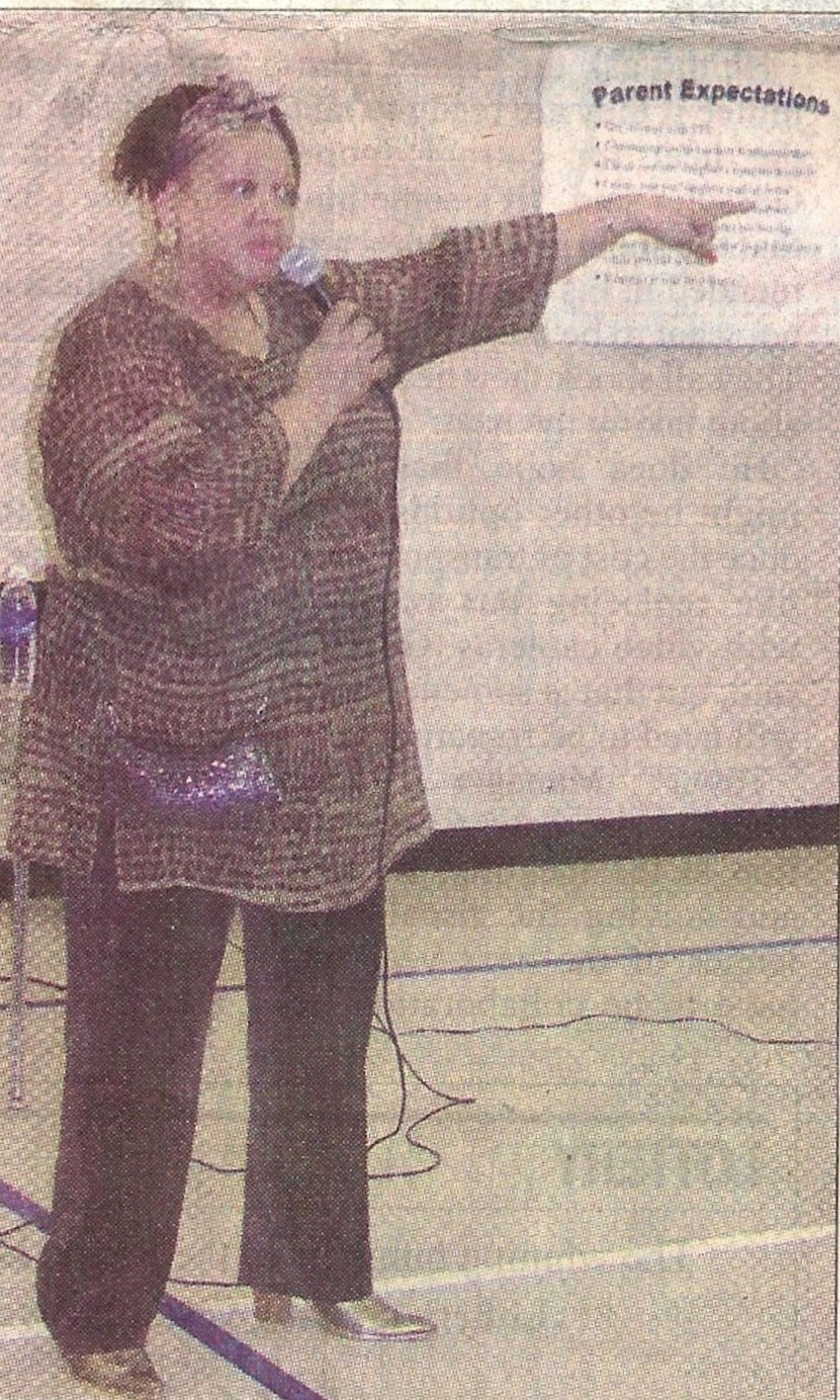




Photos/Jessica Selby

Storyteller Deborah Asante, left, keeps students at Hopkins Hill Elementary School enthralled.



THE STORYTELLER

BY JESSICA SELBY
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COVENTRY — Hopkins Hill Elementary School students sat and listened intently as Deborah Asante told them stories.

She told original tales that she created as well as some well known African folklore.

She was just one of the many performers to visit the school to offer cultural education to the students.

Lisa Tomasso, a member of the school's PTA, said that each month throughout the school year the PTA tries to bring a special performer into the school to expose the students to various cultural arts. She said that the district typically does not have the funds to support such performances so the PTA tries to raise the money through various fund raisers so that the students still have such opportunities.

Tomasso said that each month there is a different theme. She said that the PTA coordinators try to attach the cultural activity for that

month to something happening in the student's curriculum and that this month, with Martin Luther King Jr. Day falling on last Monday, the PTA decided to provide a program with a cultural education focus.

The PTA was able to bring in various storytellers who were recommended through FundaFest. FundaFest is a program offered through Rhode Island Black Storytellers (RIBS).

Asante is one of their regular storytellers and she was booked to speak at Hopkins Hill School on Thursday of last week, but she said, she was actually touring a multitude of other schools throughout the week as part of FundaFest.

According to Asante, FUNDA means to teach and to learn in Zulu and Kiswahili and that it is RIBS' mission to promote the awareness, appreciation, and application of Black Storytelling through performance, educational, cultural, and historical experiences, hence the name of the program.

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Storyteller

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Tomasso said that Asante has visited the school in the past to bring her tales and animation to the students and was invited back because she was so well received by both the students and the faculty. She lives in Indiana and only comes around during FundaFest, so Tomasso said, the PTA tries to reserve some of her time during that very busy week for Hopkins Hill School.

It was actually only the fourth and the fifth grade students that had the opportunity to listen to Asante. Tomasso said that the younger students had different story tellers, but that each presentation was tailored to meet the age of the students and was well received by all.

“The kids just love all of our cultural arts programs,” said Lisa James, the co-president of the school’s PTA. “Many of these kids would never have the opportunity to get exposure to these types of adults otherwise because the district cannot afford it in their budget so luckily we have generous families that support our programs so that we can fund it.”