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Author and Vernon Resident Joy Houlder Visits Vernon Elementary Schools to Read Her Children's Book 'Calvin Dreams' to Students

VERNON, Connecticut – Some Vernon elementary school students received a special treat this month when author Joy Houlder visited their classrooms to read from her book “Calvin Dreams: And that he will be bigger than the moon!”

At Vernon’s Skinner Road School, students were enthralled by Calvin and Houlder’s vivid illustrations, which show Calvin exploring his dreams with his stuffed bunny as a sidekick.



Author Joy Houlder reads her book “Calvin Dreams” to second graders in Denise LaVacca’s class at Vernon’s Skinner Road School.

When Houlder finished reading, the students’ arms shot into the air with questions about those illustrations, what it’s like to write a book and about Calvin.

“Can I tell you all something?” Houlder said. “Calvin is a real boy.” The children gasped.

“Calvin is actually my little brother,” Houlder continued. “He was 1 when I wrote this book.”

And then there was one more surprise. Houlder told the children that she is one of them. She grew up in Vernon, attended Vernon Public Schools, then college, where she wrote the book about Calvin, who is now 4. The students saw in her someone they could aspire to be.

The Vernon Public Schools, in partnership with family and community, is committed to provide a quality education, with high expectations, in a safe environment where all students become independent learners and productive contributors to society.

“Ms. Houlder is an example of all the great things you can accomplish when you work hard,” Melissa Trantolo, the Director of Teaching and Learning for Vernon Public Schools, told the first graders in Lauren Worsham’s class.

As she stood up to leave, some students gathered around to hug her and ask more questions.

“I’m going to be dreaming about this,” Houlder said. “It’s incredible and humbling at the same time.”

Houlder, 24, works for Eastern Connecticut Health Network as a Family Resource Specialist at Vernon’s Maple Street School, where teachers and students know her and her book well.



Author Joy Houlder reads to first graders in Lauren Worsham’s class at Vernon’s Skinner Road School.

“So many teachers at Maple Street School were telling me about Joy and what a fabulous person she is, what a fantastic author and illustrator she is and about the positive messages she is sending out to our students,” Trantolo said. “I went and met her and absolutely fell in love with her. I asked her if she would be willing to visit all the schools and share her story with them?”



Second graders at Vernon’s Skinner Road School listen as Author Joy Houlder reads her book “Calvin Dreams.”

Houlder happily agreed.

“The kids absolutely loved her,” Trantolo said. “They’re able to quickly make connections with her, and her book shows students of color in a positive light and lets all students know they have a place. It’s just amazing.”

Houlder said she wrote “Calvin Dreams” because she was excited to have a little brother and because she saw a void in books for children of color. In many situations, a Black male protagonist is working for civil rights or in another historical context. She said she wanted to create a book that featured a Black boy in fantasy situations. Those are the types of books she had trouble finding herself in when she was young.

She wrote the book for Calvin so he would have something special, but was encouraged by a college professor to think bigger. She began drawing and then putting together a story as a special course during her senior year at Emmanuel College in Boston. She graduated in May 2019 and the book was published the following December.

On the back cover is a message to the children she is trying to reach: “Dear underrepresented child, believe in yourself and chase your dreams.”

“Calvin Dreams” can be found online at Amazon and Barnes and Noble.

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