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Illustrator teaches drawing secrets to McHenry pupils

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MCHENRY – Children’s illustrator Richard McFarland showed the basic stick figure that anyone can draw. Then he flipped over a sheet of drawing paper sitting on an easel to another sheet, which had dots at specific parts of the stick figure to illustrate knees, elbows, shoulders and ankles.

Instead of drawing lines at right angles, they were slanted, and the stick figures were walking and running.

McFarland, 74, of Huntley, gave a presentation Wednesday to about 20 Montini Catholic School students who came to the Writers’ Workshop, a club that meets once a week after school.

The students listened as McFarland discussed his drawing process for the book he illustrated, “Grandfather’s Wrinkles.” The book was written by Kathryn England.



McFarland, who wore a blue shirt, red suspenders and khaki pants, drew himself as the grandfather in the book, who had the same outfit.

He talked about the rough sketches, the story boards, and the photographs he used during his yearlong project. For most of the presentation he talked about basic drawing techniques.

“How exactly are you able to make eyes like that?” fifth-grader Grace Knudsen asked. Grace tries to shape eyes like lemons, she said. “It just doesn’t look like a real eye.” “You have to be focused,” McFarland said. “It would be helpful to have photographs. ... Be patient. Take it slow and easy. You’ll get there.”

He showed how to start from basic stick figures, how to illustrate movement, and how then to draw rounder shapes around the sticks to illustrate a body. He showed how simple circles and ovals can be turned into cartoon characters such as Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck.

“It’s a fun experience to learn how to draw a human or an animal,” said Emily Johnson, an eighth-grader at the McHenry school.

McFarland, a retired lithographic artist, said he made six to eight presentations a year. “I hope they get the desire to draw or paint or find some form of art expression,” McFarland said.