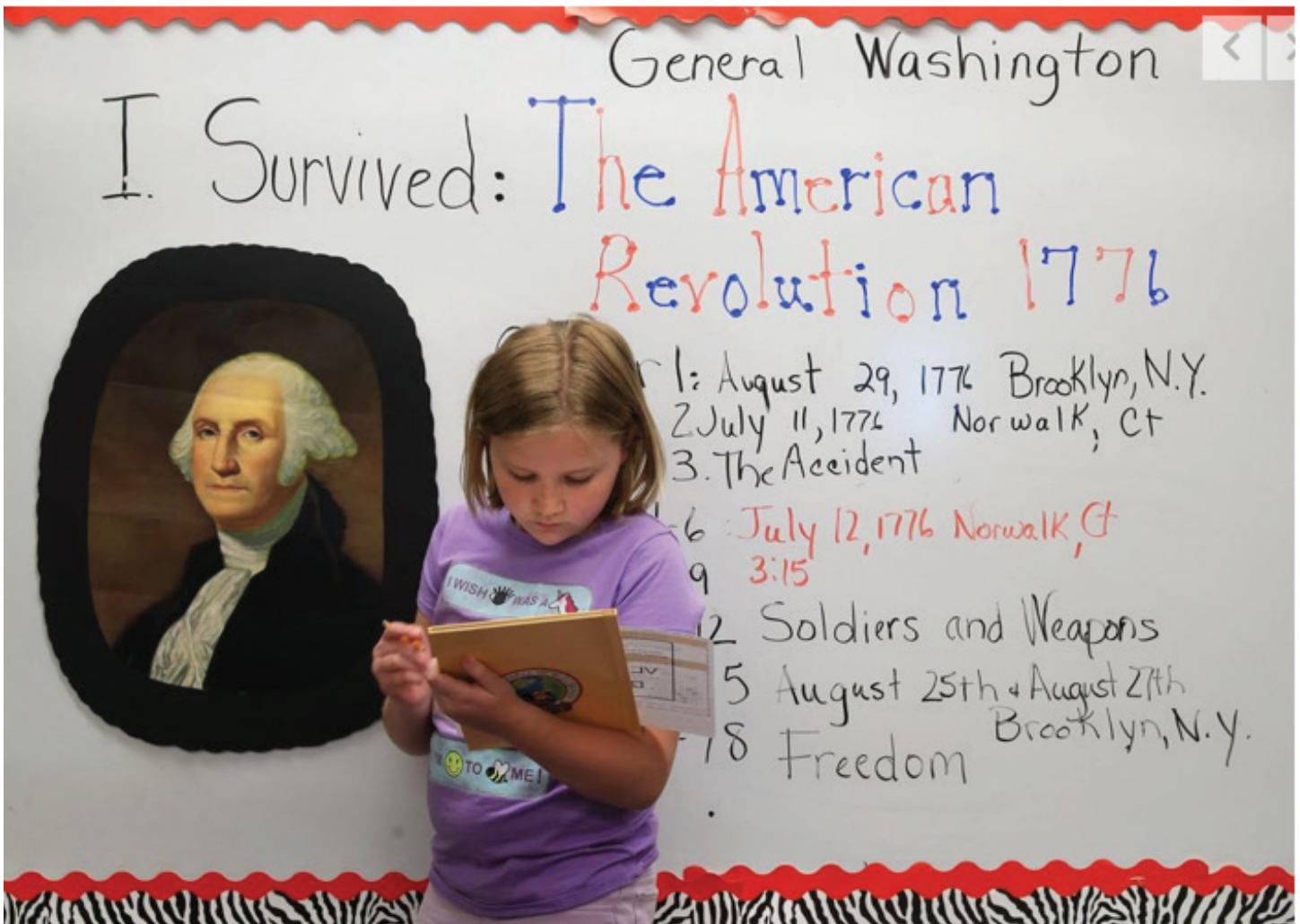




Heartland Christian School fourth-grader Delaney Kuper works to decode a message during an escape room-themed activity, based on the book "I Survived the American Revolution" by Lauren Tarshis, inside the school library on Thursday. STAFF PHOTO/JOE SHEARER

TOP STORY

Heartland Christian librarian creates escape room-themed activity for students

BY TIM JOHNSON

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Heartland Christian School librarian Cyndi Merriam brought history to life Thursday by replicating some of the places in the book "I Survived the American Revolution," by Lauren Tarshis.

Students in third through sixth grade read the book, which traces the path of colonial-era 11-year-old Nathaniel Knox, who runs away from home, stows away on a ship and, when it lands, finds himself in the middle of the Battle of Brooklyn. He makes it to Gen. George Washington's tent on the battlefield and

eventually finds his way back home.

"The kids loved the story," Merriam said. "We went over the weapons, and we went over the uniforms."

Nate has lost his parents and lives with his Uncle Storch, who is wealthy and owns two slaves: Elizabeth and her son, Theo. He likes to play with Theo and, when Theo throws a stick that hits Uncle Storch, he takes the blame to protect his playmate from possibly being sold.

The son of a sailor, Nate boards a ship to get away, and his adventure begins.

Merriam set up a series of locations that tie in with the book and designed tasks for students to do at each one that focused on plot, characters, vocabulary and a secret message.

"It's so important to get kids interested in reading," she said.

The first station was a table overlaid with a fancy tablecloth and set with china dishes to represent Uncle

Storch's dining room.

Next was a ship Merriam created with a cardboard hull, portholes encircled by construction paper, a helm of various materials and a cloth sail. The ship's hull encased two of the library's rows of bookshelves.

The third (although different groups of students visited the sites in different orders) was a desk with a canopy, colonial flag, uniform and hat to represent Washington's tent.

The fourth station was a plot back at Nate's uncle's house with flowers and a cherry tree where Nate and Theo used to play.

Fifth- and sixth-grade students said their favorite stations were the ship and the cherry tree.

Tarshis, who worked at Scholastic, wrote the book after the company got requests for books that would get children interested in history, Merriam said. The book became a bestseller and led to a series of "I Survived the..." books.



Heartland Christian School students work in groups to decode a message during an escape room-themed activity, based on the book "I Survived the American Revolution" by Lauren Tarshis, inside the school library on Thursday, May 16, 2019. STAFF PHOTO/JOE SHEARER