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**Schools**

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**Authors deliver message of acceptance**

By Eliav Appelbaum [eliav@theacorn.com](mailto:eliav@theacorn.com)



Photos by IRIS SMOOT/Acorn Newspapers **SO MANY QUESTIONS—** Author and actress Kim Wayans takes questions from students at Big Springs Elementary School during a visit with husband, Kevin Knotts, to discuss the couple's Amy Hodgepodge children's book series on Feb. 10. The series focuses on the struggles and triumphs of a young girl from a multiracial family.

Big Springs Elementary School students probably have no idea that Kim Wayans starred in the '90s TV series "In Living Color."

After all, none had even been born when the hit sketch comedy featuring future megastars Jim Carrey and Jennifer Lopez aired its last episode in 1994.

But on Tuesday, Big Springs students enjoyed Wayans' sense of humor via another medium—a children's book called "All Mixed Up," written with her husband, Kevin Knotts.

The couple read samples from the book and answered questions during two school assemblies.

"We love interacting with the kids," Wayans said, before adding with a laugh, "and I get to utilize my skills as a performer."

"All Mixed Up" is the latest in the couple's series of books that focus on a character nicknamed Amy Hodgepodge, a racially diverse fourth-grader trying to cope with being different at a new school.

Wayans and Knotts have 38 nieces and nephews, many of whom are multiracial. They wanted to write children's books that their family and others could relate to, Knotts said.



**ANIMATED—**Co-authors Kevin Knotts and Kim Wayans read to students

Big Springs usually selects one author to speak to students every year.

This year, PTA member Debbie Samel-Hannani helped bring Wayans and Knotts to the school.

"They showed a different side of writing that's fun," Radloff said.

Big Springs students learned a lot from the special assembly.

"They taught us that if you have an idea about a book, you shouldn't have to say no, you can't do it," said Frankie Allegra, 9, a fourth-grader. "You just try writing and see if it works. . . . There's no age limit to write."

Allison Sulka, a 10-year-old fourthgrader, appreciated the message of acceptance.

"I liked how they explained how people are different and that it's good to be different," Allison said.

Kaelyn Wolkensdorfer, 9, thought the lessons on bullying were important, and said Amy had realistic reactions to being singled out. Jessica Santos, 9, also in fourth grade, enjoyed how Amy's family is "from everywhere."

This week, Wayans and Knotts will publish "The Secret's Out," the fifth book in the Amy Hodgepodge series. The couple are bouncing around ideas for a potential Amy Hodgepodge cartoon or even a second children's book series.

The couple offered Big Springs students valuable tips on writing good fiction.

"The most important thing to do is to read a lot," Knotts said. "Tell a story that's half true and half a lie."

"To be a good writer, you need to observe, you need to listen and watch people interacting in your life," said Wayans, who started writing short stories in fourth grade. "I write from my own life. The characters are people I really know, but I change little things here and there to conceal their identities."

For more information, visit [www.amyhodgepodge.com](http://www.amyhodgepodge.com).