

# Ethel Jacobsen School Hosts Garden Party to Welcome Author-Illustrator

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By Juliet Kaszas-Hoch



LEARNING, GROWING: Monica Wellington reads one of her books. (Photos by Juliet Kaszas-Hoch)

The sun came out midday last Thursday, May, 19, and so did the kindergarten classes at the Ethel A. Jacobsen Elementary School in Surf City. After visiting with the pre-kindergarteners, first-graders and second-graders that morning, children's book author and illustrator Monica Wellington met the kindergarten students in the schoolyard garden.

Wellington's book *Zinnia's Flower Garden* was one of the youngsters' recent English Language Arts curriculum books. As the staff explained, "ELA in elementary school develops listening, speaking, reading, writing and spelling skills." The book, they noted, follows "a young girl named Zinnia who plants seeds, carefully tends them and watches them grow into a beautiful garden. This careful observation of the cycles in nature is known as phenology, and this particular book introduces seasonal phenomena to young children perfectly in a way that is easily understood

for this age group."

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Wellington gladly accepted, and soon planned her visit to the school. In preparation, all the students at E.J. planted various types of flowers – just as Zinnia had in the story.

On Thursday after the kindergarteners gathered around picnic tables in the garden, Wellington read from her book, in which Zinnia documents the progress of her garden in a journal. "The author takes the reader along on Zinnia's journey beginning in the spring as she plans her garden, throughout the summer as she watches her flowers grow, into the fall as she harvests the seeds of her labor and finally to the winter when she begins planning again," the staff stated. "Our kindergarten students were able to identify with many elements of this story because of our schoolyard garden. Each year students watch the growth of the flowers and plants, and document the progress in their own science journals."



Author and illustrator Monica Wellington gets a special welcome from the kindergartners.

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Wellington also spoke about the process of creating a book, and asked the students how long they imagined it takes from start to finish. Charlie Johnson raised his hand and guessed one year, which Wellington said was a very accurate guess.

As she explained, the ideas for her books usually begin with the pictures she wants to make, and both the words and the pictures undergo many revisions.

“Going through the different stages of making a book is a lot of work, but it is always enormously satisfying,” Wellington points out on her website, [monicawellington.com](http://monicawellington.com). “I spend my days doing exactly what I love to do, and it is very gratifying that my work goes out into the world and is shared with other people. I feel incredibly lucky.”



The author and illustrator was born in London, and lived in Germany and Switzerland before moving to the United States when she was 7. “I think my early childhood has had a big influence on my books: In Switzerland we lived close to a small town surrounded by mountains, woods, lakes, orchards, fields and farms, and I often find myself painting pictures of the things that happen in these kinds of places,” she notes on her website.

Wellington studied pottery, painting and printmaking at the University of Michigan School of Art. She then resided in Europe for several years, working in an antique porcelain gallery and at a museum, before moving to New York City to work as a

freelance artist.

“I worked in a pottery studio during the day and took classes at night at the School of Visual Arts,” she said. “Gradually, I started to do more painting, and because of the style and images that were developing, I began to think of illustrating children’s books.”

Her first book was published in 1988, and she has been writing and illustrating ever since.

After her reading, Wellington led the kindergartners through guided drawings, and the students were excited to put pencil to paper to create pictures of dogs and cats. Before the author departed, the youngsters all proudly held up their drawings, marking the end of the day’s delightful “garden party.”

Support from the LBI Parent Teacher Association; the LBI Board of Education; and AtlantiCare’s “Healthy Schools, Healthy Children” program – which provides funding for various wellness and healthy behaviors programs – allowed E.J. to host Wellington, and to purchase her books for each student. In addition, the Home Depot donated items for the event.

As the school staff exclaimed, “It was a wonderful and memorable experience for all, especially the students!”

— Juliet Kaszas-Hoch

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