

# “I do not like green eggs and ham,” these students didn’t say

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Dr. Washington Hill hands out books to first grade students at Booker Elementary on Friday. Dr. Hill read the popular Dr. Seuss book, “Green Eggs and Ham” a class of students as part of Embracing Our Differences’ Seuss Day. [Herald-Tribune staff photo / Mike Lang]

“Embracing Dr. Seuss’ Differences Day” involved more than 6,600 elementary school students in Sarasota and Manatee counties.

SARASOTA — The first-grade students in Rene Maher’s class at Emma E. Booker Elementary School didn’t just hear about Dr. Seuss’ green eggs and ham Friday morning, they actually ate them.

As the students sat, legs crisscrossed, on the colorful carpet, they slowly chewed bits of bright green eggs and ham.

“How does it taste?” asked local obstetrician Washington Hill, who volunteered to read the childhood classic to the students as part of Embracing Our Differences and the Suncoast Campaign for Grade-Level Reading’s fifth annual “Embracing Dr. Seuss’ Differences Day.” What they didn’t know was that he had also prepared a special meal for them.

One of the students immediately scrunched up his nose. “They’re cold,” he wailed.

Seven-year-old Aubrey Saunders wasn’t so easily deterred. “They’re amazing,” she said, grinning. Saunders had connected with the book’s message of trying something before deciding definitively that one didn’t like it.

Many of the students in Maher’s advanced class were avid readers, including 7-year-old Tarico Thompson, whose eyes lit up when he was asked about his favorite books.

“I like all kinds, I like chapter books,” he said. “I just get to read the words in my head, and nobody can hear them.”

Six-year-old Jovon Moody practically had “Green Eggs and Ham” memorized. He said he already had a copy at home.

The students were about to add more books to their collection, when Hill passed out the books the children would get to keep, “Character Counts! A Roar of Respect.” The book was donated by both organizations.

The books and the event are part of an extended effort by both nonprofits to teach children about reading, diversity, bullying and respect. The event touched more than 6,600 elementary school students in Sarasota and Manatee counties, hitting nearly 400 classrooms.