

Posted by Ben Hanstein • October 25, 2011 • <http://tinyurl.com/dailybulldog>

Authors bring rain forest, rock 'n' roll and love of books to local schools



"How did we move from the rain forest to rocking out?" Jon Voelkel asks. Through the "power of books," is Pamela Voelkel's response.

FARMINGTON - Poisonous snakes, fried mealworms and rock-and-roll; what's not to like?

Jon and Pamela Voelkel, author duo of the young adult fantasy series "The Jaguar Stones," have been speaking to elementary and middle school students across the county this week. Having visited Spruce Mountain Middle School in Jay earlier in the day, the Voelkels brought their high-energy show to Cascade Brook School Tuesday morning, for students from across the school district. The Mt. Blue Middle School was next on the agenda, with MSAD 58 schools scheduled for visits Wednesday.

"Middle school kids are a great audience," Jon Voelkel said. "They really come with you."

The first two books of the series, which draw heavily upon Maya culture and mythology, are already available, with another due out next year and a fourth after that. The fast-paced Middleworld follows young Max, dragged from his comfortable life in Boston to accompany his parents on a Central American archaeological dig, and his adventures after they mysteriously vanish. The sequel, The End of the World Club, continues



The students' rain forest imagination exercise becomes surprisingly realistic with a spritz from an atomizer.

the story of Max and Lola, a Mayan companion from the first book, as they travel from Central America to Spain.

The Voelkels tour schools to discuss their book, but long ago realized the importance of not reading direct passages from their work. Instead, they talk about their own adventures in Central American, where Jon Voelkel grew up and their family regularly vacations. The discussion enlivens and, perhaps more impressively, quiets a gymnasium packed with fifth and sixth graders; topics from Mayan ruins to Indiana Jones to eating bugs are discussed.



Emily Nicholoff was at DDG Booksellers Tuesday afternoon to meet the Voelkels, with Eisa the Iguana.

"You need the gross stuff," Jon Voelkel joked. "We try to bury them in the world of the books, the sights and sounds." Teachers are invited to try fried mealworms, a popular event which prompted chants of "eat it! eat it!" from students, and the Voelkels provide evidence that debunks the 2012 "end of the world" theory, supposedly based on a Mayan calendar. Howler monkey cries lead into a demonstration of the proper method to rock out (Max, the protagonist of The Jaguar Stones series, disguises himself as a rock musician at one point). Students seemed particularly impressed by some of the Voelkels' videos: brief but hilarious interviews with archaeologists and a culinary tour of rain forest insect life.



Pamela and Jon Voelkel stand with DDG owner Kenny Brechner, who helped arrange the school visits, and the Mayan king costume.

They stressed the importance of the research that goes into the books, of getting out and experiencing life first hand, rather than reading someone else's account. "You cannot believe everything you read on the internet," Pamela Voelkel told the students.

The events are arranged through Egmont USA, the publisher of The Jaguar Stones series, and Devaney Doak & Garrett Booksellers owner Kenny Brechner.

DEVANEY DOAK & GARRETT BOOKSELLERS

Posted by Kenny Brechner, November 1st, 2011, <http://tinyurl.com/DDGVoelkels>

Last Tuesday and Wednesday I went on a barnstorming tour around Franklin County with the amazing Jon and Pamela Voelkel, authors of a book series called *The Jaguar Stones*. The tour captivated student audiences in five school visits that involved nine area schools, and even one in-store event for a cherry on the top.



The Voelkels' brilliantly choreographed and performed multimedia presentation combines wild fun and compelling educational material which, as you can see, were a giant hit everywhere we went.



These dynamic events were the culmination of a diverse group effort from the commitment of the Voelkels' publisher, Egmont, the authors' themselves, the organizational support of nine school Principals, the extra effort of teachers and librarians, who incorporated Mayan themes and book talks into their classrooms, and to DDG's role as a central organizer, bookseller and tour guide.

This moving and wonderful experience really made me reflect on the importance of a community approach to literacy, involving authors, educators, librarians and booksellers, in a time where market and media sources are encouraging passive, stay-on-your-sofa consumerism, and physically isolated media experiences. "Books are power," as Pamela Voelkel stressed at the end of their presentation, especially when they are shared and integrated into the fabric of our lives. That's why we love what we do at DDG and are so appreciative of your loyalty and business.