



Saskatoon students horse around for literacy

Three schools get visit from program that encourages reading

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Drivers meandering past Westmount Community School may have noticed a thousand pound guest helping himself to their luscious grass on Thursday morning.

Sox, an Arabian horse, visited three schools across the city today as part of a project to increase students' literacy.

Gary Millar, head of the Arabian Horse Reading

Literacy Project, said the bond between children and

horses is unmistakable. "When kids are with horses, the brain changes in size and shape and we get to see

all these miracles that happen," Millar said. Sox visits

schools allowing children to meet him, pet him and

learn about him.

"We leave huge big banner posters, pictures of the horse, with each classroom and we challenge the kids to practice reading."

Along with the banners the project leaves behind books that Millar encourages students to read out loud to Sox. He said the horse provides a non-judgemental audience that doesn't mind if kids stutter or stumble over words.

"This is a very vital part of a whole area of learning called equine assisted learning. We're pioneering that area big-time."

Millar said the horses get just as involved as the students.

"It takes a lot of courage for a small child to come up and stand in front of this horse and hold the book out as if the horse is reading it, too."

The project is based out of Edmonton. They meet with up to 14 schools a year where students are allowed to meet with the horse and learn a little about them. Millar said a month later the students will visit the farm and read to different horses.

"It's interesting because they'll first start off very quiet and tentative and as they go through the second and third activity they're just orating and it's really quite special to see."

Leslie Basky, teacher librarian at Westmount school, said the project is a great hands-on motivator for students.

"When you've got something real life, like a horse, there is more of a connection there, it's more hands on and students are able to experience and understand as they read. It's that whole connection that makes it come together and makes reading work," Basky said.

Sox greeted each student gently and many commented on his bright white "socks". He will perform with around 120 other horses this weekend at Prairieland Park Ag Centre as part of the Arabian Horse Showcase. The showcase runs Saturday at 7p.m. and is free for all ages.

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