

Reading program sparks success, friendships

By Lauren Slavin 812-331-4376 | lslavin@heraldt.com | Posted: Saturday, March 5, 2016 12:00 am

Twice a week, Adam Day and Blaise Jerles meet at the Boys and Girls Club and take a trip to Middle Earth.

Second-grader Blaise moved his finger slowly across the page of a paperback copy of J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Hobbit" as he read the story's words aloud to his older buddy. Day, an Indiana University freshman, peeked over Blaise's shoulder, ready to answer questions and help with pronunciation any time the younger boy paused.

"I'm pretty good at reading," Blaise said.

He's even better at retaining what he learned, Day said with a laugh. He recently taught Blaise the meaning of the word "retort," and now when Day asks the second-grader to pack up his belongings, Blaise likes to "retort" that first he's going to go to the bathroom or get a drink from the water fountain.

Day's fellow student volunteers with the Boys and Girls Clubs' "Read to Succeed" program all have silly stories like this about their reading buddies. Freshman Hailey Ip and her buddy are writing a picture book of their own about a crime fighting gummy bear who does karate.

"All the kids are just so much fun," Ip said. "It's so much fun, and you can just forget about all the other work you have to do."

Since 2011, IU students, many from the university's Hudson and Holland Scholars Program, have volunteered to spend two weekly hourlong reading sessions with Boys and Girls Clubs members in an effort to increase the reading comprehension and vocabulary of young students. Over the course of the academic year, about 50 club members and IU students pair up for the program.

The United Way agency serves youth ages 6 to 18, and the Read to Succeed program has attracted members from the ages of 6 to 14, said Aaryn Eady, student coordinator of the Read to Succeed program.



'Harold and the Purple Crayon'

Sydney Valde, left, helps as Presley Graham reads "Harold and the Purple Crayon" at the Boys and Girls Club on Lincoln Street. Jeremy Hogan | Herald-Times

“We really have seen improvement in kids over time,” Eady said. “It’s definitely a program that fully engages kids.”

Parents agree. According to United Way statistics, 86 percent of surveyed parents with children participating in Boys and Girls Clubs programs said that membership has had a positive effect on their child’s academic performance.

“It’s a really intensive reading program,” Eady said. “We want to be really intentional about the books kids are reading.”

Students such as Blaise pick a reading level-appropriate book from the Read to Succeed library or bring a book from home. The youngest students read picture books. Slightly older students take on chapter books like those from the popular “Diary of a Wimpy Kid” series.

“‘Curious George’ is a favorite,” Ip said. “Sometimes you have to barter with them, but usually they’ll let you take turns reading.”

The kids learn to enjoy reading, and they also leave each session with new skills they can use in the classroom.

The volunteers will remember words that give their buddy trouble while reading and quiz them on meaning and pronunciation at the end of a reading session. Discussions about how plots develop build the children’s reading comprehension skills, which hopefully will stick with them when it comes time for them to read and write during standardized tests.

“The wish is that when they come to a test, they think back to an experience like this and feel more confident,” Ip said.