

March 13, 2008

To Whom It May Concern:

I have just returned from attending an assembly at our middle school where I had the wonderful privilege to hear and see Mike Wiley perform one of his seven self-produced plays. This production dealt with the life of Henry Brown, a slave who escaped his terrible life by enclosing himself in a wooden crate for shipment to Philadelphia.

I sat in amazement watching this master actor give a group of 200 eighth graders an in-depth look at the emotional heart-wrenching story of slavery and its impact on people's lives. Mike portrayed numerous people throughout the play including hardened slave owners, frightened children, loving mothers, and most important of all, Henry Brown, in his effort to be free from the bondage of slavery.

There are many things that make his presentation so special. First, it is based on actual history that occurred, and he masterfully gives us a glimpse into the hopes, dreams, sorrows, tragedies, and triumphs of Henry Brown. In addition, he uses many of the students and staff in participation by asking them to play the role of a particular person in the story. He uses humor, and absolutely captivates his audience. In just a matter of minutes, he won the undivided attention of every child in the room, and taught more history in forty minutes that could be taught in a week.

His stage presence is mesmerizing and his ability to relate to people is truly a gift. I would describe his work as a ministry and a true demonstration of how children learn best. Mike modeled some of the best strategies in teaching that include active involvement, movement, humor, relevance, encouragement, and respect.

I am so grateful that we were blessed to have this wonderful opportunity for our students. Following the program I watched intentionally his interaction with students who stayed behind to speak to him. Without a doubt, he is doing very important work that will have a wonderful impact on children.

Any group or audience will find his work to be an exceptional value and help. I wholeheartedly endorse his work and feel confident that he will continue to send many positive messages to all who hear him. In my 31 years in education I can't remember any performance that matches this wonderful blend of humor, history, reflection, student involvement, and lasting impact.

Sincerely,

Dr. Barry Redmond
Superintendent, Newton-Conover City Schools