

LOCAL NEWS

Athens students share Rabbit Box stories

By **ALLIE JACKSON** published Monday, May 12, 2014



The W.R. Coile Middle School Media Center filled up quickly with teachers and parents as nervous students paced.

A group of students were preparing to showcase their photography, stories and poems in a Rabbit Box presentation that's been an ongoing project since October.

Whether stories of heroism or heartbreak, the sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade students all had something important to say.

Milvia Xiomara Umana spoke about the time she witnessed her friend die by electrocution while they were kicking around a soccer ball.

“He picked up the ball and then put his hand on a power line. He began to shake and yell. He was a joker though, so we all thought he was joking,” Umana shared with the crowd. “Then his eyes opened really wide. I guess he finally let go of the wire when he died. We went to look at his body, which was pale and yellow and his skin was burned.”

One after another the middle school students spoke about significant, often tragic, moments in their lives.

Rabbit Box aims to foster the art of storytelling in Athens by providing a forum for people to share true stories from their lives. It started in May 2012, holding its first event in Avid Bookshop before holding a second at The Globe. Eventually, the forum grew and since November 2012 has been held at The Melting Point.

Several of the students first presented their stories at The Melting Point in January.

University of Georgia Professor Ruth Harman serves as the UGA liaison for the event and also applied for the AthFest Educates grant that funded the project.

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“We had some photographers ... come in and they worked with the kids and brought them out and showed them how to take photographs. Then we had this gentleman who came and did a poetry boot camp with the kids and they produced poetry and different poems,” said Harman. “They put it all together and that’s what they are sharing today, their stories.”

With photos of his surgery-scarred leg on the screen behind him, Isaiah Harper shared about the time he was attacked by a dog.

Both Shiaire Emon Loyd and Vladimir Humberto Hernandez told stories of bullying.

“My friend Alexis and me, we were both quiet. ... I noticed she was being bullied, but something felt different this time,” said Loyd. “So I jumped in to stop them. Because I did this, they started bullying me.”

Edgar Omar Escutia Chagoya talked about his journey from Mexico to the U.S. In January, Chagoya gave his presentation in Spanish. Monday he spoke only in English.

Other stories focused on a trip to the Georgia Aquarium, a modeling career, an aunt who went missing and the death of a grandfather.

Ruby Teran shared about the death of her uncle, who passed away after being in a drunk driving crash in Athens.

“The car had flipped over and my uncle wasn’t wearing a seat belt,” Teran said. “They had been drinking. ... The driver wasn’t hurt as bad. He (her uncle) left behind five kids.”

Harman said the children became really invested in their projects.

“I’d love to see more of this. They came to after-school meetings, on Saturdays to do boot camp and they all came downtown to do Rabbit Box,” she said. “It’s just amazing to see how much these kids are invested. There aren’t enough opportunities for children to be doing this sort of art. There just aren’t enough funds going into art.”

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“ Thank you to everyone involved in this outstanding project! The last paragraph is an understatement!

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