

# Portland author pays visit to school

*Children's author/educator Chris Kurtz inspires young learners*

By Ellarry Prentice

Children's author Chris Kurtz, who spent his childhood in Ethiopia and now lives in Portland, Ore., visited Paynesville Area Elementary School last week, giving a series of presentations geared to the young learners.

A third grade teacher in Portland, Kurtz has authored four children's books. His latest book, "The Adventures of a South Pole Pig," was released in January.

PAES was one of three elementary schools Kurtz visited during his visit to Minnesota last week. He also gave presentations at the Willmar and New London-Spicer elementary schools. He has a niece who teaches in Willmar, which prompted his visit to the region, he said.

Kurtz has traveled extensively, doing author visits at schools and conferences in Oregon, Michigan, Kansas, Washington, Idaho, New Jersey, Illinois, Florida, Texas, and Louisiana. Additionally, he has visited schools in Ethiopia and presented multiple times at the International Reading Association Conference.

Kurtz's morning presentations at PAES on Thursday, Feb. 28, caused laughter among the young students and were intended to help them reflect, dream, and imagine themselves in a pair of author's boots, he explained in an informational handout.

Using a PowerPoint presentation, pictures from his well-traveled life, singing, and stories, Kurtz explained what an author is, how they work, where they find details and ideas for their books, and why reading is important in his session with students in grades K-2

Kurtz brought humor and a more sophisticated message to his session with students in grades 3-5. Using specific examples from his own childhood in Ethiopia and his adult life – from pets to friends to surviving a large family where



Photos by Ellarry Prentice

**Children's author Chris Kurtz of Portland, Ore., visited Paynesville last week, giving presentations to K-5 students. Above, Kurtz speaks to third graders in the PAES library.**

he was the only boy – he showed how writers draw ideas and details from memories, observation, and research and how they craft their stories and revise them.

The son of missionaries, Kurtz and his five sisters spent several years living in Ethiopia in a remote village.

Kurtz co-wrote two of his four children's books with his sister and fellow author, Jane Kurtz. Combined, the two siblings have published 33 books and have 25 years of classroom experience.

Both Chris and Jane are active volunteers with Ethiopia Reads, a Minneapolis-

based non-profit organization that builds schools, teaches educators, plants children's libraries, and puts pencils and paintbrushes in the hands of children in the struggling African country to help empower and strengthen communities. The organization believes that by providing quality schools, access to books, and learning initiatives that engage both the creative and logical mind that it will lead to a more resourceful generation of leaders in Ethiopia, according to information from Kurtz.

By sharing his experience, Kurtz hopes to inspire students to think of the small and big ways that we can all make a difference somewhere, he said.

In his new book, "The Adventures of a South Pole Pig," recommended for ages nine and up, Flora the pig was born for adventure. "If it's unexplored and needs to get dug up, call me. I'm your pig," she says. The day Flora spots a team of sled dogs is the day she sets her heart on becoming a sled pig. Before she knows it, she's on board a ship to Antarctica for the most exhilarating – and dangerous – adventure of her life.

Kurtz's other chapter book, "The Pup Who Cried Wolf," is about the journey of Lobo, a tiny Chihuahua with a big dream – to join a wolf pack.

His picture books are "Water Hole Waiting" and "Only a Pigeon."



**Author Chris Kurtz – who recently released his fourth children's book, "The Adventures of a South Pole Pig" – visited young learners at Paynesville Area Elementary School last week, including this first grade class. A son of missionaries, Kurtz lived in Ethiopia as a child.**