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Section: Local

Famous author Osborne promotes literacy for area students

Alysa Landry The Daily Times

SHIPROCK — Mary Pope **Osborne** never goes anywhere alone.

The famed **author** of the Magic Tree House children's book series doesn't leave the house without a pirate, a dinosaur or a ninja. So it was no surprise when she showed up in Shiprock on Wednesday with a small army of imaginary foes.

"Reading is joyful," she told an audience of about 500 elementary school **students** at the Phil L. Thomas Performing Arts Center. "Writing and learning are joyful, and the world is full of amazing things."

Osborne's stop in Shiprock was one of two on the Navajo Nation. She is speaking to **students** in Fort Defiance, Ariz., today.

The Navajo Nation trip comes on the heels of the **author's** recent publication of the 39th book in the Magic Tree House series, "Dark Day in the Deep Sea," and the companion research guide, "Sea Monsters."

Random House donated copies of "Dark Day in the Deep Sea" and "Sea Monsters" to the 2,000 third- through fifth-grade **students** attending the presentations. The books follow siblings Jack and Annie as they discover foreign lands and historic times with the help of a magic tree house in their backyard. **Osborne** wanted to bring the same sense of adventure to **students** on the Navajo Nation. Reading and writing can transform the ordinary into the extraordinary, she said.

"I don't think I'll ever run out of places to travel to in my imagination," **Osborne** said. "I feel as if my readers and I are all exploring the creative process together, using our imaginations and writing skills to take us wherever we want to go."

Like Jack and Annie, the **author** thrives on adventure. **Osborne** grew up in a military family and traveled around the world before settling down in Connecticut to write stories **for** children.

The **author** gets many of her ideas from children in settings much like the two presentations on the Navajo Nation. She surveyed **students** Wednesday about their

interests, from sports to animals to weather. Her next book follows Jack and Annie on an adventure with penguins, and the one after that involves a mission back in time to meet Amadeus Mozart.

"Children have navigated this series since the beginning," **Osborne** said. "I write about what interests them."

It is **Osborne's** personal approach to the books and her relationship with her audience that has led to her success, said Will **Osborne**, her husband and co-**author**. The Magic Tree House series has reached a global audience, selling more than 53 million copies.

Although most children who read the Magic Tree House books aren't likely to brush shoulders with Vikings, mummies or Civil War heroes, **Osborne** offers these adventures to any child — or adult — who learns to treasure reading. **Osborne** guards those adventures so well she's turned down several offers from film and television crews who want to bring Jack and Annie to the big screen.

"We want to keep kids reading," **Osborne** said. "Our biggest message is that reading is magic. We want kids to keep reading and keep using their imaginations."

The books aren't only about imaginary adventures, however. **Osborne**, her husband and her sister, Natalie Pope Boyce, launched a companion series of research guides published alongside the fiction books. The guides act much like the research book referenced in the series. The fictional character Jack lugs the book around and looks up useful — and sometimes lifesaving — information about the people or places he visits.

"We do these books as if we were 7 years old and Jack and Annie were looking over our shoulders saying this is cool," Will **Osborne** said of the companion research guides. "The kids already feel like they have a relationship with Jack and Annie from the fiction books, and it's Jack and Annie welcoming them into the world of nonfiction books. The books are a stepping stone to more research."

The **author** team used the trip to the Navajo Nation to promote **literacy** and wellness.

"We wanted to turn the kids on to more reading than they're already doing," Boyce said. "Our underlying message is that reading is a huge component of wellness and a guarantee of happiness."

Will **Osborne** also is the creative force behind "Magic Tree House: The Musical," a 12-person show making its way across the nation, with appearances in the Southwest expected by 2009.

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