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Literacy Highlights UNH Child Study and Development Center Program

By [Sharon Keeler](#)
UNH News Bureau

DURHAM, N.H. -- John-Mac Mroczka, age 4, is already a literary critic. He picks Martin Hardford's "Where's Waldo?" when asked to give his recommendation of a top children's book. John-Mac's critique: "I think Waldo's funny, because he goes everywhere."

His peers offer commentary on such selections as "Arthur's Really Helpful Bedtime Stories" and "A Pair of Socks." By examining the works for "likes" and "dislikes," the children are learning to become critical thinkers of what they read. It's part of the curriculum goals of the University of New Hampshire's Child Study and Development Center, which aims to get kids excited about reading and writing at a young age.

"We want kids to see themselves as storytellers and authors, even before they can read or write," says Beth Hogan, program coordinator. "We're teaching them this is something they can do."

The center held Literacy Day recently to bring the children's parents to Durham to witness their daughter's and son's efforts. Local author Jane Cowen-Fletcher, of South Berwick, Maine, read from her works "Mama Zooms," "It Takes a Village" and "Baby Angels." She told the children how stories in her own life contributed toward the books' creation.

Activities included making puppets and bookmarks, and students proudly showed their parents books they had published. A book swap was held, and the kindergarten students donated more than 100 books to Strafford County Head Start.

"We try to create holidays at the center that can be common to all children. A day that celebrates literacy is perfect," says Kathleen McCartney, UNH professor of

psychology and family studies and the center's director.
"It's a great way to bring parents and teachers together,
and show kids that books can be fun."

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