



Athens Author Shows Decade Of Dedication

Story By James Robertson

Photos By Sharon Ellsberry

Sharon Ellsberry, Athens resident and author of *The Spaniel Family Books*, is committed to supporting classroom instruction. In the decade of writing her five titles of picture and chapter books about a family of Spaniel dogs, she has hoped to make a difference in encouraging reading, writing, and being creative.

Ellsberry says the original motivation for creating the series came from a desire and dream to have a deeper expression of herself.

"I wanted to express truths that I had learned in my childhood and share those with today's children," said Ellsberry. "Those truths center around concepts like sharing, being a good friend, and that everyone's dreams matter. These truths help develop character in all of us so I call them character development values."

After realizing her dream of publishing her first book, she had to figure out how to reach the children she was writing for. Her many years as a mentor for Big Brothers and Sisters helped prepare her for the role of mentoring many. Her marketing background also helped in the understanding that good marketing is meeting a need with something you have.

"I realized that schools enjoy having speakers, and as an author, I could offer my stories and how I turned my light-bulb-moments for stories into books," says

Ellsberry. "But I wondered how I could present it in a creative way that supported classroom instruction. Some of my teacher friends and other children's authors instructed me to study the TEKS and the STA-AR test objectives. From that research I began to develop my first school visit program."

As she studied the objectives for various grade levels, Ellsberry discovered that what she learned in her college creative writing classes, and utilized in writing her stories, dove tailed beautifully with the writing and reading TEKS objectives.

"It all just clicked into place and I had my first program ready to go," Ellsberry said. "I tell my audiences that what they are learning in their classroom today about reading and writing, could help them become authors tomorrow."

Ellsberry now has five titles and does school visit programs for Pre-K through grades five.

"We look at things like the five senses for the youngest students and then move into character, characterization, and character traits for the next grades," said Ellsberry.

She utilizes these important aspects of reading and writing by bringing the stories to life with fun skits, storytelling, puppet-theater, and improvisational writing of mystery stories that the students co-create with her.

“I love audience participation and interaction because it makes them part of the experience,” says Ellsberry.

Five basic programs in her repertory are adapted depending on grade level, school needs, and schedule.

“I usually present in assemblies with one or two grade levels, and in many schools, I am presenting in their cafeteria, also known as, the cafeterium. So I am working around that lunch schedule of getting the programs done before and after the cafeteria is needed. It’s all about adapting to their needs.”

Ellsberry says that from that she stays motivated because the children inspire her with their enthusiasm.

“Seeing them get excited about the programs and the stories is wonderful,” said Ellsberry. “Knowing that my books are a small part of their childhood is a true blessing.”

Ellsberry makes sure that each campus that schedules her to visit receives a set of books for their library.

“I think it’s important for them to be able to read the stories after I have been there. All my books have author made Accelerated Reader or Reading Counts tests and this also helps motivate the students to read.”



Ellsberry reads for children at a local book library.

In the past decade Ellsberry has visited over 275 schools, mainly in the Northeast Texas area. It is estimated that over 150,000 students have seen one of her programs. Her honors include finalist for the Children’s Book Award at the North Texas book festival, two Dove Award seals, one for her Thanksgiving Book, and one for her Time Capsule book. Ellsberry’s first book about the State Fair is now in its fourth printing.

For more information about Ellsberry’s journey, go to www.gospanties.com or find the Spaniel Family on Facebook. All of her titles can be purchased at The Ship Shop in Athens.

