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**THE MISSISSAUGA NEWS**  
**Students get 'ism' one song at a time**

**CHRIS CLAY**  
 Jun 8, 2005

If you want to get a message across to children, speak to them in a language they understand.

For singer-songwriter Gregg Lawless, that dialect is music.

"If you can't sell kids on an idea, pick up a guitar and sing it to them," said Lawless, with a chuckle.

For the past five months, Lawless has been teaching Grade 5 students from seven Mississauga schools the fundamentals of songwriting. In three separate workshops, Lawless went to the schools and taught the children how to write music and lyrics and how to sing.

At the outset of the program, students pick an "ism" issue, such as racism or sexism, and explore it through song.

In addition to enlightening students about such complex moral issues as discrimination, the project gives the children a great deal of self-confidence, says Lawless.

"The kids really come out of their shells through this," said Lawless, who debuted his program with the Peel District Public School Board this year after a successful stint in York Region.

"In school, students have a teacher in front telling them what to do. With this, once the students learn (the basics), they do everything themselves. Rather than using (an instructor) as a crutch, the kids take ownership of the song."

The months of hard work culminated with a concert on June 1 at the Living Arts Centre's Hammerson Hall. At the show, Lawless and his back-up band, which includes Juno Award-winning saxophonist Sean O'Connor, pianist Steve Klodt, bassist Russ Boswell and drummer Mark Kelso, performed on-stage as the children sang.

Mary Ann Fratia, the public board co-ordinator responsible for arts, health and physical education of Peel students, said the program encourages literacy, an aspect of education on which the board places a premium.

"This is just one, albeit creative, way to explore literacy," said Fratia. "We want the child who picks up a guitar before a book to eventually get back to reading. But, non-traditional literacy is something we're exploring."

Reading a list of responses she received from students involved in the program, Fratia noted positive comments such as, "I was proud to be able to write a song" and "It was the best experience of my life."

Buoyed by the remarks, Fratia said she hopes to turn the program into an annual collaboration.

The schools who performed at the show included Castlebridge, Corsair, Dixie, Dunrankin Drive, Huntington Ridge, Kindree and Neil C. Matheson.

THE MISSISSAUGA NEWS



Photo by Ashlea Wessel

Musician Gregg Lawless performed songs with students from seven different Mississauga public schools as part of the Literacy and Values Through Music Gala Showcase and Art Exhibition last week.

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