

Chinese immersion camp introduces Tulsa-area children to language, 'incredible culture' of coming superpower

By NOUR HABIB World Staff Writer | Posted: Friday, July 3, 2015 12:00 am

About 40 area children in monkey costumes, hats, painted faces and colorful masks performed Chinese musicals for an audience of their parents at OU-Tulsa on Thursday afternoon.

The performances by the second- through sixth-grade students — which included dancing, singing and a Tai Chi demonstration — were a culmination of a three-week Chinese language immersion camp called StarTalk.

The program, sponsored by the Confucius Institute and the East Asia Institute at the University of Oklahoma, is a presidential initiative to address critical-need languages such as Chinese, Arabic and Russian. It is funded through grants from the U.S. Department of Defense and the National Security Agency.

This is the fourth year StarTalk has been held at OU-Tulsa, and the theme at this camp was “The Monkey King: East Meets West,” a Chinese parable. Students studied their performances through Beijing Opera, led by Ghaffar Pourazar, an international expert on Chinese opera.

Before the performances, Pourazar described China’s diversity to the audience.

“There are 56 nationalities in China,” he said, explaining that each has its own traditions, way of dress and language.

And in turn, that means there are more than 300 forms of opera in the country.

“It is an incredible, incredible culture,” Pourazar said before introducing a group of students who performed a musical called “Havoc in Heaven.”

Rex Burnett, director of the StarTalk program and the East Asia Institute, as well as associate director of the Confucius Institute, said the program is a good way to introduce children to the Chinese language and culture early in their academic lives.



Chinese Musical

Youth take part in a Chinese opera during the final performance by the StarTalk Chinese language immersion camp at OU-Tulsa, on Thursday.

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Youngsters take part in a Chinese opera Thursday by the StarTalk Chinese immersion camp at OU-Tulsa, aimed at disparity in Chinese, Russian and Arabic speakers. MATT BARNARD/Tulsa World

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Andrea Eger has worked at the Tulsa World since 1999 and has covered public education since 2000. She has completed intensive professional development in education reporting with the Hechinger Institute on Education and the Media at Teachers College, Columbia University, and the Education Writers Association.

Over the years, her work has garnered her three first place awards in investigative individual reporting from the Society of Professional Journalists – Oklahoma Pro Chapter and numerous first place awards in education reporting from SPJ and the Great Plains Journalism Awards, an eight state competition.

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Amber Chabowski (left) and Abigail Chow take part in a Chinese opera during the final performance by the StarTalk Chinese language immersion camp at OU-Tulsa in Tulsa, Okla., on Thursday, July 2, 2015. The program is designed to address a nationwide lack of speakers of Chinese, Arabic and Russian. MATT BARNARD/Tulsa World



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Haley Espinosa, 8, takes part in a Tai Chi demonstration during the final performance by the StarTalk Chinese language immersion camp at OU-Tulsa in Tulsa, Okla., on Thursday, July 2, 2015. The program is designed to address a nationwide lack of speakers of Chinese, Arabic and Russian. MATT BARNARD/Tulsa World



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A youngster handles Peking opera masks during the final performance by the StarTalk Chinese language immersion camp at OU-Tulsa in Tulsa, Okla., on Thursday, July 2, 2015. The program is designed to address a nationwide lack of speakers of Chinese, Arabic and Russian. MATT BARNARD/Tulsa World



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