

Dr. Seuss has been inspiring youngsters to read for decades, but, as Read Across America participation blossoms, the scope of those his work affects also grows.

Read Across America, sponsored by the National Education Association, began in 1998. It was the desire of the NEA that every child would be read to on Dr. Seuss's birthday — March 2. That first year, NEA officials estimated at least half a million educators and millions of children participated as well as celebrities, athletes, political figures, firefighters and judges.

With the introduction of video conferencing four years ago, classrooms gained the ability to communicate with other schools across the country. Now, Read Across America involves groups of students creating unique adaptations to the works of Seuss, as well as other works, and sharing them live with other schools.

Alpena Public Schools Media Specialist Karen Tetzlaff said 1,043 classes in 24 states video conferenced this year on Thursday. This type of communication gives the opportunity for students to incorporate a variety of skills into the reading experience, and even junior high students have accepted the challenge.

"The virtual experience goes beyond the reading of a book," Tetzlaff said. "It might mean memorizing, speaking in front of a group and camera or cooperative learning."

Tetzlaff said each school has a few minutes to introduce themselves, they give presentations and there is time for questions and answers. She said some of the differences between the lifestyles of students geographically or weatherwise removed are incredible. One she remembered from last year regarded the shock of students from Texas trying to envision a snow hill.

"Virtual field trips are becoming a big venue for learning," she said.

Computer students from Thunder Bay Junior High pre-

sented parodies this year on the works of Seuss including versions called If Dr. Seuss Wrote Technical Manuals, Dr. Seuss on Y2K and Spam I Am. The students put a teen-techno flare to the familiar rhythms of childhood favorites and showed their talents to sixth grade students at Bridgeport-Spalding Elementary in Saginaw.

Many area classrooms participated this year, including Cherie Honeycutt's fifth grade class at Ella White which presented a "Scrambled States of America" skit to a fourth grade class in Brownville, N.Y. Christy Jordan's fifth grade class at Lincoln Elementary gave a rap presentation about presidents and inventions to a class in Floral Park, N.Y.

Lori Tucker's sixth grade class at Besser presented "Poetry Alive" to a class in Canada, while Laura Lewis's fifth grade class at Long Rapids presented skits to students in Novi.

Lewis said her class created skits based on excerpts from novels she had read them. The presentation began with leprechauns searching for gold who kept finding books instead. In the end, they

realized the books were gold.

"It's just kind of a fun way to relay the value of reading," Lewis said.

Lewis said the students made all the props and wrote their own scripts. She said the activities brought drama and organization into play, and the kids learned valuable aspects of what it's like for students operating within different school structures. She said it gives an opportunity for students who don't get the opportunity to travel to get exposure to other areas.

"Last year's students moving on to sixth grade looked back on the experience as one of the highlights of the year," Lewis said. "They will never forget some of the stories shared."

Lewis said last year's group communicated with students in New York who couldn't believe there were firearms in the homes of the students in upper lower Michigan and that some of the students had shot them. She said the whole hunting concept was very foreign. Lewis said her class continued to be pen pals with those same New York students.

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