

Duo does its best to get students hooked on music

Acoustic artists Trout Fishing in America conduct song-writing workshops in seven Berks County schools.
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It doesn't take a Mariah Carey or Kanye West to write a clever song, dozens of Berks County students are finding out this week with some help from the group Trout Fishing in America. The Grammy-nominated acoustic duo is giving song-writing workshops at seven Berks schools, finishing its three-day tour of the county today.

The idea is to show students they can produce some neat results by using their imaginations and working together, group members Keith Grimwood and Ezra Idlet said. On Thursday, a brainstorming session among Oley Valley Middle School students brought song ideas ranging from Kentucky Fried Chicken to untied shoes before the group decided to write about spontaneous combustion.

The students swapped ideas for 40 minutes to write the lyrics, which Grimwood and Idlet matched with the right guitar and bass notes. In the end they had created a song about a slothful man and an angry woman whose vices cause them to suddenly explode. One verse goes: "She goes to anger management every day at 1 o'clock. She never combs her hair and the madness never stops. She wants to smash her spaz computer. She takes a breath and counts to 10. But today she won't be angry. She won't be anything." The couch potato and type-A woman die when they suddenly explode, making the song somewhat of a cautionary tale. The sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders — who are part of the school's XEL Gifted Program — loved the exercise. "Once we started giving ideas it was kind of like a train," seventh-grader Lauren Brumbach said. "It just kept going." That is one of the benefits of teaching the arts in school, the Trout Fishing members agreed. "Once their creative juices get flowing, they don't want to stop," Grimwood said.

"Arts education is so crucial to helping kids learn about problem solving and cooperation," Idlet said. "Those things aren't as quantifiable as a score on a math test, but they are just as much a part of intelligence." That is why the duo, which has been together for 30 years, spends so much of its time working with youth, they said.

The program, sponsored by Kutztown University and the Reading Musical Foundation, tied in well with the poetry curriculum the Oley students are taking, said Mary Elizabeth Short, who teaches gifted classes and advanced English. "It's wonderful for students to exercise their minds, to learn about self expression, even as an outlet for issues they have," she said. "Some kids don't realize they are creative until they get an opportunity like this to see something from beginning to end." After singing their song along with Trout Fishing in America, the students were impressed with their work. "The song sounded pretty professional," Brumbach said.

Reading Eagle: Tim Leedy

Keith Grimwood, top, a member of the musical duo Trout Fishing in America, takes suggestions for lyrics from students at the Oley Valley Middle School. The duo, including Ezra Idlet, bottom, play a song the way students wrote it.

