

Stories that Soar, Mission Manor Elementary

Stories that Soar!'s Sharon O'Brien stood atop the Mission Manor Elementary School stage Wednesday proudly looking out at a packed cafeteria of young children. "Who here wrote a story?" she shouted to the assembled mass of students. Immediately almost half of the packed cafeteria leapt to their feet, and quickly the gaps filled until almost every student was standing, and applauding, to say that yes, they too were part of the work that had been done. "We had over 600 stories come in," Ms. O'Brien continued, to cheers and applause of the students and teachers, "and we needed every single one for the Magic Box to work!"

The children recognize the Magic Box. Weeks before, O'Brien and *Stories that Soar!* had come to the school and requested that the kids write stories to 'feed' it, and assured them that with enough stories something magical could happen. So the children excitedly wrote; individually and collectively, stories and songs. 600 entries later *Stories that Soar!* was back, this time with professional performers from the Stories that Soar Ensemble, to act out the children's stories.

During the performance the stories come at a manic pace, referencing each other, interweaved with an ongoing story about a ball that bounces across the world. The show features more than 20 of the stories written by the children authors. They ranged from the silly – a girl who wished herself into becoming a dog and causes trouble, to the serious – a family crossing the border in Mexico who are attacked by a Chupacabra and picked up by the border patrol.

Stories that Soar is a member of the **Literacy for Life Coalition, a beneficiary of proceeds from the Tucson Festival of Books.** The goal of the organization is to create 100% literacy through 100% community involvement and the coalition includes literacy providers such as *Stories that Soar*, as well as educators, businesses, local government, and foundations.

"Children think about a lot of things. They are aware of some of the more serious aspects of life and often write to the Magic Box as a way of making sense of the world around them," O'Brien said. "We believe it is important for children to have a space to explore serious subjects and to be honored as complex human beings- no matter what their age."

After the performance, the children authors are invited onstage and recognized for their work. One can only imagine the confidence these kids gain looking out over an audience of their peers knowing that they have played an integral part in such a well-received performance.

To learn more about *Stories that Soar!* please visit their website at storiesthatsoar.org. The next theater production will be held Thursday February 18, 8:30 a.m., at Homer Davis Elementary.