



MLK for a day

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By Hillary Rhodes

Seventeen Davenport kindergartners divided themselves across color lines Friday to show what American life was like in the days before civil rights. Eight white children sat stage right and nine children of color sat stage left during one segment of the schoolwide commemoration of Martin Luther King Jr. at Lincoln Fundamental School. Kindergarten teacher Mary Anna Parris, who organized the celebration, sought to give students and audience members more than just another history lesson. She wanted to transport them back to a time when racial segregation was the norm.

"I needed to give them some kind of a way they could get into this," said Parris, who first used the exercise in her classroom after one of her students laid down on the carpet and almost fell asleep while Parris was reading from a book about King



Larry Fisher/QUAD-CITY TIMES
Fifth-graders Trevante Terrell, 10, and Jolene Bergthold, 10, portray Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King during a play Friday at Lincoln School in Davenport.

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"What was life like before Dr. King?" Parris said she asked herself. "The biggest thing was that blacks and whites could not go to the same school. So I thought, 'OK, let's divide them and show them what that would look like.'"

Her classroom experiment had the effect she wanted. "Their mouths kind of opened up," she said. "Their eyes opened wide and they were kind of surprised. It caught their attention." So she incorporated it

into the larger commemorative event that involved other classes in songs, skits and readings from King's famous "I Have a Dream" speech, which he delivered in 1963.

Fifth-grader Trevante Terrell, 10, who played King, delivered his lines without using a microphone, insisting on doing it exactly the way King had. Parris bought him a suit to wear for the day. He will wear to church on Sunday and then return it to the school for the student who portrays King next year to wear.

There was lots of sniffing from the audience .

"I cried all the way through," said Bea Reuther, the grandmother of kindergartner Alissa Caldwell. "That's how it used to be," Reuther said, referring to the racial segregation demonstrated by Parris' class. "It's so nice to not be that way."

Five-year-old Alissa has found a hero in King.

"I like when he shouted out his voice that 'I have a dream,' " said the girl, who is biracial and already talking about marrying her white friend Matthew and running away with him to Walt Disney World.

"If kids keep learning this in school, Dr. King's dream will be a reality," said a teary-eyed Monique Martin, the mother of second-grader Devin Martin, 8. Martin said that because she is white and Devin's father is black, it is especially important for her son to attend school in an accepting environment.

"Our motto at home is: We all bleed the same, we all breathe the same air and we all wear the same shoes," Martin said.

Fifty-five percent of Lincoln's pupils are considered minority students and 45 percent are white.

Friday's celebration was part of Lincoln's greater mission to teach equality and racial tolerance. Students there call themselves "PeaceBuilders" and recite the Peace-Building Pledge, which concludes, "I will build peace at home, at school and in my community each day."

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