

PASSPORT TO THE WORLD

The students scramble out of the classrooms at Creswell's Creslane Elementary School early Friday afternoon and take off in search of South Africa, Nicaragua, Russia, China and six other countries.



Themi Myeni, a South African graduate student at the University, prepares to play a traditional African game with elementary students as they grow restless from the day of school at Creslane in Creswell.

They've each been given a passport to the world and have three hours to visit three different countries. The young students never actually leave the school to discover these places. They don't have to.

On this day the world comes to them, courtesy of the innovative International Cultural Service Program, an eight-year old scholarship program at the University that provides partial tuition to international students who provide a first-hand knowledge of their country.

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Themi Myeni, a black South African, looks at the group of 20 white children and asks them to move in close around her. When they do, she asks if they know where her country is located.

"It's on the very bottom of Africa," responds one girl.

"Yes," Myeni says, "And what do you know about South Africa?"

"It's where black people come from," a boy says.

"It's where elephants live," another adds.

Myeni laughs and tells them about schools and day-care centers in the country she lived in before coming to Eugene in July. She will return when she finishes her master's degree in industrial relations.

Myeni then sings them a song in Xhosa, one of three native African languages she speaks. She also teaches them two games that children their age play half a world away.

Although she hadn't planned to talk politics with such young children, the conversation drifts in that direction as she begins to tell of her family.

Story by Daralyn Trappe Photos by Sean Poston

Her brother was killed, she says, by white police officers. He was wearing a shirt with Nelson Mandela's picture on it at the time.

"Do you know who Nelson Mandela is?" she asks.

Myeni is pleasantly surprised to find that most do.

"He's like Martin Luther King was here," several respond.

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A few doors away, Carlos Castro, an undergraduate sociology major at the University, stands in front of a small group of second-, third- and fourth-graders with a tape of traditional music from his native Nicaragua.

Castro plays it for them, but the tape recorder he has been given to use leaves a bit to be desired. The singer's voice comes out at about half-speed at first and then goes so fast it sounds like The Chipmunks singing in Spanish.

But by then the kids have figured out that Spanish is the language of Nicaragua, and they want to hear him speak it.

Castro is stumped, however, when they ask him to translate the words "mall" and "Nintendo."

Finally, a girl stands up and points to the Pledge of Allegiance, printed on a huge piece of



Nicaraguan Carlos Castro, a sociology major at the University, shares a Mesquito Indian story with a group of children.

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(Above) University student Philippe Kouzmine writes in Russian the names of third-grader Anthony Bell and fourth-grader Lauren Hager. (Right) University student Yongzhong Lian translates elementary students' names into Chinese.