



WHAT TO DO?: Louie the lizard (Jennifer Dubois), along with Penelope the banana tree (NyAnn Hurst) and Smart Alec (Lynne Streeter), ask students how their problem should be resolved.

CARL JUSTE / Herald Staff

'Lizard lessons' help teach kids to get along

By JON O'NEILL
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What can a bunch of kids learn from a lizard?

Plenty, if the lizard is named Louie. Nearly 100 students at Coconut Grove Elementary got an eyeful of Louie Monday and, amid the laughter and singing, learned something about resolving disputes without fighting.

Louie is not a real lizard, but rather a creation of the Coconut Grove Playhouse's Education Department. Every year, Louie and his friends tour 50 to 60 Dade schools with *Lizard Lessons*, using theater to teach kids something about life.

This year, Louie is really Jennifer Dubois, an apprentice at the playhouse.

"The kids really seem to like him a lot," she said as she pulled on her reptile disguise. "At one school, a 5-year-old wanted to take me to lunch."

Louie is pretty happy, for a cold-blooded critter. He sings and dances and tells stories to the kids, who sing along and

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SHARON ALLEN,
kindergarten teacher

laugh out loud at Louie's humongous tail.

"The kids really paid attention," said Christina Robertson, a prekindergarten teacher at Coconut Grove Elementary, 3351 Matilda St. "It was pretty quiet in there."

This year, the story centers around Louie's buddy Penelope the banana tree, played by NyAnn Hurst. Penelope has a run-in with Smart Alec, a cat played by Lynne Streeter. Alec steals a banana and then begins arguing with the tree, finally threatening to scratch Penelope

with its claws.

Enter Louie. Before attempting to break up the fight, Louie turns to the audience — made up of prekindergartners, kindergartners and first-graders — and asks them what to do.

"Let them fight?" says one kid with a shrug.

"Noooooooo," the other students retort.

"Get them to be friends," one youngster finally calls out.

So Louie sets out to do just that, trying to talk peace with the two combatants. It proves a stubborn task, and a few kids in the audience tried to assist Louie by yelling out suggestions.

Louie finally decides to leave the pair alone to work out their own conflict. Tired of arguing, they call a truce and become friends. The kids applaud when they hug.

"We talk a lot about conflict resolution," said kindergarten teacher Sharon Allen. "At this



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RAPT AUDIENCE: Chaille Stovall, 5, watches the play at Coconut Grove Elementary on Monday.

age, I think kids are kinder and more empathetic, so we can teach them to get along with each other."

Robertson, the prekindergarten

teacher, said the message of the play was a good one.

"I find a lot of times, the kids will work things out on their own," she said.