

STUDENTS TEACH HANDS AND WORDS ARE NOT FOR HURTING



TIMOTHY J. GONZALEZ / Statesman Journal

CHORUS LINE: Students rehearse the opening of "Hands" on Tuesday at Judson Middle School. The student-written production explores themes of nonviolence, anti-bullying and acceptance of diversity.

A show of 'Hands' for peace

The work is based on a project about nonviolence.

BY TRACY LOEW
Statesman Journal

Teasing. Peer pressure. Bullying. Self-doubt.

A normal part of the middle school experience? Or an opportunity to do things differently?

Eighty-five Judson theater students explore that question in one of the school's largest productions ever.

The students have been working on the show, titled "Hands," since early November, writing most of

Curtains rise

WHEN: 3 p.m. and 7 p.m.
Jan. 17.

WHERE: Judson Middle School annex gym, 4512 Jones Road SE

TICKETS: \$2.

FOR INFORMATION:
Judson Middle School,
(503) 399-3201.

the skits, songs and vignettes themselves. They'll give two public performances next week.

"It took a long time to get it just right," said actor Sammy Horvath, 12.

The result is a fast-paced, thought-provoking look at middle school life.

One piece focuses on the

idea that once kids have a label they're stuck with it. Another is about being part of a group involved in teasing and feeling powerless to stop it. One student wrote a rap about a bullying situation.

"The process of this show has been real different from anything I've done before," drama teacher Tom Hewitt said. "It's caused a lot of discussions about what really happens in school.

"They really have a grasp on the fact that this isn't entertainment theater. It's theater with a message," Hewitt said.

The idea for the produc-

tion came from the Hands and Words are Not for Hurting project, founded four years ago by Salem resident Ann Kelly.

The simple yet effective nonviolence program, run out of Kelly's South Salem home, has spread across the country and even internationally. It asks children and adults to commit to nonviolence by tracing the outline of their hands on purple paper and pledging: "I will not use my hands or words for hurting myself or others."

The Judson actors say writing and performing "Hands" has driven that

HANDS

CONTINUED FROM 1C

message home.

"It makes you think to watch your actions. If you find yourself saying something mean, catch yourself," said Catherine Lenhardt, 12.

Kelly will lead the pledge at one performance. Superintendent Kay Baker will lead it at the other.

In keeping with the hands theme, Judson students who bring mittens or gloves for charity will get free admission.

The project involved all three of Hewitt's beginning drama classes for seventh- and eighth-graders. Advanced drama students are doing production support.

Judson seventh-grader Matt

Seely designed the logo used on the set, posters and matching yellow T-shirts worn by the cast.

The production got help from a \$500 grant from the "We of Me," a joint effort of the Community Coalition for Diversity Human Rights and Relations Advisory Commission, Pentacle Theatre, the mayor's office and the Salem-Keizer School District.

Hewitt will build a packet and will make the show available to other middle schools.

Tracy Loew can be reached at (503) 399-6779 or tloew@StatesmanJournal.com