

Learning from living books

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Independence Township Trustee Jose Aliaga talks with students Ricky Rottach, Isabella Foster, Payton McCracken, and Kathleene Mull. Photos by Jessica Steeley

BY JESSICA STEELEY

Clarkston News Staff Writer

Humans became books last week at Sashabaw Middle School as Allie Dennis' seventh grade classes listened to the stories and experiences of



Maddy Kopsch strums a tune for Sean Trador, Ethan Schneider, and Grace Ankrom.

different guest speakers during their Human Library event.

“The human library project is a worldwide organization and it’s a movement for social change,” Dennis said. “We’re kind of doing it here, but a modified version of it. I have different volunteers of all different ages, of all different professions and stages in their life.” This was the first human library project held in Clarkston, Dennis said. Speakers included two Clarkston High School students, Superintendent Rod Rock, Independence Township Trustee José Aliaga, and a pro-gamer, among others.

“It’s really cool to see their reactions and see how interested they are in what you talk about and how they really care. It’s just really cool to see and connect to them,” CHS sophomore Maddy Kopsch said.

Kopsch told students about being a young musician and learning to play the guitar and write her own songs.

“It opens their minds to see how many different people there are in the world and how many people do different things,” Kopsch said of the human library project.

José Aliaga discussed his experience coming to America as an immigrant from Peru, learning English and receiving his Master’s Degree.

“As an immigrant I always have to overcome things here. They like the story, and they will ask me a lot of questions,” Aliaga said.

“Kids are curious about what immigrants do when we come to America.”

He hopes his story motivates the kids to realize they can get what they want out of life through hard work and determination.

“It’s good to share my experience and encourage people about the American Dream. I told my story, basically came as an immigrant without having much and working hard and if you have a dream, a goal, this is the right place to belong,” Aliaga said.

Dennis said before students experienced the human library they made predictions about what they thought the speakers would be

like based on their name and the book title the speakers chose for themselves.

“Each one of these speakers today is like an autobiography, only they’re here talking to the kids rather than actually writing the book,” Dennis said, “so, we’re thinking of these people as books and the students get to check them out for the hour and they get to talk to them about bits and pieces of their story and of their lives.” Seventh grader Ava Gushem thought the project was a good idea because she was able to learn about different people from different backgrounds and learn to combat the negative stereotypes used against certain people.

“I learned a lot of stuff about our superintendent and how he is a very important person and he goes to Washington D.C. a lot,” Gushem said. “Also about the Jewish person I was talking to. She told us a lot about her background, her religion and how she celebrates certain things and how they celebrate a lot of stuff differently.”

Gushem said the project relates to a book their reading in class, “The Outsiders”, through its focus on stereotypes.

“We learned a lot about stereotypes and labels that people have given them in the book and that those aren’t always true,” Gushem said. “You can always learn more from a person by talking to them.”



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