

**“The Earth is a House for Us All”  
200 Connecticut Children Celebrated World Languages in Mansfield  
At the 16<sup>th</sup> Annual CT COLT Rhyme Celebration**



Mansfield children representing Swiss German and Korean



2007 Rhyme Celebration Organizers: Ricardo Moraga, Christi Moraga, Diane Hutton and Kathleen Siddons

Houses, homes, Mother Earth and respect for the environment were all topics of the rhymes recited in 18 languages and 2 dialects by elementary school children. The Sixteenth Annual CT COLT Rhyme Celebration took place on Friday, March 30, 2007 from 3:00 to 6:00 p.m. at Mansfield Middle School auditorium in Storrs, Connecticut. Two hundred children from kindergarten to sixth grade, represented twenty-one Connecticut schools. They recited rhymes and sang songs in front of a packed audience of teachers, parents, administrators and dignitaries. Each child was rewarded with a certificate printed in the language of the recitation, an illustrated program booklet with all the rhymes and names, a thematic child-designed button, a healthy snack and souvenirs, including UCONN Husky paw print stickers.

The theme for 2007 was “The Earth is a House for Us All,” title taken with permission from “*A House is a House for Me*,” a children’s book by Connecticut poet, Mary Ann Hoberman, who was the special guest of CT COLT and Mansfield teachers. She read her poem onstage with a Power Point of the illustrations in her book and at the end of the event she read another poem and went onstage to be photographed with all the children. In keeping with the theme, the rhymes and songs were carefully chosen to reflect houses, homes, the earth, as well as the people and animals, who live here. The Mansfield world language teachers, Kathleen Siddons, Diane Hutton and Ricardo Moraga, who all teach 2<sup>nd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> grade Spanish, along with CT COLT Rhyme Celebration Chairperson Christi Moraga, coordinated all the details, including research on the languages, the thematic murals, special invitations, refreshments and audio-visual concerns.

Several long time attendees of the CT COLT Rhyme Celebration commented on how diverse the program was this year. With eighteen languages and two dialects, many children dressed either to reflect the topic of their rhyme, or to represent their heritage

(costumes and flags haled from Armenia, Austria, Brazil, Germany, Iceland, Iran, Korea, Romania, Spain, Korea and Turkey.) For the first time ever, an African language, Fon (from the country of Benin), and an indigenous language, Nahuatl of the Aztecs, were heard. The audience listens every year to Connecticut school children recite in French, German, Japanese and Spanish. Additional languages that graced the Mansfield stage this year were: Armenian, Chinese, Farsi, Finnish, Icelandic, Korean, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Sanskrit, and Turkish. For the first time, the CT COLT Rhyme Celebration also welcomed rhymes in two dialects\* or variations of languages: Flemish (variation of Dutch spoken in parts of Belgium) and Swiss German (dialect spoken in parts of Switzerland.) English was used by the poet Mary Ann Hoberman and by children reciting the warm up poem: "The Little Turtle." The Theme Song: "This Old Man" was a rendition in English, Spanish and French by the Vinton Chorus, led by teacher Ricardo Moraga.

The 2007 Rhyme Celebration also had several family touches. The Mama twins of Mansfield recited in Fon, Julia and Lucas Hannegan were a sister-brother act of Willington who recited in Portuguese, Maria and her father, Freddie Meier on the accordion, encouraged the audience to sing "Edelweiß," Emma Chang from Farmington sang in Korean while her mother played the piano and her younger brother played the violin. Also behind the scenes were the Moraga's: Christi, the Chairperson, Ricardo one of the Mansfield hosts, and Max who filmed and edited the DVD.

The CT COLT "Rhyme Celebration" is part of a national effort, "Discovering Languages, Discover the World," from ACTFL, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, to inform the public about how important it is to learn languages at all ages. While Spanish, French and Japanese are the major languages taught in the elementary schools of Connecticut, there is a healthy effort to maintain and promote heritage languages, such as through Saturday schools (i.e. The German School of Connecticut) and after school activities (i.e. "Taste of Languages Club" held weekly at the West Woods Upper Elementary School in Farmington.) Parents and grandparents are happy to assist teachers in promoting the languages of their roots.

Katherine Sinisgalli, the CT COLT President, awarded the three Mansfield Host Teachers a plaque of merit and appreciation: Kathleen Siddons, Diane Hutton and Ricardo Moraga. All agreed that with a real poet presenting to the children, along with special family presentations, 2007's Rhyme Celebration will be remembered for many years to come.

The districts represented this year in order of appearance:

Mansfield – Vinton School

West Hartford – The German School of Connecticut

Simsbury –Tootin' Hills and Squadron Line

West Hartford – Norfeldt Elementary School

East Hartford – Glastonbury Magnet School

Harwinton-Burlington – Harwinton Consolidated and Lake Garda

Farmington – West Woods Upper Elementary School

Manchester – Das Kleine Schulhaus

Waterbury – Maloney Interdistrict Magnet School  
Marlborough – Elmer Thienes  
Old Saybrook – Goodwin School  
Region 12 – Burnham, Boothfree and Washington Primary  
Madison – Our Lady of Mercy  
Wilmington – Hall and Center Schools  
Mansfield – Southeast, Goodwin, Mansfield Middle School

\* Virtually every language in the world has dialects—varieties of the language that are particular to a group of speakers. Dialects vary by region and by social group. Dialect diversity, or language variation, reflects the fact that languages change over time and that people who live in the same area or maintain the same social identity share language norms; in other words, they speak the same dialect.

<http://www.cal.org/topics/dialects/>