

EDUCATION

Rural school uses music to teach core subjects

BY ANDREAS MORSE

STAFF WRITER

In the Uncas elementary school gym, students' heads are nodding to blues tunes, unaware of how much information they're absorbing.

Thanks to artist in residence Peter Lenton – known to kids as Peter Puffin – the K-6 students are getting a lesson in science, social studies, language arts and Phys. Ed. all rolled into one musical performance.

Songs about friendship, the ecosystem and lyrics penned by students are the culmination of Lenton's two-and-a-half-day stint at the rural school.

A biologist and teacher by trade, the self-taught singer songwriter uses the fine arts to teach core subjects.

"You can weave the ideas and the learning outcomes that teachers want them to achieve into song lyrics," Lenton said. "The kids don't even know they're learning."

While he uses music as a tool to teach other subjects, it's more than an instructional method.

He hopes students will develop a passion for singing, songwriting, drama or visual arts.

"I think sometimes the fine arts are perceived as fluff," he said. "It doesn't always have the emphasis, the exposure that this school gives it."

Exposing rural students to culture is a high priority for Giselle Yanish, the

school's fine arts committee chair.

From Jan. 24 to 26, her committee hired Lenton to help students develop their creativity.

As well as covering concepts in the Alberta curriculum, Lenton's tunes incorporate character education and anti-bullying messages.

"It's important to bring in not only a good artist with talent but someone who can instill in (students) these values," Yanish said.

Her son Matthew excels in math and science, but Lenton's sessions have helped him apply that knowledge.

"I learned that the environment is as important as we are and the future depends on what we do with the environment," Matthew said.

The Grade 3 student also has a creative side.

"I sometimes write songs by myself. I make poems in my head and sometimes I jot them down, but not very often," he added.

Now that he has some training in songwriting, Matthew may be putting more of his poems on paper.

Most students at Uncas school will have another chance to check in with Lenton, as he plans to return next January.

On Feb. 17, he will be back in the county for a Parent Link-sponsored performance at the Log Cabin. The show is geared toward preschool children and is part of a bullying prevention initiative. Tickets are \$5



Peter Lenton, also known as Peter Puffin, teaches Uncas elementary students the actions to one of his songs.

PHOTO BY JOELLE TOMEX

per person or \$15 per family and are available at Strathcona County family and community services. For more information call 416-6730.