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Near North tutor gets golden results

11/23/2011 3:00 PM

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Mendacious.

If you don't know the meaning of that word, then you are not smarter than a third grader. Well, not smarter than the two third graders I met recently at The Reading Clinic, 538 W. Menomonee St.

I confess, embarrassingly, that I hadn't even ever heard that word (I chalk it up to my CPS education). That is, until I learned it in one of Carol Truesdell's tutoring classes.

Truesdell, a Gold Coaster, is a former reading specialist who was working in a suburban school district when she decided she "wanted to do something else and work for myself." She now enthusiastically tutors kids in kindergarten through eighth grade.



Mariah Taylor (left) and Ava Senne

Nestled into a cozy and inviting space in Old Town that makes you want to curl up somewhere with a good book, Truesdell has created a cheery place in The Reading Clinic, where colorful, hand-painted book covers adorn the walls and creativity abounds. Even her bathroom made me smile, with its fake water and a cool-looking mannequin from the basement of the Three Arts Club decked out in a bathrobe in the tub. Then there's the little guy riding a unicycle who holds the toilet paper.

"We have to be fun," said Truesdell, a past president and current board member of the North Dearborn Association.

Fun is what I definitely had on a recent afternoon while sitting in on one of Truesdell's classes with two adorable and smart young ladies, Mariah Taylor and Ava Senne, both 8-years-old.

Ava, a third grader at the Immaculate Conception School in Old Town, said her confidence has improved and her grades are better since attending tutoring.

"I pay more attention," said Ava, whose mom, Leslie, also praised the "talented" Truesdell. "Now every time I do a test, I check it over three times.

"It helps with school," said Ava. "When the teacher asks what a synonym or antonym is, or how to pronounce something, I know. I also like the books, and picking out new books and book reports."

Didn't like your child's report card last week? Truesdell coordinates with the school and teachers and monitors progress reports. Kids come after school once or twice weekly, and small groups are created according to age and ability.

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"These are the kids that just need a little extra," said Truesdell. "After 30 years, whenever a mom has said, 'I'm not sure but I think there's something going on,' they're always right. So the moms need to trust their guts."

Armed with positive reinforcement tools such as Cheetos and scented erasers, which are given as occasional treats, Truesdell helps turn kids who might be struggling into little know-it-alls. Take Mariah Taylor, for instance, who used to do her work and be "scared I'd get everything wrong."

"But now, I feel like I get everything right," said Mariah, a third grader at Hawthorne Scholastic Academy in Lake View. "Now I know these are exactly the right answers."

"It helps me read better and bigger words, and if somebody doesn't know something, I raise my hand and I say the answer," said Mariah. "My teacher asks 'How'd you know that?' and I say, 'My tutor taught me.'"

Truesdell charges \$45 for one-hour group sessions, although kindergarteners are usually half-hour sessions, which run \$40. She also offers a summer reading program. And she's not shy about her successes.

"If I got 'em, they're golden," she boasted. "They're at North Shore Prep or at Walter Payton."

And after watching her in action at The Reading Clinic, I totally believe that Truesdell is not being mendacious (definition: untruthful or misleading) when she says that.

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