

## COAL CREEK ELEMENTARY

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*John Kiemele, Ed.D., Principal*

*October 18, 2011*

*Dear Parents:*

*Recently, students in Grades one through five saw a presentation of Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night" in our Gym. This activity was provided to the children as part of our school's ongoing efforts to create a safe climate at Coal Creek; our goal was to deliver a message about anti-bullying strategies to the students in a unique manner. I was very pleased to see the following article published in The Denver Post this past weekend. We were one of only 25 schools across the state to offer this dramatization to date to our kids, and our three fifth grade classrooms benefited from follow-up workshops offered by the actors. The article highlights the purpose of this new twist to an old story; I hope you find it interesting.*

*Warmly,*

*John*

### **Shakespeare Gives the Latest Strategy in Anti-bullying in Schools**

**By Colleen O'Connor**

*The Denver Post*

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Shakespeare is the latest strategy in combating bullying in America's schools, but the idea was not an immediate hit.

"When we first told people, they said, 'What? That's weird. How do those two things go together?' " said Jane Grady, assistant director for the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence at the University of Colorado.

But after a month of performances of "Twelfth Night" in 25 schools across Colorado, which were followed by workshops in which kids talked about the character Malvolio and other bullies in the play, the results surprised the experts.

The plan was to do eight shows a week throughout October, which is National Bullying Prevention Month. Bookings were filled before the first rehearsal, so a fifth week was added.

"It's pretty amazing," Grady said. "Hopefully it will take off, because this is really a better way to get the message out."

In Colorado, anti-bullying education in schools has helped decrease the problem, according to a 2009 Colorado Trust survey, which was part of a \$9 million Bullying Prevention Initiative.

The idea that 17th-century Shakespeare plays can be relevant to the contemporary bullying problem came from the *Colorado Shakespeare Festival*.

Associate producing director Timothy Orr and education associate Amanda Giguere had been brainstorming about the fall school tour of "Twelfth Night," a romantic comedy in which a servant named Maria decides to get back at Malvolio, a dour, mean-spirited steward, by forging a love letter from him to his employer, Lady Olivia.

"The idea hit me that in 'Twelfth Night,' everyone mistreats each other," Orr said. "It's like a practical joke gone too far, and I thought, 'Let's talk about bullying.' "

They approached the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, just a few blocks down the street in Boulder.

It was just random outreach — they had no idea that their Boulder neighbor is a national leader on anti-bullying research or that its director, Delbert Elliott, served as science editor for the U.S. surgeon general's report on youth violence.

### **Study guides, workshops**

"They loved the idea," Orr said. "When we pitched the play, we talked about the phony letter forged for Malvolio. They said, 'That's just like cyberbullying on Facebook!' "

Elliott applied for a grant to fund the project, and his team worked closely with the Colorado Shakespeare Festival to develop study guides and workshops that feature the latest research on effective anti-bullying practices from the CU center.

"It's a very unique and creative way to present the information to students," said Jeanne McDonald, assistant director at the CU Office for University Outreach, which also collaborated on the project. "After the play, they're able to do workshops with the actors, do movement and act things out, and talk out different scenarios."

During workshops that follow the play, actors engage students in discussions to help them analyze how Malvolio's story might reflect the same patterns of bullying they see in their own lives.

Also, the students discuss concepts such as imbalance of power, read short bits of the script and move around the room in role-playing exercises. Performers coach them to act out the different feelings they saw in characters in the play, from low self-worth to high self-worth.

"Research (in this area) by itself is very dry," she said. "It's not just the kids that tune it out; it's probably all of us. Seeing the play, it's raucous in some ways, funny and sad. It draws people in a whole lot better than a presentation" (on the topic).

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*I hope that you found this information to be helpful. You can find out more about **The Twelfth Night** either online or through your local public library. I encourage you to follow up with your student by discussing the notion "no one likes a bully," and then help your child to make connections between the characters in this play and anti-bullying. Enjoy! JK*