

# Lessons learned from Nipmuc storyteller

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FITCHBURG -- Soon-to-be first-grader Phoenix Morissette clasped her hands to her mouth as Native American storyteller Larry Spotted Crow Mann delivered the news.

"Something crazy happened boys and girls," he told the students gathered in a Crocker Elementary School classroom Thursday. "You wouldn't believe it."

The two horns being held to her head -- part of an impromptu enactment of a traditional Nipmuc story -- were there to stay.

"Those antlers stuck to her head and they began to grow and grow and grow," Mann said.

Though the antlers were eventually removed by the same jealous boy who stuck them to her head, the two small bumps on the girl's head never went away, as the Nipmuc tale goes.

"Once you do something to hurt somebody you can't take it back," Mann said.

The story and lesson was part of a presentation on Nipmuc culture led by Mann during Journeys Summer Camp, a Title 1 funded program for Fitchburg students entering kindergarten through fourth grade.

Mann, a member of the Nipmuc tribe of central Massachusetts and Webster resident, travels around the state sharing his culture through storytelling and drum performances.

"It's very important to teach the history and culture of this area," he said. "It's important for the people who live here today to remember and understand the indigenous people and understand what the land means."

Storytelling also fits into the goals of the summer camp, which aims to improve the 78 student's reading and writing skills according to Eva Kelly, director of enrollment and family outreach at Fitchburg Schools.

"The storyteller brings it to life," she said. "It's an authentic experience to support what they've read, heard read to them and written about all week."

The presentation took place on the second day of the four week farming-themed camp alongside other activities such as an art project using vegetables as stamps, a visit from TheraPAWS animals and a presentation explaining composting.

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