

Pupils draw inspiration from illustrator and writer

Kids' book creator gives presentation on her colorful work

Mountain View School

Address: Cloverhill Drive, Mount Olive

Grades: K-5

Principal: Susan Dinges

BY GIOVANNA FABIANO
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

With a little bit of tracing paper, a couple of silly jokes and a wild imagination, children's book author Katie Davis proved that, a feisty, childlike spirit can go a long way — especially when trying to command the attention of a group of rowdy fifth-graders.

By the end of her presentation last week, Davis, author of four Harcourt books — "Who Hops?" "Hate to Go to Bed!" "Who Hoots?" and "Scared Silly" — had students at Mount Olive's Mountain View School roaring with laughter.

Wearing a bright-colored vest, jeans and converse sneakers, the author, who hails from Bedford Hills, N.Y., resembled the lively cartoon characters depicted in her books. She broke the ice by showing the children the mud that had splattered onto her jeans when she slipped and fell that morning.

"I usually try to look a little more cleaned up when I visit schools, but boy, what a day I had ... I got lost, I got locked out and then I fell in the mud," Davis said.

After a slide presentation with pictures of Davis as a child, teen-



PHOTOS BY ANGELA MENEZINE STAR-LEDGER

Children's author Katie Davis coaches Gina Carmine, 10, on how to make an angry face during a writing exercise at the Mountain View School.

ager and adult with her husband and two children, she showed the children images from her books from the production phase to the completed version.

She encouraged them to read as often as possible and told them about "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory," the book by Roald Dahl that changed her life.

"In the fourth grade, kids hated me and I have no idea why ... No one was named Katie and they thought I was just an oddball," said Davis. "But we read 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory' that year and it saved my life ... I just got lost in the story."

The students sat in awe as Davis traced a picture of her two children — 8-year-old Benny and 6-year-old Ruby, who were each wearing vampire fangs — as part of a drawing exercise. In the end, a loose sketch with a marker created two funny-looking cartoon characters in less than a minute.

"Art is messy ... it's kind of like you have to keep coming up with great ideas, but it's the greatest job in the world. ... I definitely am aware of how lucky I am," Davis said.

Giovanna Fabiano works in the Morris Bureau. She may be reached at gfabiano@starledger.com or (973) 539-7910.

