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Contact: Sue Publicover
207.752.4802
sue@writersoftheroundtable.com

Kim Jackson
802.345.9730
kim@writersoftheroundtable.com

TENNESSEE STUDENT WINS “DUCKEY AND THE OCEAN PROTECTORS” YOUTH ECO-ESSAY CONTEST

Sixth grader’s Calvin Catfish to be featured as next book’s newest Ocean Protector

OAKBROOK, Ill (July 14, 2009) – Phillip Pinarski, a sixth grader at St. Ann School in Bartlett, Tenn., cast a line and reeled in first prize in a national essay contest. The youngster’s creative writing about a blind catfish earned him top honors in the “Duckey and the Ocean Protectors” Youth Eco-Essay Contest, which focused on encouraging youth to write about ways to help conserve and save the oceans.

With the release of his first children’s book, “Duckey and the Ocean Protectors” (Writers of the Round Table Press, October 2008), Author John Sexton and his publisher sponsored the contest to encourage kids to think of new ways to protect the environment and to create new creatures that can help to do that. Pinarski’s winning essay was chosen from more than 200 entries. His character, a blind catfish named Calvin, will be featured as one of the new Ocean Protectors in Sexton’s next book in the series.

“We were blown away by Phillip’s creativity and sensitivity of his character he created,” said Sue Publicover, vice president of marketing and development for Writers of the Round Table. “He also challenged the panel of judges because his character actually lives in fresh water. Calvin will allow for John and (co-author) Katie Gutierrez to create a team of Ocean Protectors from all walks of life — and water — in the next book. Whether from salt or fresh water, or land, the Ocean Protectors will need to come together as a team to solve their next mission. It’s easy to envision watching Calvin educate others about how everyone has a special talent, regardless of disabilities. We applaud Phillip’s insight at such a young age.”

Pinarski wrote, “He is basically a handicapped fish because when he was in an egg, a whirlpool struck the egg making him blind. You know when people say that if you’re blind, your hearing is terrific; well in this case his barbs are terrific. ... I made Calvin blind to show everybody that they can overcome anything if they set their minds to it.”

The essay contest was part of the launch of the new environmental and educational tale of one lucky Duckey and his sea creature friends who are out to save the ocean from going black. “Duckey and the Ocean Protectors” was written by Sexton and Katie Gutierrez, and illustrated by Maciej Zajac. The team wanted to encourage kids to act like the Ocean Protectors, using their own unique skills and talents to help protect the ocean – and save the planet.

Sexton also hopes the characters he created as childhood friends will be able to reach out to kids, parents, and teachers with a clear message: celebrate the simple victories and work together to make all children strong individuals, each in his own right.

The contest was open to all children between the ages of 6 and 16. Contestants had to answer two questions in their own words, in 250 words or less per question.

1. Why is it important to save the world's oceans?
2. If you were an Ocean Protector, what kind of creature would you be, what one special power would you have, and why?

In addition, several honorable mentions and finalists were also named:

Honorable Mentions -

Andres Salas: Driag Koah (sea dragon); St. Ann School, Bartlett, TN

Special Youth Award -

Stephanie Yoshida, age 6: Crab; Hokolani Elementary School, Honolulu, HI

Finalists -

Shayla Gaffney: Caylie Crab; St. Ann School, Bartlett, TN

Robert Lawson: Shortfin Mako; St. Ann School, Bartlett, TN

Katrina Ung and Melissa Ball: Kamele Kame & Conan; Jaffrey Rindge Middle School, Jaffrey, NH

Nick Owens: Oarfish; St. Ann School, Bartlett, TN

Robert Harris: Terrance the Sea Turtle; St. Ann School, Bartlett, TN

The winner's character will be featured in the next book as the newest Ocean Protector, and the winner's name will be included as a contributing writer. The top finalists all receive an autographed copy of the book and their essays can be read on <http://www.duckeyops.com/contest>. All entrants are now honorary Junior Ocean Protectors and received a certificate of award.

To learn more about "Duckey and the Ocean Protectors," visit www.duckeyops.com. For interviews with Sexton or to request a copy of the book for review, contact Sue Publicover, 207.752.4802 sue@writersoftheroundtable.com or Kim Jackson, 802.345.9730 kim@writersoftheroundtable.com.

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