

## Duo enchants youngsters as they weave "world tales"

Musician, storyteller combine talents in unique road show

It was a knee-slapping, hand-clapping, foot-tapping morning at Coastal Ridge Elementary School last Thursday. World Tales, a unique duo who combine movement, music and storytelling, performed before the entire school at a special assembly that transformed the gymnasium into a magical, faraway place.

Randy Armstrong, a talented musician who plays 25 instruments, and Genevieve Aichele, a master storyteller and movement artist, call themselves World Tales and recreate stories from different countries around the world. They helped one another enchant the audience through lyrical words and rhythmic instruments, the latter of which were used by Armstrong to create a soundscape that enhanced both the atmosphere of the stories and the movements of his partner. The partners are members of the *New Hampshire Touring Artists* program and operate out of the New Hampshire Theatre Project in Portsmouth.

Students were treated to the unusual sounds of an authentic Lakota Sioux (Plains Indians from North America) courting flute during *The First Flute*. Sounds of owls, rustling leaves, twisting tree branches and the whistling wind were all

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illustrated realistically through voice and music. Handcrafted masks were also used as props by Aichele as she tiptoed into the audience, between rows of seated students, dancing and swaying to the beat of the music.

*Fatima and Mujuru*, an original story by Armstrong set in the African country of Zimbabwe, introduced a variety of instruments, including the traditional African mbira. A mbira's structure is modeled after a bow and arrow with a painted gourd attached near the bottom to amplify the rhythmic sounds. Throughout the story, with the accompaniment of the instrument, students mimicked the calls of monkeys, crows and ravens and



STUDENTS AT COASTAL RIDGE Elementary School were captivated by World Tales performers Randy Armstrong and Genevieve Aichele (behind the mask) last week as they spun fascinating stories through a marriage of movement, music and master storytelling. Children traveled with the performers to such faraway places as Zimbabwe and Ecuador while they grooved to the rhythms of Armstrong's unusual musical instruments. Photo by Cheryl Moore-Smith

were event prompted to stand up and "walk" through the forest.

Even more audience participation was invited during *Anansi's Hat-Shaking Dance*, a tale about that infamous trickster, Anansi the Spider, from the Ashanti tribe of Ghana, a character the students already seemed to know. To the background beat of a traditional African drum, the kids grooved to a fun call and response "rap" written by Aichele: "What

kind of man do you think I am with my mother-in-law just buried?" It actually made sense within the context of the story.

Another story, *The Search for the Magic Lake*, took audience members back to the ancient Incan settlements in Ecuador. The song that opened the story, set to a traditional Spanish rhythm, was written by Armstrong and Aichele, and sung in Spanish, so students got a flavor for the language.

The students were noticeably excited and the faculty couldn't help but keep smiling as Armstrong and Aichele moved through the four intriguing stories adapted from traditional, mythical folktales. Principal Jane Stephenson said she was pleased to see the students so excited about the performance. The duo will repeat the tales tomorrow for students at Village Elementary School.