



The School District of Philadelphia

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February 4, 2011

Promise Academies Host African American Literary Pros

Four nationally recognized authors and illustrators offer life and career advice

PHILADELPHIA, PA – Five of the School District of Philadelphia’s Promise Academies hosted a selection of some of the nation’s most prominent African American authors and illustrators on Thursday, February 3, and Friday, February 4, 2011. Spanning a wide range of genres, the visiting literary professionals spoke to students about the importance of developing their talents, finding positive role models and offered tips for improving their writing skills.

Ethel Allen Elementary, University City High School, Potter-Thomas Elementary, Paul L. Dunbar Elementary and Vaux High School were selected as host sites for cartoonist/author Jerry Craft, author L. Devine, author Derrick Barnes and author Dinah Johnson.

Divine, who started writing her “Drama High” Series as a graduate student at UCLA while also working as a teacher in the Los Angeles Unified School District, spoke to students at University City High School and said the reason she began a career as a writer was to get her students reading. “There were no other books out there to relate to what young people were going through,” she said. She also told students that each of them have a “voice.” “When your intention is positive, your product will be positive,” she said.

Students participated in discussions and Q & A’s as well as a drawing and writing workshop with cartoonist/author Jerry Craft.

Author Derrick Barnes spoke at Paul L. Dunbar Elementary and Vaux High School and told the students that he began his career writing a column for his college newspaper. “I realized I could have a voice and use my talents,” he said. Barnes told students he writes his books with African American protagonists because of a lack of positive African American role models in today’s culture. “Nobody talks about being a man,” he said. He also stressed the need for Black men to become more responsible as fathers, husbands and mentors.

The selected authors and illustrators appeared at the District's Promise Academies in anticipation of the 19th Annual African American Children's Book Fair scheduled to take place this Saturday, February 5, 2011 from 1-3 p.m. at the Community College of Philadelphia.

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