

NORTHEAST TARRANT

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Photos by RICKY MOON/Special Contributor

Author Chris Espinosa tells students in Patty Willingham's fourth-grade class at Carroll Elementary about writing catchy introductions. Mr. Espinosa, known as Uncle Chris, is taking his writing workshop to schoolchildren across Texas, and teachers say they're seeing results.

A way with words, and kids

Big personality helps Keller author connect with students in writing workshops

By VERONICA VILLEGAS
Special Contributor

Writer's block is something author Chris Espinosa knows something about.

It is one of the many challenges any writer — including schoolchildren just learning the art — must overcome in order to tell a great story that will capture a reader's interest.

The 38-year-old Keller resident, affectionately known as Uncle Chris, has a few tricks of the trade culled over years of storytelling that he is now taking on the road to share with schoolchildren all over Texas.

"It's not something that is difficult, but I am able to engage kids and teach them something," he said. "It's my calling."

Students at Old Union and Carroll elementary schools in Southlake have been learning how to use those tricks of the trade during a four-part writing workshop presented by Uncle Chris.

The information isn't new, but teachers said it's all in the presentation.

"He has an instant connection with the kids," said Patty Willing-



ham, the fourth-grade language arts teacher at Carroll Elementary. "You can just see by watching him how he captures their attention, and they're learning and probably don't even realize it."

During each of the 45-minute lessons, students learn how to develop ideas, the importance and use of vivid verbs, how to "hook" their reader, and how to write a

great conclusion — all while enjoying Uncle Chris' effervescent personality that has him hopping from one side of the room to the other and engaging children along the way.

"I thought he was just going to talk and make us write, but it's been a lot of fun," said Carroll Elementary fourth-grader Matt Landers. "He's really funny, and I've learned a lot of things. I think

my writing's getting better already."

And that's exactly what teachers want to hear.

Mrs. Willingham said she hopes that Uncle Chris will have the same effect on her fourth-graders as he did on those at Old Union Elementary last year.

Teachers at Old Union have credited Mr. Espinosa with improving their fourth-grade TAKS

Fourth-grader Matt Landers listens to Mr. Espinosa's presentation. "I thought he was just going to talk and make us write, but it's been a lot of fun," Matt said. "He's really funny, and I've learned a lot of things. I think my writing's getting better already."

writing scores last year.

Mrs. Willingham said even though her students haven't completed the writing workshop yet, she can already see the effect Uncle Chris has had on them.

"I can tell that their writing has improved just in words they are choosing," she said.

Mr. Espinosa said he is just glad he can help budding writers reach their potential. He said he remembers how hard it was as a young student to even know where to start with a writing assignment. He said he believes his writing technique called The Story Window works because it is so simple.

"There's really nothing complicated about it," he said. "The Story Window is just an idea starter and a way to organize thoughts. If I can fill it up with ideas, then I can make the connections and create the story. These kids can do it — they just have to use their imagination."

Carroll Elementary fourth-grader Kylie Mason agrees.

"I loved to write before, but he made it better," she said. "He puts things in a way kids understand."

Veronica Villegas is a Fort Worth freelance writer.