

Author visits Redlands schools, bookstore

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REDLANDS - A best-selling fiction writer visited Redlands schools the same day Cope Middle School held a fundraiser for its library.

Frank Beddor, author of the "Looking Glass Wars" books and graphic novels, spoke at Cope Elementary and Redlands East Valley High School and held a book signing Friday at Barnes & Noble.

A percentage of Friday's sales to Cope supporters will benefit the school's library.

"There's always so many new fiction titles every year, so there's always a need to keep that collection current," said Redlands Unified School district middle school librarian Joan McCall, who attended the Cope assembly Friday morning. She said students will want to read Beddor's third book, "ArchEnemy," which came out October.

"There are other books the kids are anxious to have, so it's great we can have funding for that," said McCall, who splits time between the district's middle schools.

Cope Principal Kate Pearne said the school does have a library budget, but it is not enough to cover its needs.

"You can never have enough books - the one thing we push is reading for our kids," she said.

Beddor gave his own reading pitch to Cope sixth-graders, beginning the assembly with the story of how he became inspired to put his own twist on "Alice and Wonderland."

While in London for a movie premiere, Beddor saw some handpainted playing cards on display at the British Museum. The pictures, which reminded him of scenes from Lewis Carroll's "Alice in Wonderland," "had this whole Goth vibe going on," he said.

He worked on "The Looking Glass Wars" for five years, publishing it in 2006. "When you're creating a world you have to understand the logic that makes the backstory," he told the Cope students.

Besides the books, Beddor now has graphic novels based on the character "Hatter Madigan," an online game and is holding casting calls for a movie. He chose four students and two teachers to read character parts at the assembly. He had a girl and a boy read the parts of Alyss Heart and her love interest, Dodge, which drew enthusiastic responses from the audience. Beddor asked students to choose teachers to play two villains.

Beddor also showed trailers and artwork for his books.

"There's different ways to be artistic - you can be an artist and tell a story, you can be an actor and tell a story," he said to students.

He told them he would put a Wonderland stamp in the books he signed at Barnes & Noble.

It was his first signing at the Redlands store, according to community relations manager Laurie Aldern.

"Many of the students preordered their books, so they get front-of-the-line status," she said.

"There has been a lot of buzz about it and people have been calling to see what time they should be here. We have a lot of employees who read his books and they're excited he's coming here to sign."

The Cope choir sang before the signing, teachers did activities and readings and parents served as gift wrappers.

Aldern said Barnes & Noble allows each school to hold up to two book fair fundraisers a year.

"I've seen libraries come in with their full year's budget of \$500 and that's sad," she said. "That's not enough to stock a library."

McCall said Cope's PTA also raises money for the school's library. Beddor regularly gives school presentations about his "Looking Glass" stories. He spoke to Cope seventh- and eighth-graders last year and visited McKinley Elementary School in October.