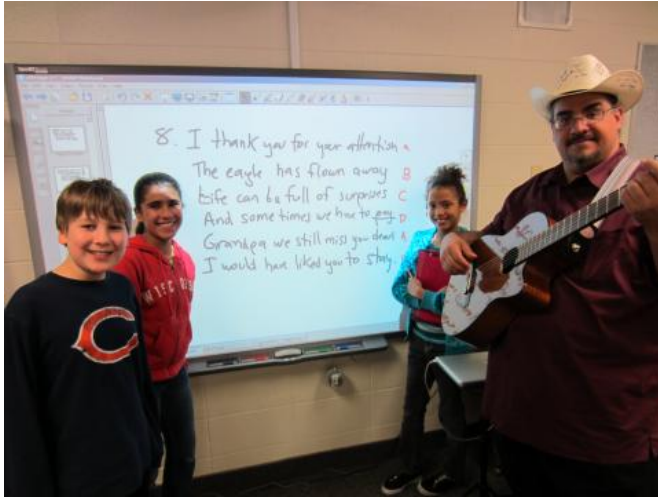




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Sauk Trail Program Music To Students' Ears



Walk past the music room at Sauk Trail Elementary these days and you just might hear performances of a future Jennifer Lopez or Cee Lo Green as fourth- and fifth-graders continue to compose life-event lyrics and music after a special residency music workshop earlier this month.

"Sones de Mexico" Education, under the direction of Grammy-nominated composer/musician Juan Dies, is a program that brings Mexico's culture of song-storytelling to elementary school students and offers hands-on lessons in committing students' own life stories to song, dance, art and music.

Dies teaches about significant events in Mexico's history as preserved in songs, specifically corridos, which is a compilation of lyrics set to music that tells a true, and often tragic, story as a way to memorialize the event.

"He teaches corridos in a structured way, helping our kids identify a significant event in their lives and then writing a song about it in an organized manner, much like an essay," said Sauk Trail music teacher John Becker, who assisted during Dies' four-day visit earlier in February.

Dies strapped on his guitar and sang several corridos and offered the back-story on each narrative. He then challenged the students to think of an event and set it to music to compose a corrido. Dies guided them along the way using PowerPoint and other presentation materials.

A corrido consists of an introduction of characters, the conflict or tragic event, moral or lesson to be learned, and a farewell or closing.

"Some of the topics the kids offered were about a girl who broke her arm after being warned not to jump on the bed, and a story of a pet dog that got loose and was killed on nearby train tracks," Becker said. **"They're taking something that's personal and unique and creating a work of art with it.**" They learn the structure of how to write a song, where the accents fall, and making it fit with the melody and making things fit within a rhyming scheme. It's a new way to say something that's worth saying, with their own ideas and creativity."

The project also includes an art class component with art teacher Anne Gustafson. Students are drawing and engraving blocks in a Mexican historical style to print images to accompany and storyboard their corridos, which will be projected as part of the final concert performance, an all-school assembly at 12:45 p.m. on May 9.

"The cultural exchange in learning this new art form from Mexico is really a valuable lesson, especially with so many of our native Spanish speakers at Sauk Trail," Becker said. **"To have Juan Dies come in and share his culture, authenticity, and experience in a learning setting is incredible."**

The Sones de Mexico Education residency was made possible via a district Global Initiative Grant written by Becker.

-- By Tom Kobinsky

* **Web editor's note:** A longer version of this story will appear in an upcoming edition of the Middleton

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