



CHIEFTAIN PHOTOS/CHRIS MCLEAN

U.S. Poet Laureate Juan Felipe Herrera helps Park View Elementary School third-graders focus on their feelings using art and music during his visit to the school on Wednesday.

EDUCATION

‘You all have beautiful voices’

Poet Laureate Juan Felipe Herrera inspires third-graders

BY JON POMPIA
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

For third-grade art students at Park View Elementary School, a visit from a genuine American treasure was very emotional.

In all the right ways. Juan Felipe Herrera, the country’s Poet Laureate since 2015, also is a gifted performer, teacher and artist. Tuesday, the animated Californian drew from his equally colorful grab bag in an effort to bring out the “beautiful voices” of the bright-eyed children before him.

“We are just starting into our new unit, and it is about emotions and feelings, how we react to things,” art teacher Jason Trigo told his charges. “And we also are talking about how things feel, like when we rub our hand on the table.”

With that mission in



Students react to a presentation by Herrera during his presentation titled ‘Feeling and the Feelings of Art.’

mind, Herrera’s presentation was as much performance art as it was education — a lively potpourri that blended physical movements, bilingual

instruction, goofy humor, singing and scribbling into one big fun lesson on the power of imagining.

“Everyone say: ‘We are excellent, beautiful,

intelligent human beings. Beautiful boys and beautiful girls ... super-intelligent students,’” Herrera said, the excited youngsters echoing his

Watch the video»
WWW.CHIEFTAIN.COM

More on the web»
CHIEFTAIN.COM/NEWS/EDUCATION

beat poet-like flow.

“And I’m here to let you know that you have a beautiful voice. And it’s very important that we use those voices.”

To kick-start the process, Herrera led the youngsters in spelling out “California” and “Colorado,” accented by hand and arm gestures, and broadened vocabularies by having the children repeat the Spanish equivalent of common words.

The centerpiece of Herrera’s emotional exercise involved the creation of a piece of free-form scribble art using only the wrists, elbows, shoulders and torsos.

SEE VOICES, 9A

VOICES/from page 8A

“You can go in circles, too. Go all across the paper but just use your wrist,” Herrera encouraged. “Then we’ll use our elbows, our excellent elbows, strong shoulders and then our toro, toro, toro, toro torso.”

Once the body-driven abstract pieces were complete, Herrera offered another, more thought-provoking challenge: To discover something in the scribbles, as well as an emotion.

“How many see a face here?” Herrera asked. “What kind of emotion does a face have? Is it a

happy face? Is it a mysterious face? Is it a scary face?

“Is it a spaghetti face? Is it a hungry face? Oh, it’s happy spaghetti.”

An Italian staple, by the way, that popped up in more than one creation.

“This one has a sweaty spaghetti stomach,” Herrera said, holding up another Rorschach-ish depiction as laughter broke out. “Everyone say, ‘Sweaty, spaghetti stomach.’”

“Now concentrate: How does everyone feel when your stomach is sweaty and full of spaghetti? How

do you feel?”

“Fat!”

“Full!”

“Tired!”

“Heavy!”

“And all those are emotions,” Herrera explained.

A master of humorous improvisation, Herrera proved himself to be as good with children as he is with the prose that garnered him worldwide acclaim.

“What I liked best is him teaching us Spanish, how to say the words in Spanish,” said Ariel Hoggan. “I don’t know Spanish but I learned some today.

“And he’s famous, too . . . for teaching us something cool.”

“My favorite part was when we scribbled,” added Ethan Osorio. “Then we had to look for things in the picture. I found a dog, a bone, a bed and a happy face in mine.”

Herrera, in town for speaking engagements at both local colleges, was invited to Park View through a partnership with Kadoya Art Gallery owner Gregory Howell, who is coordinating arts-related guest speakers at the school.

jpompia@chieftain.com