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Students find inspiration in author's story

By JENN WIANT - jwiant@nwherald.com
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LAKE IN THE HILLS – When he starts a new book, Peter Lerangis might spend a whole day writing and have only three sentences to show for it, he said.

But when he gets further into a story, the words begin to flow and take on a life of their own. Sometimes, he'll type all night, he said.

Lerangis is the author of more than 150 books for children and teens, including books from the Baby-Sitter's Club series and the Hardy Boys series, the Spy X mystery series, the Watchers series, the Drama Club series, and historical fiction such as "Smiler's Bones."

His most recent novel, "The Sword Thief," is the third book in The 39 Clues series. In the 10-book series, Amy and Dan Cahill follow clues to find 39 pieces that hold the key to a powerful serum.

In a humorous and engaging presentation Friday, Lerangis told students and teachers at Conley Elementary School in Algonquin and Lake in the Hills Elementary School about how he became a writer.

He showed pictures of himself growing up and told the students about his experience traveling to Russia with former first lady Laura Bush and authors R.L. Stine and Marc Brown for the first Russian Book Fair.

He asked the teachers to cover their ears while he told fourth- and fifth-graders that he had written his first story in his math book while he was supposed to be doing math problems in elementary school.

"I like how he told how he got to become a writer," said Seth Janschek, 10, a student at Lake in the Hills Elementary.

"He didn't first expect to be a writer, but he ended up being a writer, and now he's written so many books."

Anthony Tsakiridis, 11, and Lerangis chatted about their mutual Greek heritage while Lerangis signed a copy of "The Sword Thief" after his presentation.

"He's been to Greece a lot, and he is Greek, like me," Tsakiridis said. "He even wrote in my book [the Greek word for hello]."

Coleton Hebert, 9, said he had read all three of the 39 Clues books and loved them.

"You feel like you're actually inside of the book," Hebert said while he waited to have his book signed. "I can't wait until the next one."

The next book in the series will be available in June, according to www.the39clues.com.

Lerangis will finish his monthlong book tour in Philadelphia next week after a trip to visit his sons in college in Ohio and a brief stay at home in New York.



Lauren M. Anderson - landerson@nwherald.com **Coleton Herbert, 9, listens intently to author Peter Lerangis speak during a presentation to students at Lake in the Hills Elementary School on April 3, 2009. Throughout the presentation Herbert held tightly to his copy of The 39 Clues: The Sword Thief written by Lerangis. (Lauren M. Anderson ())**

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For Lerangis, a marathon runner and Broadway performer, it's easy to stay energized giving the same presentation over and over again to children.

"It's hard not to keep up the energy. You look in their faces and they just give it to you," he said. "It just automatically gets me excited."

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