." It sold a few copies.

He got even more laughs when he told students of becoming curious about what was going on in a private place only adults could go — the teacher's lounge. He sold nearly 400 copies of a magazine to adults and students about what really goes on beyond locked doors of the teachers' lounge.

He told students these stories to show that curiosity can bring a world of wonder with words and imagination.

"It's fun for me to write and fun for people to read it," he said. "When you get your heart racing you can produce your best writing. Find passion in what you want to write."

Students, who in their reading classes are hearing about the early years of King Arthur's wizard, were entranced.

"I like that he puts Merlin at our age," said Abby Palumbo. "His books allow us to use our imaginations and paint pictures with words."

Other youngsters, like Laura Kusek, thought it was cool that they could meet a real author that they were reading and hear him read to them as well.

For Adam Ostrander, a seventh grader who got permission to hear Barron, the Merlin books are better than that other wizard of renown, Harry Potter.

"The Merlin books are more of a challenge to read," he said. "He has more detail and more imaginative."

Adam couldn't wait to meet him. After Barron showed up, Adam introduced himself, extending his hand.

"Hi, Adam," Barron said. "It's great to meet you. You look a lot like my son."

Adam beamed.

Students also got some inside scoops on how a writer works. They wanted to know where he wrote in his house, how he came up with the names of his characters and which of his books he liked the best.

Other were curious about the types of letters he gets from readers. One asked what he wanted to



T.A. Barron answers questions from sixth-graders during a recent visit at Wood Dale Junior High School.

Photos courtesy of Kim Henner, Wood Dale Junior High School sixth-grade teacher

be if he couldn't be a writer? Barron's answer?

"I'd love to be a wizard," he said. "It'd be a blast. I could have all kinds of adventures. Being a writer is the closest thing to being a wizard."

Students who didn't get their questions answered could send their questions to his Web site and he'd answer them.

While at the junior high, he also had a sit-down with sixth graders Susan and Margaret Hammerand, reporters for the Panther Press, the junior high school's student newspaper

One was curious about the teacher who inspired him. He said it was Lucile Wilson, his middle school librarian. She volunteered to use the printing press in the teachers' lounge to copy his magazine.

"She was a fabulous person," Barron said.

The other wanted to know what he thought about the students at Wood Dale Junior High.

"I was impressed, totally impressed," he said. "No kidding. All the questions were terrific. I've rarely had kids with such thoughtful questions."

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