

— THE — PRINCETON SUN

www.theprincetonsun.com

APRIL 25-MAY 1, 2012



JULIE STIPE/The Princeton Sun

On a visit to Princeton Academy of the Sacred Heart on April 11, children's book author Chris Grabenstein gave an interactive presentation describing how he writes a story.

Student rallies for author presentation

By JULIE STIPE
The Princeton Sun

Fourth-grader Andrew Tokarski, a student at Princeton Academy of the Sacred Heart and fan of author Chris Grabenstein, has found persistence pays off.

Tokarski discovered Grabenstein's books when he visited a children's book fair at the Princeton Public Library last September.

"I just picked up one of his

books and started reading and got hooked," Tokarski said.

Tokarski became such a fan he decided Grabenstein needed to pay a visit to his school, and took his cause to Princeton Academy librarian Ellen Dowling.

"I went up to Mrs. Dowling and said 'I really like this author called Chris Grabenstein and his books are really fun to read,'" said Tokarski.

His efforts didn't pay off right away, and Tokarski ended up

going to Dowling "four or five times" with his request to bring Grabenstein to the school.

"I brought her the bookmarks and then I brought her the books," Tokarski said.

Eventually, Tokarski's persistence got the school's attention, and Princeton Academy brought Grabenstein to the school not just for a visit, but for the launch of his new children's book "Riley Mack and the Other Known Troublemakers."

Why does Tokarski like Grabenstein's books so much?

"I like to call them scary in a funny way," Tokarski said.

Tokarski likes his books to be either funny or scary or both.

"I also read comedy books and Goosebumps books," Tokarski said. Grabenstein's books, he said, are both funny and frightening, but not too much of either.

And this is exactly Graben-

please see AUTHOR, page 7

Tr
ta
p

At
ton T
April
a rec
Boro
cept a
cy. Th
proce
sonne
reduc
elimi
tions,
conso
eranc

A f
subcc
task f
hout
in fo
mana
The g
hout
Town
port e
proce
ees, c
balan
ough
that
able a
igatic
mora
Th
a sel
posed
repre

stein's goal for the books. "They're kind of like a roller-coaster ride," Grabenstein said. "You scream and you laugh. You don't want people screaming for the whole book."

Scary may describe Grabenstein's "Haunted Mystery" series, but his new book, though still funny, is more about adventurous shenanigans than bloodcurdling suspense.

"I thought it would be fun to do a comic caper for kids," Grabenstein said.

Grabenstein said he finds inspiration for his children's books in all kinds of places, often while he is on a walk in New York City with his dog, Fred.

In fact, this is how "Riley Mack" came about.

"I was walking behind these kids in New York City, where I live," Grabenstein said. "And they were wearing these huge, heavy backpacks. So I thought, what if instead of books they had electronic spy gear in the backpacks?"

This was the inspiration for Grabenstein's latest book, which he said is like "Mission Impossible" for kids.

"I've created a bunch of kids who kind of mirror the 'Mission Impossible' team," he said. "Each one has these skills. It's like 'Ocean's 11' for 11-year-olds."

It's almost possible to predict whether kids will love Grabenstein's books by simply watching him give a presentation. Standing in front of a crowd of students at Princeton Academy, Grabenstein managed to keep both the adults and the children in the room mesmerized with funny voices and dramatic facial expressions as he came up with a story on the spot using prompts given by students.

This touch of theatricality shouldn't be surprising, as Grabenstein spent a number of years when he was younger performing with improvisational comedy troupes in New York City, performing at times with young actors Bruce Willis and Robin Williams.

Grabenstein has also written for Jim Henson's "Little Muppet Monsters" show on television and spent many years writing television and radio commercials.

All his years of writing for various audiences seem to have given Grabenstein an exceptionally good handle on what kids want to read and what keeps them interested. And as a children's book author, Grabenstein realizes what he writes and how he writes it can be a huge influence on the kids who read his books.

"There's a power behind whatever you do for kids," Grabenstein said.