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New variety show puts Kammerer students on stage

Students in an after-school club at Kammerer Middle will play starring roles in a new monthly variety show that promotes humane education and animal safety.

Students from Kammerer's Critter Club will perform skits in the Animal Gambill Show, an educational variety show that uses songs, dance, trivia, and other creative outlets to promote kindness and responsibility with animals. The variety show is the brainchild of Shannon Gambill, a Louisville author and child therapist. The first show will be held at 10 a.m. on **Sat., Feb. 14**, at St. Matthew's Elementary.

For at least eight years, Kammerer Middle Functional Mental Disability (FMD) teacher **Krista Wheatley** has taken several of her FMD students to the Animal Care Society on Westport Road. Her students learn to care for animals, and her students and the animals enjoy the mutual soothing and bonding of their interaction. Earlier this year, Wheatley began the Critter Club, an after-school club that meets each Wednesday to promote humane education. The club is open to all Kammerer students and has swelled to 50 members.

"The main goal is to prevent abuse and to try to teach students how to be kind and safe and respectful with pets," Wheatley says. "I'm just really proud of what they're doing."

Wheatley met Gambill about five years ago, and now Wheatley serves on the board for

Animal Gambill's Critter Crusade, a nonprofit organization that educates children about animals so that they can help animals, interact safely with them, and be responsible for their own pets.

Gambill challenges students to become a Critter Crusader, which refers to someone who is kind, safe, and responsible with animals. The variety show is ideal for students ages 5 through 12 and will include fun, interactive lessons about animal health issues, exercise, playtime, and social interaction. Participants will receive raffle tickets, which will be used to award prizes or to become involved in such activities as a trivia game.

"Even if they don't have a pet, they can learn about being safe with pets," Gambill says. "They're going to do it in a way that's going to be fun, educational, and empowering."

Since October, Wheatley's students have developed skits and activities for the upcoming variety show, which is free and open to all students and parents/guardians. Among the participating student groups, one will perform a skit about a family that arrives at a shelter looking for a new pet and another group will perform a skit about a missing pet.

Wheatley's Critter Club students care deeply about animals and want to help educate others about what they have learned. Studies indicate that children who are cruel to animals often exhibit cruelty toward their peers. At a typical meeting, the club discusses how to prevent animal cruelty, dog fighting, and how to rescue abandoned animals.

This year, Wheatley's students have rescued abandoned animals or reported possible animal abuse to appropriate authorities.

"We're trying to create a kinder world," Wheatley says.

The Animal Gambill Show will be held at St. Matthew's Elementary on the second Saturday of each month through June. The format provides education and entertainment and special visits from the animals on which Gambill's book characters are based. For more information about Gambill and Critter Crusade or to learn how Gambill could visit your school or classroom, visit <http://www.crittercrusade.org/>.

[Back to top](#)