

History comes to life

238 Longs Peak students study, portray historical figures

By Melanie M. Sidwell
Longmont Times-Call

LONGMONT — Statesman Winston Churchill, comedian Chris Farley, musician John Denver, playwright William Shakespeare and aviator Amelia Earhart will be among the dozens of famous figures to speak at Longs Peak Middle School this week.

A program through the state council Colorado Humanities, Young Chautauqua allows students to bring history to life by immersing themselves in the

writings and lives of historical characters.

Student Chautauquans work with professional presenters and scholars to perform as historical figures through research, rehearsal and performance.

On Tuesday and Wednesday, 60 eighth-graders at Longs Peak will present their historical figures in the classroom, language arts and social studies teacher Joan Hollins said.

Hollins is working with John Stansfield, an author and storyteller who portrays conservationist Enos Mills, who worked to ed-

ucate the government and public about the need for national parks.

"He's the 'Father of Rocky Mountain National Park.' For somebody who should be well known, he's not," Stansfield said.

Stansfield has been visiting the classroom for the past six weeks to help guide students through their research.

He said he helps students work on developing their vocal and physical presentations of the person.

"It gives a whole new twist to a research project," he said. "It's not just researching and writing; it's researching, writing and bringing the character to life in the classroom."

Hollins said students got to select their historical figures, though some choices — such as dictator Adolph Hitler and advocate for the disabled Helen Keller — were nixed because she thought they were too difficult for the assignment's goals: to study research technique, the biography genre and oral communication.

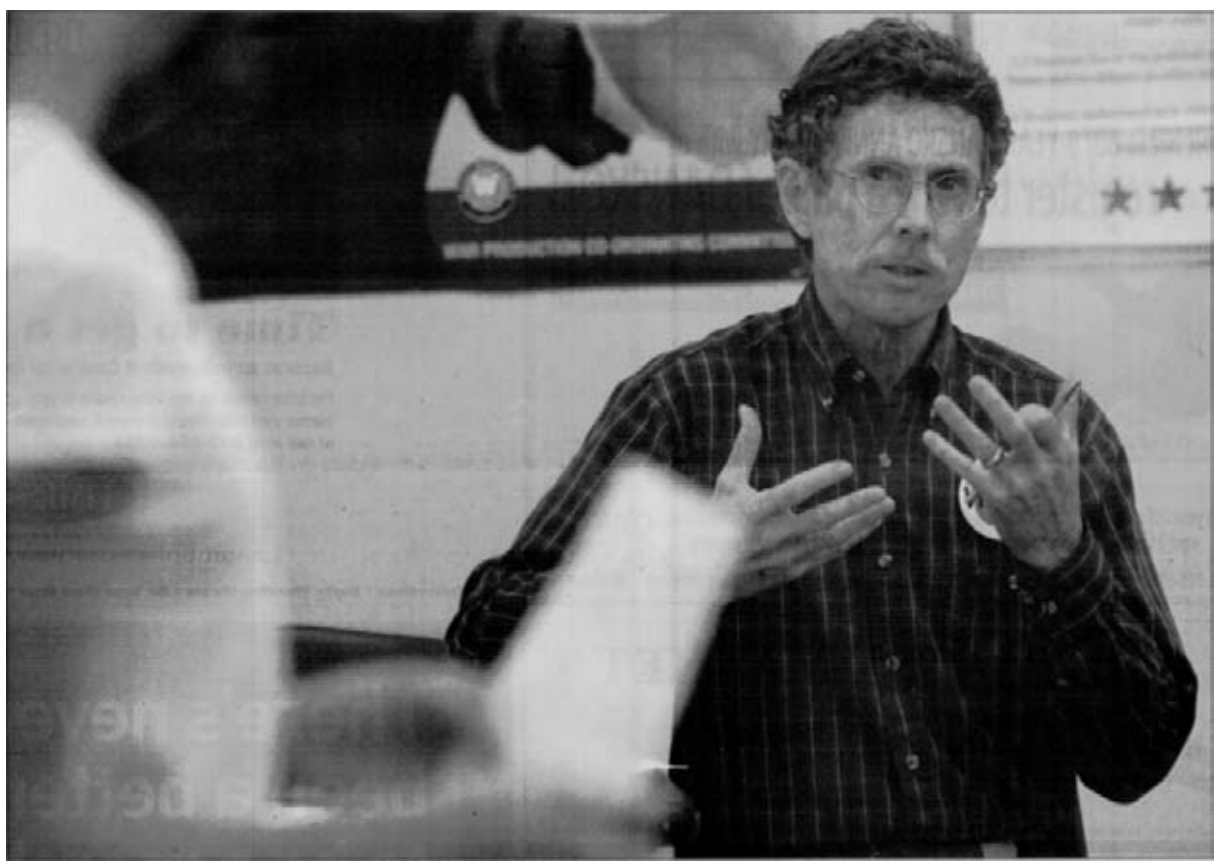
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John Stansfield — who portrays Enos Mills, known as the “Father of Rocky Mountain National Park” — has been visiting Joan Hollins’ classroom at Longs Peak Middle School to work with students to research historical characters and write about them. Each student will portray a character and deliver a first-person monologue in character. Jill P. Mott/Times-Call



Emily Bossert as Harriet Tubman

Kristen Fischer as John Denver

Asia Groves as Emily Dickinson





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Jessi Fox rehearses her historical figure Tupac Shakur during English class in preparation for her performance at Long Peak Middle School.

Jill P. Mott/Times-Call



HISTORICAL: Student portrayals

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Choices ranged from civil rights activist Martin Luther King and Jewish teen Anne Frank to pop culture icons Walt Disney and Sid Vicious, Hollins said.

"It's been really fun to see what choices they make," she added. "They've all been really fascinating."

The students then had to read the person's biography or autobiography, research the person from other sources, write a presentation and, with help from Stansfield, structure an oral presentation.

"They're learning to take

basic facts and put inference to them and adapt that person's emotions and attitude towards a situation," she said. "They learn to fill in the blanks a little bit."

Eighth-grader Ben Jansen, 14, said he chose Malcolm X after his dad suggested the influential black nationalist leader.

Ben said he found Malcolm X's story interesting, especially his uprising out of a criminally corrupt youth.

"He got better and became a helpful leader for the black community," the eighth-grader said.

While noting that he en-

joyed the unusual assignment, Ben said the hardest part was talking in front of the class.

Classmate Daniela McCarthy agreed. She was portraying Marie Antoinette, the iconic French queen.

"I liked the time (period) she lived in," Daniela said, adding the interesting fact that Marie Antoinette married at age 14, the same age Daniela will be in a few weeks. "It's really cool to learn about someone I never would have thought to learn about."

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