

September 30, 2001

THE SUN (Part of the Virginian Pilot)

Program helps students learn to deal with bullies

BY SUSIE STOUGHTON
THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

Merrill McCubbin -- "Mr. MerMan" of MerMan Productions -- combined comedy and common sense to arm elementary students for the bully battle.

"The word for today is 'believe,'" McCubbin told students at Booker T. Washington Elementary School last week. "As long as you believe, anything is possible."

Believing in yourself is the first step, said McCubbin, who takes his Norfolk-based show to schools across the nation.

For years, he's performed his Comedy and Illusion Show at night.

Then, about a year ago, he got a request from some school officials who were preparing a safety program. They asked if he could do a show on bullies.

He put together the program geared toward helping young people cope with problems in interacting, he said after the assembly.

He calls his daytime production Education That Entertains.

"It's been phenomenal," he said.

The way students feel

bully," McCubbin said.

Hands flew into the air when McCubbin asked how many had an older brother or sister.

"Do they ever tease you or pick on you?" he asked.

Arms waved wildly as students shouted affirmatively.

"They're bullies," McCubbin screamed. Nearly as many hands shot toward the ceiling when he asked how many have a younger brother or sister?

"How many of you have bullied them?" he asked.

Hands hesitated, as giggles erupted in the audience.

"Tell the truth!" McCubbin said.

Had they ever cut in line, or let somebody cut in line? McCubbin asked, strutting across the stage, pretending to break in front of someone, Students howled.

"You're a bully!" McCubbin said.

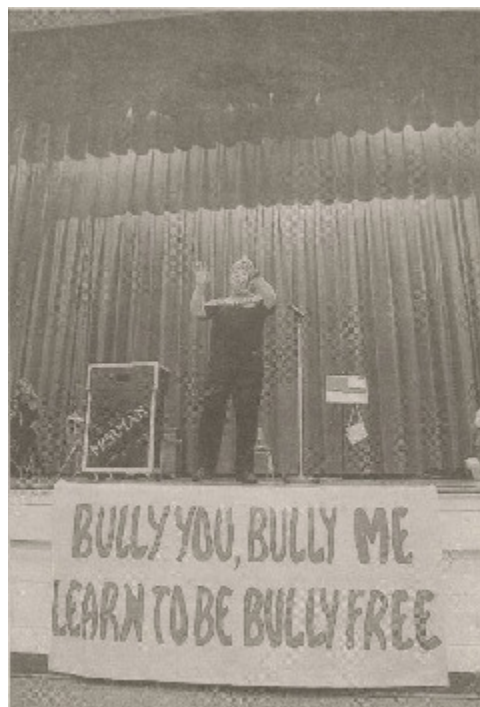
McCubbin told the students to remember four key words:

- Know. "Know how bullies work, know how bullies think," McCubbin said. "Know yourself, believe in yourself."
- Go. "If you see a problem, don't go see what's going on," he said. "Go away from it."
- Tell. "Tell somebody," McCubbin said, "and not just if you're a victim or a witness.. If you're a bully, if you think you have a problem, now is the time to fix it." Ninety-five percent of bullies behave that way because somebody has been a bully to them, he said.
- Yell. If you are being bullied, yell, McCubbin said. That can startle



MICHAEL KESTNER PHOIOS / THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

Santita Mizell, left, and Bhanne Miller look on in amazement at Booker T. Washington Elementary School during a program on how to handle bullying.



about themselves affects their behavior and their ability to succeed, McCubbin said. "Low self-esteem is where all the problems are coming from," he said.

Students, who had been recruited earlier, performed a skit, portraying a girl who grabbed a lollipop from another girl on a playground, while a boy watched.

"Each and every one of us, at one time or another, has been a witness, a victim and a

the bully, allowing you a split second to get away, he said. And someone can hear you and come and help.

After the program, McCubbin stood at the auditorium door, shaking hands as the students left, trying once more to pump them up.

"Thanks for coming, " McCubbin said. "See you later."

*Reach Susie Stoughton at 222-5555
sstought@pilotonline.com*

Merrill McCubbin, of MerMan productions, addresses children at Booker T. Washington Elementary School during a presentation on bullying at school.