



CONTINUED FROM ARTICLES WEBPAGE:

"The play has basically been teaching and reinforcing what has been taught" said Martien, executive director of Songs with Meaning - a nonprofit group with the mission of enhancing lives through the arts. The Guide Program enlisted Songs with Meaning to help the students learn these lessons in a creative way.

Songs with Meaning wrote the original production of fun scenes, moving moments, rap, music, dancing -and most importantly - life lessons for both the actors and audience to take away The play focuses on the importance of good education good relationships and good habits.

Each school, which meets with Martien on separate days, has been working on different parts of the production - a scene here a set piece there and - and will join for the first time Monday for a dress rehearsal where students will see how each of the scenes and projects. come together.

"It's really been a challenge," Martien said. "Most of the students have never ever been in front of an audience before."

However, Martien said participating in the arts allows students to express themselves. And as the saying "a picture is worth a thousand words" goes, Martien also said acting and seeing the scenes better reinforces the lessons in them.

"You have an opportunity for release," she said. "You can do things that aren't normally acceptable off stage."

For example, Gaithersburg Middle School seventh-grader Sherrice Blake plays the eternally late Shelby who takes her time brushing her teeth and rolling her eyes at a nagging mother instead of hustling off to school. Later on in life, Shelby gets fired from her job for bringing her bad habit of being late to work.

"It's supposed to teach other people about how to solve their problems at the same time it's teaching us," said Gaithersburg Middle School sixth-grader Michelle Munguia, who plays the stem boss Mrs. Johnson fed up with Shelby's lateness. "We should start when we're young doing what we're supposed to be doing so when we grow will be successful."

In addition to lessons from the play, the students get lessons in working together, patience and compromising as Martien directs with a no-nonsense approach.

They put up with me so well," Martien said. Martien told one student on Thursday to memorize her lines better She firmly told another not to crack into a smile during one scene. And she made another student practice an entrance again and again.

"She's just showing us how to improve," Munguia said. "It's kind of our fault if we're wrong."

A few miles away and a few days later, about a half a dozen students Montgomery, Village Middle School spent the afternoon painting, pasting and drawing in preparation for the play. Some students chose to be a part of the play's backstage crew which painted parts of the set, created scale models of the scenes, and decorated posters

for the event among other things.

"We chose our own things depending on what we wanted to be," said Montgomery Village sixth grader Alvin Munoz, who said he didn't feel the acting, bug. "We all decided like to do the backstage. I like designing I like cutting - I like everything"

Montgomery Village seventh-grader Brittnee Smith drew colorful bubble letters to title a poster that showed off pictures taken of the students throughout the year for those attending the play to see.

Smith said she wouldn't mind being on stage, but she was content for now with her task

I just like art, so I don't care what it's for," she said. I like the performing arts - acting and singing - so that's what I want to do."

But besides the fun, Martien said she has seen how students have benefited from working on the play.

The Montgomery Village students eager to show that they were helpful - hurried to pick up scraps and bits of paper littered on the floor before it was time to leave. The most helpful student in the program will receive an award before the play next week.

"I have watched a transformation as subtle as it may be in some students and apparent in others," she said.