

When a teenage boy finds a treasure map, he holds the key to finding hidden pirate loot. But his plans go awry when a hurricane gets in the way. "The Last Pirate" chronicles a boy's journey through the past and into the very real present. The story is made more real to local readers because Cape Coral author Wilson Hawthorne uses familiar locations in his book.

Hawthorne, who has worked as reporter and camera operator, said the book, which is aimed at a middle school audience, has a overarching life lesson.

"The theme is we write our own history as we live our lives," Hawthorne said. "What do you want yours to be?"

Hawthorne came to his lecture at Oasis Middle School dressed in a pirate costume and read an excerpt from his book.

"You have an opportunity to (your life) - what you want it to be," he told students.

Hawthorne spent months researching local areas, including the Calusa mounds on Pine Island and Gasparilla Island, before he put pen to paper. Once he sat down to write the story, pirates and hidden treasure were a natural fit, given the history of Southwest Florida.

"The story just spills out," Hawthorne said. "Then, I rewrite, rewrite, rewrite."

Hawthorne didn't wait for a publisher to offer approval. He self-published the books and has driven hundreds of miles promoting it. He has visited numerous local schools and bookshops and sold out of the first printing.

Oasis Middle librarian Debbie Conwell invited Hawthorne to speak to students, many of whom said they plan to put it on their reading list. Conwell said while the book targets middle school students, it has become a crossover, appealing to many adults at the school.

"They have found the book fascinating," she said.

One important factor is that the main character is a teenage boy, a feature that appeals to an audience that is often difficult to reach.

"It's aimed at boys," Conwell said. "It gets them to read."

Sixth-grade student Jorge Hernandez, 11, said Hawthorne's lecture was enough to pique his interest

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"I think he had a lot of experience," Jorge said. "He did a lot of research."

Jorge said that focusing part of the story around pirate lore made the book appealing.

"I like how they say, 'Arrrr!'" he said.

Zoe Sioma, 12, said she liked the way Hawthorne read from the story, building drama with not only a hidden treasure, but the drama of Hurricane Charley, which most of the students experienced.

"I think he was good at explaining things," she said. "When he read I could picture it in my head."

JL Watson – Fort Myers News-Press – January 22, 2010

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