

All about India

Longtime teacher tells students about world's largest democracy

BY ERIC PETERSON
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In the wake of President Bush's renewed commitment to the cause of democracy worldwide, students at Armstrong School in Hoffman Estates spent a day learning more about the world's largest democracy — India.

Rashmi Gandhi, a faculty member at Schaumburg's Churchill School, was invited to present a program that focused on the architecture, music, dancing, clothing and art of her native land.

"My kids went to school here 29 years ago, so I have a bond with Armstrong School," Gandhi told students.

Naseem Alibhai, a language teacher at Armstrong, said the school is located in a strongly multicultural community — with a strong representation from Asian nations.

Students focus their studies each month on a different continent. Asia's turn came up, making Gandhi's visit a natural.

She taught students the Indian greeting "namaste" (pronounced na-ma-stay) and explained the meaning of the Indian flag. The orange stripe across the top stands for bravery, the white in the center for peace and the green at the bottom for fertility and prosperity. The wheel in the middle of the flag is the "wheel of law."

While there are about 200 spoken languages in India, 18 of



Fourth-grader Isha Jog dances for fellow students at Armstrong School in Hoffman Estates during a presentation on India.

them are officially recognized. About 30 percent of the population can speak English.

Gandhi's slide presentation showed everything from India's most important buildings to scenes from her own wedding 38 years ago. She also explained the symbolic ceremony in which the brothers in a family vow to look after their sisters for the rest of their lives.

Principal Patricia Piech lent herself as a model for Gandhi's demonstration of how six yards of material can be wrapped in different styles as the traditional Indian sari.

Two students at the school, 9-year-old Isha Jog and her 7-year-old brother, Ishan, demonstrated different styles of Indian dance. While Ishan performed some modern dance styles,



Indian dance from her mother for the past four years.

Gandhi brought a collection of musical instruments which she demonstrated, from the guitar-like sitar made from a pumpkin to the tambourine and various percussion instruments.

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