

## Authors of The 39 Clues children's series to visit Absecon schools

By JENNIFER BOGDAN | March 28, 2011

ABSECON - A series of adventure books that lead a young brother and sister from the catacombs of Paris to the gravesite of William Shakespeare has captivated the minds of Absecon students.

And, in a few short weeks, those students will get a chance to meet and have lunch with two authors of The 39 Clues, a New York Times-best-selling children's series.

The Absecon School District landed a stop on the national book tour promoting "Vespers Rising," the latest installment of the series co-authored by seven writers. On April 15 - between stops at a Princeton Barnes & Noble and the Philadelphia Book Festival - Peter Lerangis and Jude Watson will be at the combined Emma C. Attales and H. Ashton Marsh schools to speak with students and sign books. They also will have lunch with the school's 39 Clues book clubs.



Media specialist Rose Hagar helps fifth-grader Camren Turner, 10, while fifth-graders Allen Thomas, 10, and Billy Cappuccio, 11, work on their projects as part of the 39 Clues book club at the Absecon schools library.

The prospect of meeting the authors is overwhelming for 9-year-old Lily Pena, who notes that she will be a much-more-grown-up 10 years old by the time the authors visit her school. Pena has read the series from cover to cover and spent countless hours solving clues, she said.



Absecon School District media specialist Rose Hagar points out areas of interest on a map to students Rebecca Turner, 11, and Larae Register, 14, as part of the 39 Clues book clubs. Authors of a book in the best-selling children's series will visit the Absecon School District on April 15 for a presentation, lunch and book signing as part of a national book tour.

"There are people out there who actually thought this story up - thought about where the characters will go and what they'll do," said Pena, who then pauses, wide-eyed, to take a deep breath. "Then, they tell us we're actually going to see these people. It's just so exciting."

School media specialist Rose Hagar initiated the clubs with the financial support of the Absecon Education Foundation and the Absecon PTO. Hagar said she has never seen her students so eager to read.

"There are so many historical figures in these books. The kids have learned about (Wolfgang) Mozart and Mount Everest as they read," Hagar said. "When they find out that these places are real, they get so excited. The best part is seeing that excitement - all from a book."

For students, part of the appeal of the series is its interactive approach. Readers follow characters Dan and Amy Cahill - fictional descendants of the most influential family in history - on a journey to discover the secrets of the family's power. The adventure does not end at the close of a chapter. Instead, students can look for puzzles hidden in the books' margins, solve clues on a series of trading cards and play an accompanying online game.

"I like the mystery," said 9-year-old Nick Coleman. "They keep you guessing all the time."

Hagar's book clubs, one for the elementary students and one for the middle school students, take the learning even further. When she learned her youngest readers had not heard of tombstone rubbings, a term mentioned in the first book, she sent them out to the school's courtyard with paper and crayons to look for plaques with raised letters to make an imprint.

"It's another way of bringing the books to life and learning a new skill through reading," Hagar said.

Charisse Meloto, publicity director for publisher Scholastic, said the company works with schools when organizing book tours, usually coordinated through bookstores. But because Meloto knew of Hagar's clubs in Absecon, she was able to set up a direct visit.

"(Hagar) has been instrumental in fostering her students' interest in The 39 Clues series and getting kids excited about books and reading in general," Meloto said.

"Vespers Rising," the latest book in the series, will be released April 5.

According to Scholastic, DreamWorks Studios has acquired movie rights to the story. Scholastic also reports that Steven Spielberg may be interested in directing a film adaptation.



*Fifth-grader Brandon Shane, 11, left, and eighth-grader Mason Weems, 13, play a card game that is part of The 39 Clues book clubs at the Absecon schools library.*