

Weaving stories of compassion

A teller of tall tales captivates and educates the pupils at Spring Grove Elementary School.

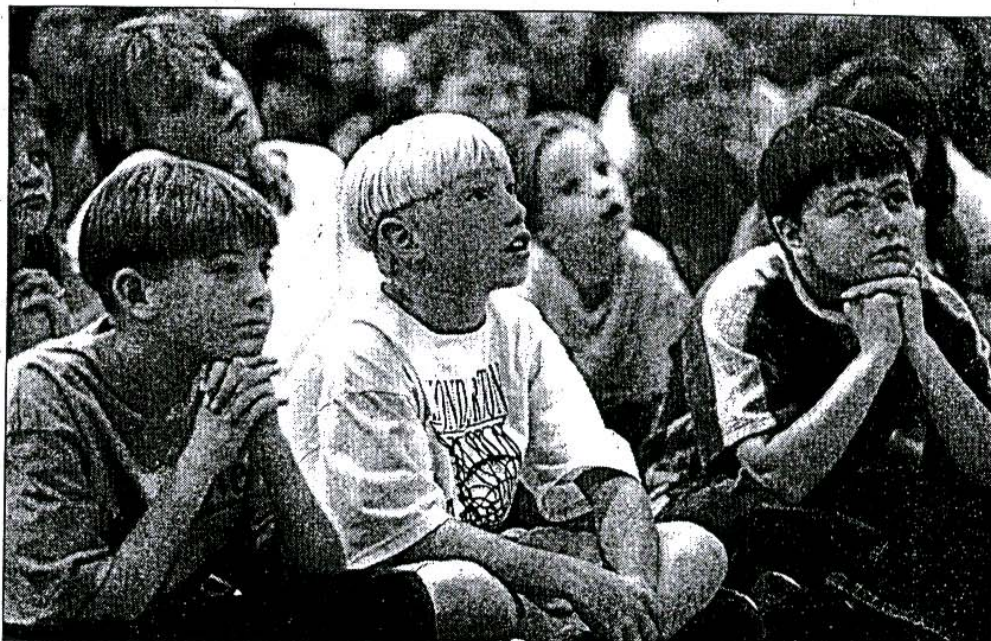
By Barbara lehl
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

The tale of Anansi the spider, as told by storyteller Ron Williams, captivated the pupils at Spring Grove Elementary School and at the same time taught them an important lesson of life.

Through listening to Anansi's adventures, the children in grades kindergarten through 8th are taught a lesson in compassion and acceptance. Anansi, who is poor, competes against Sylvester, a high-class cricket, to win the attentions of Edna, a caring and sensitive flea.

The presentation last week in Spring Grove was a spin-off of Tribes and Bridges, a story/theater performance brought to McHenry County schools this autumn through the Northwest Area Arts Council and the Illinois Storytelling Festival.

Williams, an African-American



Tribune photos by Jerry Tomaselli

Eleven-year-olds Ben Thomas (from left), Jacob Carus and Jimmy Browne listen to LaRon Williams last week. His stories spread a theme of racial understanding and cooperation.

ican from Ann Arbor, Mich., is one of three storytellers from different ethnic backgrounds who share fables and tales of touching personal remembrance with a goal of spreading interracial understanding and cooperation, and an anti-violence message.

The three—Williams, Susan

O'Halloran, an Irish-American from Evanston, and Antonio Sacre, a Cuban-American from Los Angeles—have developed a program primarily for high school and adult audiences. By relating their own experiences, they each describe how they were taught to be prejudiced—and what it's

like to be on the receiving end of other people's ignorance and hate.

"If racism and diversity are created, we can uncreate them," O'Halloran said. "We can help people understand each other. Through understanding, they become empowered to make

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changes."

With the support of business, arts and religious groups, the trio will complete a videotape of their performance and develop an anti-violence curriculum for high school students that will soon be available throughout the United States.