

# Mitchell: 'Cowboy Code' is about human decency

By Sheri Gourd sgourd@tahlequahdailypress.com  
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**Marshall Mitchell's Cowboy Music for Kids featured "Marshall's Big Book" and life lessons taken from the "Cowboy Code." Mitchell performed his original music Thursday in the Tahlequah Public Library.**

The community had a chance Thursday to be entertained while learning about the "Cowboy Code." Marshall Mitchell brought his Cowboy Music for Kids - Marshall's Big Book program to the Tahlequah Daily Press and taught life lessons through songs and stories.

"I've always liked this place," Mitchell said of the Carnegie Room. "Besides the history, this room is alive with sound."

His first couple of songs introduced the crowd of about 30 people to the things cowboys - and cowboy girls - need on the trail and what they wear.

"I never play as loud as I dress," Mitchell announced.

He brought out items cowboys need and talked about their uses and about the materials of which they were made. Audience members got to handle each item, including a leather boot and leather chaps that were worn by one of his daughters. Mitchell explained the different types of leather and where leather comes from.

He discussed steel while passing out spurs, a belt buckle, a horseshoe, and a bit, which he described as a "steering wheel for a horse." He went through the many practical uses of a bandanna, as well as the types of rope and why a cowboy needs drinking water.

"What is a cowboy or cowboy girl? It's not so much the dress; it's an attitude, how we act," said Mitchell. "What you give, you're going to get."

He motioned to the large hanging photo near him, describing the ranch at which he would like to wind up living. He talked about the road - literally and figuratively - it would take to get there. "Build your dream of where you want to end up," he told the library youth. "Listen to your parents, because they've been down more roads than you."

From there, Mitchell opened his "Big Book" and went into the parts of the "Cowboy Code": Honesty, respect, integrity, responsibility, courage, perseverance, and wisdom. Book pages featured a part of the code, what it means, and an animal character. He would then tell a quick story featuring the animal in a situation dealing with one part of the Cowboy Code.

For his song about respect, Mitchell taught the crowd to yodel by using the "knock, knock" joke featuring the "little old lady who." Integrity is doing the right thing even when no one is looking, Mitchell explained. "Be as honest with everybody else as we are with ourselves," he said. Making good choices were part of the segment about responsibility. "The difference between a smile and a frown is a decision," he said.

Mitchell encouraged the children to have courage, and to stand up for what they know is right. "Every day, you're building your foundation to a better you," said Mitchell, bringing in the Summer Reading Program theme of "Building a Better World."

Diverting from his original songs, Mitchell performed a couple of alphabet songs and got the group up to do "The Hokey Pokey." To keep the energy and everyone up, he next went into his "Cowtown Boogie."

Then came the story of Connie Coyote using perseverance - one that had the kids literally howling along with the song. All of this led to wisdom, which Mitchell described as "knowledge put into action." "Parents can teach you all of these things, but it's up to you to make choices," Mitchell said to the kids. "Do you want to be average, or do you want to be extraordinary?"

He asked the kids to repeat after him as he said, "I like me." "When you like yourself, the whole world is better and brighter," he said. "When mom and dad tell you stuff, put in your brain. You might need it down the road.

"Marshall's Big Book" did not have a "the end," he pointed out. "Every day is a beginning. You decide where you're going to be," he said. He closed up the program with a version of "Happy Trails." Mitchell said he tries every day to make a difference. "How do you build a better world? By building better folks," he said. "I want to be a better example. I have to be what I say."

Having grown up in clubs, Mitchell now faces his toughest crowds: children. "I love kids because they aren't afraid to call you out if you say something that contradicts something else you said. You have to stay on the straight and narrow," he said.

Mitchell was raised in Texas, has two daughters, and lives in Northwest Arkansas. He got his first guitar for his 13th birthday, and began writing his own songs soon afterward. "The songs and stories I write and perform are based on my dreams and life experiences from the traveling troubadour lifestyle," said Mitchell on his website.

In addition to the Marshall's Big Book program he performed at the Tahlequah library, Mitchell has other Cowboy Music for Kids shows: Rodeo Show and Western Expansion. He also appears as Captain Marshall, performing songs he wrote for the Illinois River Watershed Partnership Clean Water Raingers Program.

This year, he has 118 performances scheduled, and has performed for over 53,000 people since he began tracking audience numbers in 2007. Mitchell is a registered artist with the Arkansas Arts Council - Arts On Tour Program.