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First flight production shows students the “Wright stuff”

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MOUNT AIRY -- J.J. Jones Elementary School hosted “Wrights of Passage” in the auditorium Thursday to commentate North Carolina’s centennial celebration of humankind’s first successful flight in a powered aircraft by the Wright brother’s on Dec. 17, 1903.

Jones students, along with children from four county schools, watched the live theatrical production in the Jones’ auditorium during regular school hours.

Travis Reeves, principal of Jones, said, “This is a community school, and my goal is to encompass as many different sides of the community including the parental, civic and school support we receive within the community. When you look at the building that’s what it’s all about.

“We have invited Cedar Ridge Elementary, Flat Rock Elementary, Franklin Elementary and White Plains Elementary to help fund the event. The play cost \$800, but we split that five ways. It only cost each school \$150 to attend. This made it really affordable,” he said.

The “Wrights of Passage,” a 40-minute dramatic production sponsored by the NCAE, taught students about the history of aviation. Actors, David zum Brunnen as Wilbur Wright and Stephen Wall as his younger brother Orville Wright, assemble a model of the Wright Flyer on stage during the performance.

The play uses humor to inform the student audience about how flight originated-- drawing back from the historical ideologies of flight from Egyptian and Roman mythological practices and beliefs.

The 9:30 a.m. performance was seen by the four area schools. Jones students watched the 12:45 p.m. performance.

Ten teacher and student volunteers were asked to read off historical facts from note cards during the performance. The children sat attentively during the production as they watched the actors break into song as they constructed the Wright Plane from rods and canvas on stage.

After the performance, questions from students were taken. During the morning production, students asked as many questions about the actors and production

itself as they did about the Wright brothers.

Zum Brunnen's wife, Serena Ebhardt, wrote and directed the play for EbzB Productions.

"We jumped on the chance to do this show because of the opportunity to go throughout the state.

"The most rewarding work is to be working with students in schools, because I believe it is a way to enhance the curriculum. Science, language arts and world studies are addressed in the show.

"By bringing performing arts into schools, they can get something they might not be able to get in the classroom," zum Brunnen said.

Howard Fox, public relations director, said the schools only pay the expenses of the travel and an actors' fee. The NCAE pays for the remaining costs of the production.

"The NCAE brings programs into the schools that are relevant to what the students are learning," said Fox.