



WOMEN CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

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Kate Campbell Stevenson asked her audience to dare to dream.

She gave them hope that they, too, can achieve their goals by portraying the lives of five women in history that overcame adversities to affect the lives of many Americans.

"I always say to my audience if Bessie Coleman can learn to fly, you have no excuse not to make your dreams come true," said Stevenson, a former teacher.

Coleman, a female black aviator, was portrayed along with Lucy Stone, Sacagawea, Abigail Adams and Silver Spring native Rachel Carson in Stevenson's one-woman performance, ***Women: Back to the Future***, Friday at Blake High School.

Stevenson's presentation featured dramatic acting, singing and educating the audience about the lives of the women.

"As an educator, I saw how little there were of women in history books," said Stevenson, 47, of Silver Spring. "I wanted to rewrite women back into history books."

Audience members were impressed.

"Bessie Coleman seemed empowering," said Janelle Richards, a ninth-grader at Blake.

"She believed in what she wanted to be," said Ashley Willis, also a ninth-grader at Blake, about Coleman.

Several people said they were inspired by Coleman's story of courage and Rachel Carson's tale of a not-so-dynamic woman speaking before Congress to change the way Americans treated the environment.

"The show was very inspirational, especially the part on Rachel Carson. I was fighting hard not to cry," said June Cayne, a teacher at Kemp Mill Elementary School. "I feel like I'm taking something away from this that I'll use."

Stevenson has been performing this show since 1996. She created the performance as a way to address her children and their peers' apprehension to fully achieving their dreams.

"We need positive role models. We need to show our young people it's not necessarily the celebrities that are the best role models," Stevenson said. "Making a difference is not necessarily making a million dollars, but changing people's lives."

She selected women in her performance that would inspire and empower her audience.

"Women pull incredible inspiration from the performance, [because] women for the most part buy into society's subtle biases," Stevenson said. "[The performance is a] wake-up call especially to women to catch yourself and don't do that."

And several women said they felt empowered by her performance.

"[Afterwards] you really feel like 'hey, I can do it,' " Cayne said.

"It shows what the best of us can be," said Kathy McAdams of Silver Spring. "At the end ,you don't think you're nothing."

"I've seen it before, came back, and brought four eighth-graders and two friends," said Janice Moschetto, a teacher at White Oak Middle School. "I wanted my child to see it. I think it's a really good show for all young girls to see."

Others were inspired by Stevenson's ability to perform so many roles while remaining on the stage between acts. She changed her costumes or reapplied make-up in front of the crowd, while talking to the audience about the backgrounds of the women.

"How do I become a Kate Stevenson?" Cayne said. "She's an inspiration to all women."

"I sing and also like to act. She's given me thought on what I can become," said Anais Rodriguez, a ninth-grader at Blake who aspires to be an actress and singer like Stevenson.

A couple of men said they gained a deeper appreciation for women after seeing Stevenson's performance.

"For me, I always liked strong women...for the boys it's good to see strong women [too]," said Tim McAdams of Silver Spring. "It's good to show women who make contributions that are sometimes overlooked."

McAdams used the example of Abigail Adams' letters to her husband, John Adams, urging him to declare America an independent country.

"He would not have been what he was without her," McAdams said. "She was a successful businesswoman even without him."

And boys see their mothers in the strength and courage of the women Stevenson portrays.

"Young boys today appreciate it [the performance] more because they know how hard their mom works," Stevenson said. "[The boys say], 'I want my mom to get paid as much as anybody else doing the same job.' "

But Stevenson said the show was for everybody to learn to never give up on your dreams.

"You never stop living. There's always opportunity to make life better," Stevenson said.