

Long Ago, Far Away, *And In The Here And Now*

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Once upon a time (quite recently, in fact), in a land not that far away (the east campus of Independent Day School-Corbett Campus / IDS-CC), and without the help of a fairy godmother, the first and second grade teachers suddenly appeared before their classes, wearing long flowing gowns and colorful, ethnic costumes from foreign countries—certainly more uniquely dressed than usual!

Seated upstairs in the beautiful Grand Room that overlooks the east campus, the first and second grade Brilliant Bugs, Cool Cats and Mighty Monkeys sat attentively focused on their teachers.

Multi-age Primary Cool Cat teacher, Debi Brockmeyer, dressed in an elegant red gown, began telling students the Irish version of the tale of *Cinderella*; but before she could get to the end of the story, first grade teacher Teresa Waterman appeared, in a rural country costume and launched into a different Irish version of the same fairy tale, called *Becken the Cinder Lad*.

Multi-age Primary Brilliant Bug teacher Sammi Borosh, elegantly dressed as well, then came forward, cutting in with an English version of the tale, using a culturally correct name that caught the students by surprise—“Princess Furball.”

As each teacher made their way into the storytelling area, and told their tale from the perspective of other cultures, each one of them was comically, yet insistently conveying, “*I’m the one who has the story right.*”

The students sat attentively, on task—listening, observing and, no doubt, forming opinions about the purpose of seeing so many different versions of *Cinderella*!

Dressed as a commoner, second grade Mighty Monkey teacher Ande Felder had begun a Polish version, *Raisel’s Riddle*, combining elements from the classic tale with ideas from the *Talmud*, when in stepped colorfully costumed Cool Cat teacher Andria Petty, to tell her story as one of *Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters* from the African version of *Cinderella*.

And just when it seemed there couldn’t possibly be any more Cinderellas, teacher Jill Pomet, also dressed for the occasion, began portraying the *Rough-Faced Girl* derived from the Native American version.

The laughter in the room provided evidence that the students were both watching *and* thinking.

Mrs. Borosh explained, “In the case of *Cinderella*, it’s one story that you can look at through many different cultural lenses and give students the opportunity to be open to different points of view.”

In a reflective moment, students were asked to identify the common story elements. They noted that the stories all had sisters in them, as well as royalty, and someone getting married. They also observed that these stories ended with people getting their wishes granted!

Developing auditory skills from listening to stories with which they are already familiar, and told from the main character’s point of view, students begin to recognize how the beliefs and values from different cultures vary. And when given the opportunity to express themselves, students continued the long standing practice of developing their ability to ask coherent questions.

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Ms. Brockmeyer noted, “Students could see how a culture expresses its values and traditions through folklore. Understanding the similarities and differences of the numerous versions of *Cinderella* helps students understand and appreciate their own culture and be open to the perspectives and traditions of others.”

In the days that followed, the classes read many different *Cinderella* stories and other fairy tales from around the world. They made charts and Venn diagrams comparing all of the *Cinderellas*. They saw the challenges, felt the injustices, and asked questions about the different techniques used in problem-solving.

“The story outcomes may have been the same, but students saw many culturally different routes to the conclusion,” Mrs. Felder said. “And they noticed what made all of these stories fairy tales—magic!”

That was all the inspiration that was needed to create their very own fairy tale. The students’ original works, with all the elements of a fairy tale—a character with a problem, several attempts at solving the problem, and, of course, a little bit of the students’ own magic, will be keyboarded and then published.

And so, in their own lives, in their imaginations, and in stories that begin with *Once upon a time*, students learn that accepting differences and developing empathy and respect towards others will hopefully contribute to more opportunities for *happily ever after*.

Founded in 1968, Independent Day School-Corbett Campus is a fully accredited, independent school located on Orange Grove Drive in northwest Hillsborough County. The school serves over 500 students in PreK3 through 8th grade and offers the International Baccalaureate program of study for all middle school students. IDS-CC balances a nurturing learning environment with high standards and high expectations.

Read our book: ***It's All About Kids: Every Child Deserves A Teacher Of The Year***

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