

Honest Abe visits area schools

By Craig Purcell

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In this election year some presidential candidates have questioned other candidates' honesty, and some have told tall tales to increase their political standing in hopes of becoming the 45th president of the United States.

There was none of that at Cascade Elementary School Feb. 18. That's when a guest artist stood tall in his portrayal of America's 16th and tallest president, Abraham Lincoln, a leader who was nicknamed "Honest Abe."

The tall, slender man with the beard and stovepipe hat was actor Danny Russel, who toured area schools as part of the Dubuque Arts Council's Artists-In-Residence program.

In front of the entire student body, Russel walked the gymnasium floor, detailing Lincoln's life and accomplishments, from his log cabin birthplace in Kentucky to his ascent to the White House in Washington D.C.

Russel wore period clothing, save for the portable microphone he spoke through, and his presentation didn't gloss over Lincoln's many failures in business and life before he was elected president. Russel's delivery was humorous at times and emotional at others: Lincoln lost his mother at a young age, and later, a sister.

"I learned that his mom died, and that he was born in Kentucky," said second-grader Addyson Ambrosy.

Brady Schlemme and Bradley Dolphin, also second graders, chimed in together, saying, "He gave freedom to the slaves."

Many students laughed during different parts of Russel's portrayal. Others assured "Lincoln" that he was not ugly, when Russel's presentation mentioned what some in Lincoln's day said about his appearance.



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Danny Russel, portraying Abraham Lincoln, tells students from Cascade Elementary School about the 16th president Feb. 18. Russel visited the school as part of the Dubuque Arts Council's Artists-In-Residence program.

Russel stopped short of Lincoln's demise at the Ford Theater but shared portions of Lincoln's "A House Divided," "Second Inaugural" and "Gettysburg Address" speeches.

Russel has been portraying Lincoln for 15 years. "Lincoln is probably the best example of America," Russel said. "He came from poverty and had less than 300 days of formal education. We're still trying to figure out how he did his job magnificently well, with no training for it. He was the right person for the right time in history."