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100 Book Challenge has DMMS 7th-graders making time to read

By Mark R. Dorolek
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Winchester — Gathered in the media center at Daniel Morgan Middle School on Friday, seventh-grade students sit quietly and do something that most kids don't take to easily: reading.

As part of the 10th anniversary of the nationwide program Read Across America and the Winchester Public Schools' 100 Book Challenge, the students enjoyed a little time to catch up on some of their favorite books.

The 100 Book Challenge is a program that tries to get seventh-grade students to read at least 15 minutes a day and move up another "step" in the program, which is designed to boost reading skills and allow the students to progress to a higher level of reading comprehension.

"It has the students reading and is exciting for the kids," said Principal Adam Burket.

This is the first year the school has done the 100 Book Challenge, which should help the school system's test scores, he said.

The school has focused on literacy in all areas, not just in English classes, Burket said.

"We have some kids that have really gone crazy with it," he said.

One of those that has taken to the program is Elizabeth Martin, who met her limit of 15 minutes a day for the week and was wearing a fuzzy pink jester hat as part of the school's "Hats off to Reading" day.

She said her favorite type of book involves things she can relate to.

"I can see things in my life and see how it connects," Martin said.

She said some of her friends that do not normally read have started because of the program.

Amanda Pennypacker said she enjoys "realistic fiction" and her favorite book is "Just Listen" by Sarah Dessen.

She has enjoyed the challenge so much that she has contests with friends.



Seventh-graders David Gaither and Elizabeth Harris were among the students at Daniel Morgan Middle School reading in the library as part of the Read Across America event on Friday.

(Photo by Rick Foster)

“I am going to start reading during lunch,” Pennypacker joked.

Heather Kwolek has completed 1,435 steps since the program began in October.

She likes fantasy books and anything by Tamora Pierce, who writes fantasy novels for teenagers.

“She has strong girl heroines who aren’t afraid to break with convention,” Kwolek said.

Lisa Rodriguez was not much of a reader before the program, but now she is reading “Memoirs of a Geisha” by Arthur Golden. The book was recommended by her mother.

So far, she said, the book was her favorite she has read this year and wanted to see if the book was better than the movie.

The seventh-graders aren’t the only ones excited about the program, the English teachers seem just as thrilled.

In each of the teachers’ rooms are about 10 bins containing 30 books each. Each bin has books ranging from a three and a half grade reading level to an eight and a half grade level.

The idea is to find the appropriate level for students and then have them progress to the next level, said English teacher Jim Clay.

Miranda Delmerico, an inclusion teacher who helps the other English teachers, said the 15 minutes of reading given to the students give her and the teachers time to find the correct reading level and evaluate progress.

English teacher Beth Buerkel said the program is focusing more on nonfiction, which will help the students’ reading skills and teach them things in other subjects.

“It is giving them a variety of genres to pick from,” she said.

English teacher Lydia Butler said she has enjoyed watching the students’ families get involved and having the kids recommend books to her.

“They are loaning me books faster than I can read them,” she said.

English teacher Kim Farley said there are still students who are difficult to motivate but she is happy with the program.

“It is fun to watch the kids challenge themselves,” she said.

If the students cannot find a book they like in the classroom, they can check out one of the 16,000 books in the media center from either Librarian Julie Baker or Assistant Librarian Donna Setzer.

“The School Board has been very generous with their funding,” Baker said.

— **Contact Mark R. Dorolek at mdorolek@winchesterstar.com**