

Students bring history back to life

Charter school kids pay tribute to Black History Month with a wax museum

Candice Craig
Staff Writer
The Durham Voice

Seven-year-old William Bones is anxiously looking down the long line of students as he inches closer to the man he's dying to talk to.

William is walking patiently with his class as they go through an exhibit, looking from one speaker to another. All of his classmates are listening intently, as the speakers talk about their lives and show off items they've made. However, William can't seem to stay focused, and he keeps looking down to the end of the room with a huge grin as the speakers talk.

Finally William's class makes it to the person he believes to be the most important speaker in the exhibit.

Dressed in a gray and white striped suit jacket with political buttons pinned on his collar, there he was: American politician and activist John Kenneth Blackwell or, in reality, Christian Bones, William's older brother, dressed as Blackwell.

Christian, 10, took on the life and role of Blackwell for a history project at his school.

"Hey, this is my brother William and I am John Kenneth Blackwell," said Christian before he proceeded to give a short speech.

Christian and his classmates at Research Triangle Charter Academy took a different approach to Black History Month on Thursday. All students between third and fifth grade modeled influential African-Americans in a wax museum-style presentation, honoring both prominent and less well-known historical figures.

Tyra Blanchard, 10, dressed as Oprah Winfrey, the prominent African-American talk show host.

"Oprah is a really big inspiration," Tyra said. "She was told numerous times that she couldn't be successful because of the way she looked, but she ended up being a billionaire."

When approached, all the students would come to life and deliver a short, informational speech about their historical figure.

"Oprah was born on Jan. 29, 1954 in Kosciusko, Mississippi," Tyra said to a group of second graders. "Oprah's name is an accidental misspelling of



Christian Bones, 10, models a less well-known politician John Kenneth Blackwell, the first black gubernatorial candidate in Ohio State history to be endorsed by a major party. (Staff photo by Candice Craig)

the biblical name Orpah."

The wax museum took place in the gymnasium of the school.

"I wanted to do Martin Luther King, but I'm in the third grade," said Kamauri Hinton. He was holding a clay figure he made of his historical figure – Academy Award winning actor Jamie Foxx.

"Third graders could only do, like, actors and comedians," Kamauri said. "Fourth graders are doing people that invented things and fifth graders are doing people from the Civil Rights Movement."

The students were given about a month to work on the project. They were required to write a paper on their historical figure, create a poster to show at the wax museum, bring prompts and dress up, said fifth grade teacher Catie Cedzo.

"Besides being limited to what category of people they were able to pick from, the entire project is student led," said Robin Fields, wax museum coordinator.

The students were able to pick a historical figure, what they wanted to write about that figure and what they wanted to present in the wax museum.

"It is a great way for the kids to learn history," said Fredrick Johnson, a father who came to the wax museum

to support his daughter as she presented her work on Michael Jackson. "My daughter knew about Michael Jackson before doing this project but doing this project has taught her how to do research and bring all that she's leaned together so she can understand it enough to tell other people about him."

The event was from 1 to 2:30 p.m., and the majority of the charter school classes were released for about 25 minutes to attend to the wax museum.

"I remember doing this when I was in fifth grade," said Serenity Byers, an eighth grader whose social studies class was released to attend the wax museum. "We didn't do Black History Month, we just did historical figures, and I did Penelope Barker. We had to have props and costumes just like they did."

A lot of the students really enjoyed being able to show off projects they worked so hard on to such a big group of people.

"I've been counting and I've said my speech to 11 people," said fourth grader Jabari Hunter who portrayed James West. "I'm trying to show my project to as many people as I can because I feel like more people need to know about him, and it's fun getting to pretend like I'm him."