

Math plays for laughs

January 26, 2007
Janice De Jesus
STAFF WRITER



Peals of children's laughter resounded throughout the small theater as the host took center stage and danced to the thumping sound of upbeat music.

Host Ben Bendor entertained the young audience with funny faces and mime to get their funny bones warmed up.

Just like in a game show, Bendor selected a few children to come on stage amid cheers from their classmates. He handed out a large card with a number to each student. With the numbers in random order, he asked children with the odd numbers to step to one side and those with even numbers to step to another side.



Then he gave the children 10 seconds to arrange themselves from the smallest to the largest number they held. As the music played, giggling kids scrambled about as they tried to put their numbers in order.

For two days, students from Sun Terrace Elementary School in Concord, Fair Oaks Elementary in Pleasant Hill, Las Juntas Elementary in Martinez, Bel Air and Rio Vista elementary schools in Bay Point received tickets to see "Arithmetickles," interactive math shows appropriate to the students' grade levels. The shows featured comedy and storytelling activities to show youngsters how to incorporate math into their daily lives.

"The students were thrilled about today's performance," said Terri O'Connor, second-grade teacher at Fair Oaks. "It was also a good experience for the teachers to watch the students answer math questions in front of others."

"Arithmetickles" performances are part of the **Diablo Regional Arts Association's (DRAA)** Arts Access Program, which brings low-income students to the Leshner Center for the Arts. Bringing children to see "Arithmetickles" was made possible by a grant from Wells Fargo Bank.

Bendor showed that math problems can be funny by incorporating comedy, theatrical effects and audience participation in games that tested the students' skills, such as telling time, adding and subtracting.

Some math problems could be solved creatively by putting students in everyday scenarios, such as, "If you left your house at 6 a.m. and arrived at your destination two hours later, what time did you arrive?" Another problem might be "If Mr. Green took his whole family out to dinner and it cost \$10 a plate for each adult and half-price for the kids, how much did he pay for four adults and four kids?"

"Math isn't only what you do in your classroom, it's much more than that," Bendor said. "We use math in our everyday life."

Peggy White, DRAA executive director, said there is a need for curriculum-based programming at the Leshner Center for the Arts, and the DRAA hopes to offer more in the future.

"It was amazing to see the kids' faces light up when they arrived at the Leshner Center for the Arts, and heartwarming to watch them during the performance of 'Arithmetickles' because they were having so much fun and learning," White said.

For the students, attending the shows wasn't just about learning math. "Coming to the theater is a unique opportunity for these students since our school doesn't have a lot of money to provide these types of outings," O'Connor said. "We are happy to have been provided such a fun and educational experience."