



## Young Northgate book reviewers broadcast critiques

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By Megan Duncan, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Pupils at Avalon Elementary School in Northgate School District got radio airtime and their names on a compact disc when they were chosen to record book reports.

Eighteen youngsters from third through sixth grades read books ranging from a Judy Blume classic to a new book in the Star Wars series, wrote reports, and recorded them with help from the host of a local radio program.

The reports are being aired on the "Saturday Light Brigade," a children's show, now through the summer. They have also been placed on the Internet and distributed on a CD.

The show airs from 6 a.m. to noon Saturdays on WRCT-FM, the lower-power FM station on the Carnegie Mellon University campus that reaches 12 to 15 miles from campus.

After Saturday Light Brigade received a \$5,000 grant from Dominion Foundation of Dominion Resources for the project, program host Larry Berger contacted Avalon Principal Richard Stuempges, a member of the "Saturday Light Brigade" advisory board, about involving pupils from his school.

Berger took sound equipment from his studio at the Children's Museum on the North Side, showed the pupils the recording process, and let some assist while other pupils read their reports.

Garrett Malsch, a sixth-grader from Bellevue, chose "The River," Gary Paulsen's sequel to "Hatchet," for his report and practiced reading aloud to his older sister. Berger said he did as little editing as possible to the readings.

"If they coughed, you're not going to hear that, but I didn't want to alter their words," he said.

To ensure words weren't removed during editing, he collected the manuscripts.

He said they were covered in erasure marks from editing, and he noticed spots where pupils had ad-libbed.

"There were times when they were colloquial, but then you knew it came from the heart," Berger said.

Fifth-grader Germine Alfonse chose "The Two Princesses of Bamarre," by Gail Carson Levine, because of the way the princess sisters help each other out of trouble.

Her teacher, Ruth Smith, said she asked the pupils to write their reports in a way that would make listeners want to buy the book.

Berger said because the reports were for the ear, they were different from normal book reports. In addition to promoting literacy, Berger said these reports boost self-esteem because of the response from those who hear them.

CDs of the reports were distributed at a school arts festival March 12, the same day the first reports were aired.

The applause when pupils received their copies of the CD was thunderous, Berger said.

Stuempges said parents have been very proud of the results of the project.

One youngster's grandparents live in Egypt and were able to listen to her report on the Internet.

Reports are being aired in groups at about 8:30 a.m.

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