

# Fairview Park students celebrate family history with ‘Tell Me Your Story’

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Fairview Park’s Lewis F. Mayer Middle School celebrated its “Tell Me Your Story: Family Traditions” initiative with an Oct. 3 program held in the high school gym. (Photo courtesy of Gayle Dill)

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By [John Benson, special to cleveland.com](#)

FAIRVIEW PARK, Ohio -- One way to keep students engaged with history is having them study their own.

That was the idea behind Lewis F. Mayer Middle School’s “Tell Me Your Story: Family Traditions” initiative, which students in grades six through eight showed off Oct. 3 at a program held in the high school gym.

“The students who participated in ‘Tell Me Your Story’ were thrilled to learn from their families and then share what they had learned,” Fairview High School/Lewis F. Mayer Middle School Certified Media Specialist Gayle Dill said. “Hopefully, the students were just kind of realizing that we all come from different places if we go back far enough in our family history.”

“The idea is to empathize with each other’s experiences, whether you’re a first generation American or whether your family has been here six or seven generations.”

The recent program included 60 students sharing their family histories through recipes, such as Irish soda bread and Indian dishes, as well as memorabilia with the 175 attendees.

One student who learned a lot was eighth-grader Erich Malek.

“I enjoyed doing the interviews with relatives,” Erich said. “It gave me courage to ask my grandma about her life. I learned a lot about my great-grandma and what it was like during The Depression.”

Parents said the initiative was rewarding during the initial interview, as well as the recent program.

“It was fun to sit down with our kids and answer questions they had about our family and heritage,” said parent Melissa Hille, who has two eighth-graders attending Lewis F. Mayer Middle School.

“It made me realize we need to get more information about our ancestors. This will be a nice keepsake for the future. It was wonderful to hear other students speak about their heritage, as well,” she said.

“Tell Me Your Story: Family Traditions” was initially tied to a summer-reading program involving historical fiction author Alan Gantz, who was supposed to visit the school.

However, the author had to cancel, which forced the school to pivot at the last minute to a similar project involving video producer Natalie Bauman, who created the “SimplyTold” app. The program provides interview prompts to guide users through creating a personal or family legacy.

“She helped the students tell their stories, their traditions via this app,” Dill said.

Bauman said the students’ natural enthusiasm to share their own stories was easily elevated to thinking about how to learn more about their family members.

“I love seeing them connect to their history and start to understand how their family’s experience impacts them,” Bauman said in a press release. “Capturing and sharing their family stories helps kids see themselves in a different context, as part of a bigger picture, which I think is so important for pre-teens and teens.”

The Fairview Park Education Foundation contributed a \$4,400 grant to cover the cost of bringing Bauman to Lewis F. Mayer Middle School.

Fairview Park Education Foundation President Denise Devine said the nonprofit encourages and supports grants that will be utilized by large groups of students for cross-curricular learning use.

“The opportunity to explore their heritage by engaging with their family members is wonderful,” Devine said.