

Chalk and Talk

by Kathleen Cox

Children spellbound by visiting storytellers

Pupils at Swanmore primary school listened with fascination to the age-old art of the storyteller, with tales of ghostly encounters and country life.

His rivetting story of *The Hollow Hill* challenged the imagination with what might happen if the boundary line was crossed. Accompanying his words with the haunting lilt of wooden pipes, there was at one point a distinct resemblance to Hamelin's Pied Piper!

Storyteller Michael O'Leary's visit to Swanmore was part of an inter-cultural programme, promoting English skills in focused listening, with various follow-up activities.

Setting the scene for mystic tales and folk legends has for him become a way of life.

Visiting schools throughout the country, he carries a wooden chest containing a star-studded story mat, various wooden pipes and simple artefacts.

Michael (46) says: "The spoken word came long before the written word. Children need an understanding of oral and listening skills. It helps them develop other literacy skills."

Local legends, sometimes embellished, are gathered in the course of his travels, either through hearsay or books. Getting the level right for the age of his audience is no problem for the former junior and infant teacher.

Throughout the week-long programme, pupils developed an awareness of other cultures and customs, a sense of life in the past and people's beliefs.

They dressed in African national clothing while listening to music and stories by Odion Ogogo, listened and danced to Indian music

co-ordinator of the school's religious education curriculum, organised the programme of events. She believes that in addition to the English content, aspects of geography, history, religious education and music have given the week a cross-curricular element, as well as promoting pupils' spiritual and cultural development.

She said: "It was a lot of hard work but I feel it has been a success. The children have enjoyed themselves and have learned a lot about how others live."



Words and music...A few notes from the Northumbrian Pipes provide musical back-up to folk legends, as told and played by Michael O'Leary on his visit to Swanmore primary school

You could
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