

Young readers embrace kindness

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Pre-kindergarten students at Gocio Elementary take part in the 'Bucket Fillers' reading initiative under the direction of Embracing Our Differences. *Courtesy/Embracing Our Differences*

Embracing Our Differences recently coordinated a one-day virtual readalong with 'Bucket Fillers' books involving 8,200 students in 455 pre-kindergarten through third-grade classes in Sarasota and Manatee Counties.

The 'Bucket Fillers' series, written by nationally acclaimed author and Venice resident Carol McCloud, teach children the value of kindness. The initiative was conducted in partnership with Sarasota and Manatee County schools, the Early Learning Coalitions of Sarasota and Manatee County, and the Manatee Education Foundation.

'A 'bucket filler' is somebody who spontaneously shares compliments and spreads positive vibes without being asked,' EOD education director Ben Jewell-Plocher said. 'Carol McCloud's 'Bucket Fillers' series of children's books spells it out delightfully. Carol asks children to imagine that everyone possesses an invisible bucket they can fill up with kindness, support and love. It's a beautiful idea for children – and I think it works for adults, too.'

The initiative was offered in November via interactive, prerecorded webisodes featuring readalongs with the Asolo Rep, CreArte Latino Cultural Center, Venice Theatre, and Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe and activities with McCloud. Each participating student and teacher received their own copy of one of McCloud's books.

Since her first book, 'Have You Filled a Bucket Today? A Guide to Daily Happiness for Kids,' was published in 2006, McCloud has inspired millions of people of all ages. Her nine children's books have sold 3 million copies worldwide and are used in schools around the world.

'My bucket is bursting with joy that my books will be read and gifted to so many thousands of children in Sarasota and Manatee counties,' McCloud said. 'This past year, we witnessed a world that is not always kind. We saw and felt the pain caused by hatred and division. I am grateful to Embracing our Differences for making it possible for children to learn how easy and rewarding it is to be kind to others by being a bucket filler. I'm so proud to work with all of EOD's volunteers and educators who are dedicated to creating a kinder and more inclusive world.'

Stressing kindness, forgiveness As an author, speaker, and early childhood specialist, McCloud said her goal is to help all ages and occupations grow in kindness, self-control, and forgiveness. McCloud said the initiative was a bucket-filler for her. For more information, visit bucketfillers101.com .

'Carol joined all participating classrooms on Nov. 16 through pre-recorded introductions and bite-size activities included in the readalong webisodes,' Jewell-Plocher said. 'We're touched by her generosity and desire to reach as many area students as possible and grateful for her donation of a large portion of the cost of books, helping us reach thousands more children this year.'

Since 2004, EOD's outdoor art exhibit, celebrating the theme of 'enriching lives through diversity,' showcases the art and words of thousands of artists and writers from around the world, including hundreds of area-based students and educators.

Embracing Our Differences' annual outdoor exhibits are the heart of a year-round program of activities designed to use art as a catalyst to promote awareness and diversity. The 2022 exhibit will run Jan. 15 through April 10 at Bayfront Park in downtown Sarasota.

Embracing Our Differences is a not-for-profit organization that capitalizes on the transformational power of art and education. For more information, call 941-404-5710 or visit embracingourdifferences.org .