



Photo Provided by Shenandoah University

Deborah Wiles (left) and Harry Bliss are two of the 10 authors that will take part in the 2006 Children's Literature Conference at Shenandoah University. The weeklong event begins Monday.

'Capture Children's Hearts'

10 Authors Speak at Literature Conference

By VAL VAN METER

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Ten popular authors of children's books will tell what they do and how they do it at the 21st annual Children's Literature Conference at Shenandoah University next week.

"It's filled to capacity, and we have a waiting list," said Karen Huff, professor of education and coordinator of the elementary education program, who helps organize the event.

With the theme "The Power of the Story," each morning, the conference presents award-winning authors and illustrators whose works have "captured children's hearts."

In the afternoon, participants can choose small group sessions, classes, or roundtable discussions on instructional techniques.

Participants can also earn graduate credits in writing, literature or education.

The speakers for the conference include Avi, Doreen Rappaport, Bryan Collier, Candace Fleming, James Howe, Rafe Martin, Brian Selznick, Sarah Weeks, Deborah Wiles, and Harry Bliss.

Bliss, who has illustrated several best-selling and award-winning children's books, including "Diary of a Worm" and "Diary of a Spider," will also be at the Shenandoah Valley Discovery Museum in Winchester from 7 to 8:30 p.m. Wednesday to meet young fans of his art.

Huff said she asked him to do something with area children when she learned he would be in Winchester a day early for his Thursday talk.

"The kids will love him. He has that kind

of personality," she said.

To carry out the theme, "The Power of the Story," Huff said authors and illustrators were chosen for the strength of the tales they tell.

Huff has plenty of chances to read and evaluate children's books, as part of her job teaching children's literature. She also works as a tutor for special classes at Virginia Avenue-Charlotte DeHart Elementary in Winchester.

Illustrator Harry Bliss invites the public to come and meet him from 7 to 8:30 p.m. Wednesday at the Shenandoah Valley Discovery Museum in Winchester.

"It's harder to write for children," than for adults, Huff said, quoting no less an authority that E. B. White, author of the best-selling "Charlotte's Web."

"You have to be very clear with your words," she said, "and the story has to be exciting enough to hold the attention of a child."

Children are not as patient as adults, Huff noted and, if you don't engage them right way, they'll abandon

the story.

Huff noted the conference has grown in size in its two decades.

At the first conference in 1986, when SU's Board of Trustees' member Nancy Larrick was one of the featured speakers, 85 people attending.

Two hundred people are expected to fill Henkel Hall this year for the weeklong event.

While no more participants can be accommodated this year, Huff said anyone interested in the conference can send name and address to khuff@su.edu to be contacted for the 2007 conference.