

Teddy bears sit in on the lessons

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EASTHAMPTON

The crayons were moving, the children were smiling and the teddy bears were plentiful as Susan Pouliot began teaching her first grade class at Center Elementary School one day last week.

A giant piece of paper, draped over an easel, read, "Dear Mr. Orlando, Thank you so much for letting us bring our teddy bears to school. Love, Nelson, Audrey, Daphne, Tobias, Kunden, Kyle, Omar, Clara, Emma, Katherine, Armin, Kassidy, Lillian, Corey, Jennifer and Mohamed." Next to the names, a teddy bear was drawn in green marker. Next to the "love" there was a heart, for this was a day filled with love.

Children sat at six little round tables, sharing the boxes of crayons in the center. Some of the table tops had teddy bears laying on them, while other bears sat on children's laps. A dessert tray with 20 brown paw-print cupcakes sat on a windowsill. The cupcakes were a treat to be enjoyed later, along with the end-of-the-day Teddy Bear Parade with Center and Pepin kindergarten and first-grade students.

Next, the children gathered in a circle on the carpet.

"What do you notice about the bears?" Pouliot asked the children, most of whom immediately raised their hands high.

"They're all different," Kassidy Marowitz said.

"They're all different sizes," Armin Hodziac said.

"Everyone has a bear," Pouliot said. "It's something that makes us all the same. Even though all of our bears are different."

The children then moved onto their morning greeting. Clara Downey, who sat next to Pouliot, shyly crouched over her bear, and began to sway from side to side after Pouliot wished her good morning. Downey smiled wide, revealing her missing two front teeth.

Students raised their hands to talk about their bears.

Clara brought in her two-year-old fluffy, white bear, who was wearing a pink T-shirt with a red heart on it. "I like to sleep with her," she said.

Audrey Bronson, who was wearing pink sneakers, brought in Peter the Panda, a birthday present from her grandma and grandpa.

Nelson Alicea brought in Ring Bear. "He's special because he's cuddly and my mom got him at their wedding," Alicea said.

Pouliot asked the students to stand up from their circle and sit in rows before the easel. She turned the giant paper with the thank-you note to Orlando over the easel and revealed a new piece of paper that read "Welcome Teddy Bears! Today is Teddy Bear Day! Emma is our helper. You will have your picture taken this morning. Let's have a 'beary good day.' Love, Mrs. Pouliot."

Emma Dragon stood up and drew the yellow-tipped star of the wooden wand across the words as the class read them aloud.

Oct. 11 was National Take Your Teddy Bear to School Day, and bears were tied in with all aspects of the daily curriculum, Pouliot said. Students read, spoke and wrote about bears; sorted and counted bears; and talked about the different kinds of bears.

"They're not supposed to bring toys to school, so this is a big deal," Pouliot said.

A beary good day it was.

Game night

At Pepin Elementary School tonight at 6:30, students will bring their families back to school to play all sorts of games. In the past, game nights were so well-attended that they had to be split into two evenings, according to Kara McElhone, Title I Parent Liaison for Easthampton Public Schools. The first session was held Wednesday at Maple School; the second session is tonight.

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