

Activity excites fourth graders, lends reality to writing

By Kristina M.

At Knox Elementary School fourth grade teacher Mrs. Sherry Wakal came up with a writing activity in February that helps students learn what they need to fix and tells them what they did right.

It is called "American Writer" and it is based on the television reality show "American Idol."

Three to five students in Mrs. Wakal's class are picked to be judges. They are the ones who sit and listen to the students "audition," or read their stories in front of the class. The judges are the ones who think through the story, and then they give comments to the writer about the paper.

The judges have to base their comments on the Six Traits that the students learn during the writing block class.

After the judges make their comments, they have a decision to make. The judges have to agree if that student who wrote the paper will go on to 'Hollywood,' or will they have to go back and redo the paper to fix the kinks in their writing.

All of the students in Mrs. Wakal's class enjoy doing the 'American Writer' activity.

"One afternoon during writing, students in my class were listening to me make positive comments after individual students read their papers out loud to their classmates," Mrs. Wakal said. "I would let them know which of the six writing traits needed to be improved."

She said students then started discussing other parts of writing - using the 5W's, 'purple words', etc. - and one student remarked that it was "kind of like being on American Idol."



Brady M., a fourth grader at Knox Community Elementary School, shows off his golden ticket to 'Hollywood' after being passed on by his 'American Writer' judges.

Hence the name, "American Writer," Wakal said.

Faith Hemphill, one of Mrs. Wakal's students, said she likes doing this activity. "It teaches you to write. It's a great activity and people will learn from it."

"It should inspire teachers to do this activity in their classrooms," said Brady McCarty, another of Mrs. Wakal's students.

He said he thinks this will help students with fluency and help students read in the process.

"It's cool and people should enjoy this writing activity," McCarty said.

Mrs. Wakal said it helps build confidence in the students' writing and will help the students accelerate their skills to be a successful writer.