Author Candace Fleming Plants “Story Seeds”  
by Joan Lange, AOS Director of Libraries

A writer uses special tools, ears and eyes, to find “story seeds.” These seeds will grow into stories that delight, puzzle, and encourage readers to empathize with the lives of people. Award-winning author Candace Fleming shared this and the excitement of discovery in the research and writing process as she visited with students in Delphi through eighth grade.

Librarians prepared students for the author’s visit through Design Thinking projects, Times Machine explorations, and Book Talks. Tomisha Atkins, Lower School Librarian, and Jamie Jackson, Instructional Technology Specialist, engaged students in a Novel Engineering project using Candace Fleming’s picture book, *Muncha, Muncha, Muncha*. Kindergarten, first, and second graders used the central problem of the picture book (rabbits eating a farmer’s garden vegetables) to identify a client (either the rabbits or the farmer) to build a device that would solve the problem. After designing their contraptions on paper, students assembled their designs in the Eureka Lab; the creative models were then displayed in the library.

Taking a leap back in time, students in third, fourth and fifth grades explored historical resources that the author used in the writing of *Strongheart: Wonder Dog of the Silver Screen*. Using *Times Machine* (historical news articles from the *New York Times*), students searched for a variety of sources that included an article by the movie director who described how he trained Strongheart as well as Strongheart’s “dog interview” with the *New York Times*. Students evaluated stories for purpose and intended audience, and they listened to story excerpts and viewed video clips from Strongheart’s silent movie films. Joan Lange, Director of Libraries, also showed fifth graders how to use Boolean search techniques to combine search terms, locating a variety of fiction and nonfiction dog books in the library online catalog.
Middle school students were invited to Book Talks held during advisory periods. Students became the performers as they demonstrated their juggling skills before listening to Candace’s biography about P.T. Barnum and his celebrated act, Jumbo the elephant. Students also recreated the famous Annie Oakley “mirror trick shot” as they learned more about the author’s biography of Buffalo Bill and his Wild West Show. Middle school students also participated in a Writing Contest themed to memories and collections. Student winners enjoyed a pizza lunch with the author, and their writing pieces will be published in the 2019 Literary Magazine. Read winning poems and essays on the Library News libguide: https://libguides.aoshouston.org/librarynews

Candace arrived at AOS during Book Fair week, and she delighted student and faculty audiences with her storytelling and demonstration of how she uses “story seeds” to grow a story. With the lower grades, she illustrated how details from everyday life can be used for exciting stories: whether it was dive-bombing seagulls during a birthday party on the beach, or mischievous cookie-snatching monkeys while on a family trip to Borneo, the author used these idea “story seeds” and joined it with her imagination to create a story. Enthusiastic reaction from the author presentations included an observation from Kim Chapman, second grade teacher: “I loved Candace’s energy and great storytelling ability. The 2nd graders were enraptured! They have been talking about story seeds ever since.”

Curiosity and “being nosy” was the focus of the author’s presentation to grades three-eight; she showed primary sources that stirred her questionings in the research process. Students chuckled when Candace showed her many rough drafts and corrections from the editor, but she emphasized how this was part of the writing process. Grades three and four looked at primary sources for the book Strongheart, such as a photo of Strongheart seated behind the wheel of a car, a gift from an admiring fan of his movies. For middle school students, Candace shifted focus to how she used primary sources in her numerous biographies. Students connected with her example of Amelia Earhart as a sixth grader who had a troubled home life, which was reflected in diary entries. Students then viewed Amelia’s sixth grade report card and made inferences about her grit and resilience. Robert Wise, seventh grader, described the presentation as “energetic” and agreed with the author’s comment, “you have to be nosy to be a historian and a writer.” Ella Piper Claffy, seventh grader, shared her favorite quote from the author: “If you think about it, writing is a really weird occupation...you are sitting in small room, all alone, trying to reach as many people as possible with your writing.” AOS thanks Candace Fleming for reaching us with her stories and encouraging students to plant and grow their own “story seeds.”