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# STUDENTS BRING HISTORY TO LIFE

Students portray historical figures for program

**By Dan Scanlan, My Mandarin Sun**

Maya Angelou read some poetry, while Albert Einstein had some flyaway hair. George Washington's hair was a bit askew, too.

That didn't matter to the students at Mandarin's Center Academy, as history came alive in their third-through 12th-grade classrooms Feb. 1.

They were "living" that history as re-creations of famous people like Pocahontas, George Washington Carver and Benjamin Franklin.

Center Academy is a private school at 3571 Cardinal Point Drive that offers a more personalized education for students with learning problems. There are three other campuses in Jacksonville and 11 elsewhere in the country, plus two charter schools. The idea for the history program came from the director of its academy in Tampa, and was a fun way to learn, said academy director Stephanie Thompson.

And the students went to great lengths to get it right.

"Here is an emotionally safe environment where kids who have learning problems and haven't found success in other environments can go to those lengths," she said. "It's a joyous occasion for us, and an opportunity for us to feel pride in our students' accomplishments and share the pride they feel."

Fifty-five students participated in the school's first History Alive project. Their job: choose a historical figure from a list, research him or her, then recreate part of that person's life in words and costume. The performance was part of their grade.

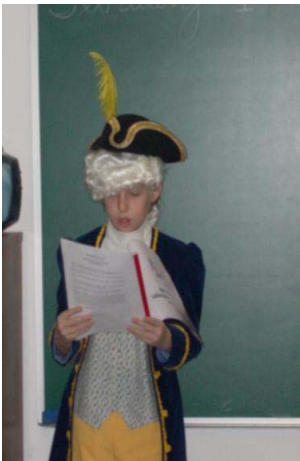
For example, eighth-grader Ka'juuan Fisher was Benjamin Franklin during a five-minute presentation on the life of the inventor, writer, publisher and politician, with familiar vest and long white hair.

Elena Chorpening recreated Eleanor Roosevelt, down to the white gloves and formal dress. Rock 'n' roller Chuck Berry was represented by Elizabeth Bowlus, while Olympic great Jessie Owens (Jared Whaley) was there with track suit and gold medal. And Sarah Buser was jazz great Ella Fitzgerald.

In the end, teachers said the project made history more real - just ask cotton gin inventor Eli Whitney, baseball legend Babe Ruth or Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, because they were there, too.



Center Academy student, Arielle Sheffield presented the life of poet Maya Angelou.



Not your usual Center Academy class: Jordan Salisbury (George Washington), Daniel Tennant (Albert Einstein) and Sarah Buser (Ella Fitzgerald) listen to a lesson on History Alive.