

## CMS Students Treated to a Blast from the Past

Recently sixth-grade students in Mrs. Walker's language arts class were treated to being part of living history when Assistant Principal Mrs. Leatha Massey brought the 60's to life. Students recently finished reading the novel *Leon's Story* about a man growing up in the rural south in a sharecropping family and then later marching during the Civil Rights Movement.

Mrs. Massey (dressed in full retro 60's apparel that included bell bottoms and afro) shared her experiences of growing up in a sharecropping family in Pompano Beach, Florida. As a third-grader Mrs. Massey often had to get up at 3 a.m. to go work in the fields to help her family before going to school. She never complained because she feared her punishment which was not being allowed to go to school. At an early age, Mrs. Massey realized her love for school, and she hated the thought of missing out. During this time, education was not a priority for many young African-Americans. Surviving was what mattered, and school had to come second. When she did go to school, Mrs. Massey remembered going to a segregated school and having to use second hand books from the all-white school.

It was working in the fields picking peppers, strawberries, and beans that she realized she wanted more for her life. She realized her only "out" was to pursue a college education. However, Mrs. Massey had a problem...she had no way to pay for a college education. Being resourceful, she used her talent and trumpet which led to her being awarded a full music scholarship to Morris Brown College in Atlanta, Georgia. By doing so, she became the first female to receive this honor. Mrs. Massey could have never imagined that by performing the "Star Spangled Banner" (the only song she had memorized) would lead to her having the opportunity to become part of the Civil Rights Movement.

It was in Atlanta, Georgia, where Mrs. Massey had the honor of meeting Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. This was during a time before cell phones, the Internet, and social media existed. When Dr. King came to town, word spread quickly that he would be marching. She retells how Dr. King, Andrew Young, and others would come to the student center and ask students if they wanted to march. It wasn't hard to get the college students involved. It was a cause they believed strongly in (and the free food at the end of the march didn't hurt either). Reflecting back on the peaceful protests, Mrs. Massey remembers walking with locked arms and singing, "We Shall Overcome". She even had the honor of playing in the marching band when Dr. King's plane landed on the tarmac in Atlanta after he had been released from the Birmingham Jail.

Mrs. Massey recalls how the students knew that he was working for them. She remembers shaking his hand, hugging him, laughing with him, and thanking him. Mrs. Massey pointed out that it is because of Dr. King's hard work and determination that she is able to look throughout Camden Middle School and see such a diverse mix of students from different creeds and races.

Some of the comments students' made about Mrs. Massey's presentation included:

"I learned that even if times are bad you should never exchange the time you had."

"Something I learned was don't hold on to the past and forgive."

"I learned that she [Mrs. Massey] had some good looking clothes and that no matter the color that they were all fighting for equality."

"Something I learned is that Leon's Story was very similar to Mrs. Massey's story. The part I enjoyed that most is the style they wore back then in the 60's."

"Something I learned from the guest speaker is work toward success."

Mrs. Walker and all her students thank Mrs. Massey for her time and wonderful presentation she shared. This was such an awesome opportunity for students to be able to make a real life connection to the novel they read.

