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**CONTACT:** Lauren Creiman, (909) 833-9853

## **Bonita Unified Middle School Theater Performances Receive Awards, Accolades**

**SAN DIMAS/LA VERNE** – The Ramona Middle School Drama Society is celebrating another season of outstanding performances, earning awards and accolades at prestigious theater festivals across California in February, then returning home to stage its showstopping annual musical, “Shrek Jr.” for three performances, including a sold-out, standing-room-only show on the final night.

A touring group of 24 Ramona Drama Society students traveled to Sacramento for the 2025 Junior Theatre Festival – the world’s biggest theatre festival – featuring drama programs from across the United States, as well as Canada, New Zealand, South Korea, China, and Australia. Ramona Drama Society members performed a 15-minute section from their 2024 production of “Annie, Jr.,” earning an exclusive Excellence in Ensemble award, presented to only five groups in the 55-team field.

Not to be outdone, a group of 11 Ramona Drama Society students attended the Junior Thespian Festival at the Orange County School of the Arts, with seven students competing in the Solo Musical or Duet Musical categories. Ramona eighth-graders Lillian Krane and Tia Kaldas received “Superior” rankings and Judges Choice Awards in the Duet Musical category, while eighth-grader Peyton Lokar received a “Superior” ranking in the Solo Musical category.

“I am so proud of the Ramona Drama Society. Our students bring talent, enthusiasm, creativity, and dedication to every project they initiate,” Ramona theater director Colin Campbell said. “Many of our students are aspiring thespians and take on leadership positions in the drama society. This focus and determination serve the students so well in public performances and competitions.”

The theater festivals are more than just competitions, Campbell said; they are opportunities for students to meet peers from around the world and learn more about their craft. At the Junior Thespian Festival, the touring group participated in workshops on British accents, special effects, masking, costume design, and resume building. At the Junior Theatre Festival, students received tips and advice from Broadway professionals on acting, singing, and dancing.

Eighth-grader Noah Craven is the Ramona Drama Society President, running weekly meetings and serving as Campbell’s right-hand man. Craven attended both drama festivals, enjoying the competitions and camaraderie. He was cast in the title role of “Shrek Jr.,” which required elaborate makeup and costuming.

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“For ‘Shrek’ I wore a lot of green make-up and a fat suit. It was a lot of fun and challenging,” Craven said. “I love drama because of all the people you meet and friends you make. Mr. Campbell is an amazing teacher and inspires us all. I would recommend the Ramona Drama Society to anyone who loves to perform or be involved in theater.”

Craven also joined the Drama Society on their New York City Broadway Adventure field trip in February 2024, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for students to see Broadway shows, participate in workshops, tour one of the top 10 schools represented by Broadway professionals, and more. Campbell is currently putting together the 2026 Spring break trip, expecting to once again take more than 100 students along for the journey.

The Ramona Drama Society now gears up for its end-of-year Student Showcase extravaganza, to be held Monday, June 2 at the Bonita Center for the Arts. The showcase will feature two group numbers and several one-act plays and will be followed by Ramona’s Junior Thespian Induction and Award Ceremony, which recognizes students for their involvement in the Drama Society throughout the year.

Looking to expand his student’s learning experience, Campbell this year opened the year-round Drama elective to include seventh-graders, a class traditionally offered to just eighth-graders. For the 2025-26 school year, eighth-graders will have the opportunity to take an Advanced Drama course, which will include an option to stage a standalone student-run musical production.

“We want to give our students every opportunity to explore their craft and have fun,” Campbell said. “We had more than 100 students on the cast and crew for ‘Shrek Jr.’, which really speaks to the success of our program. We also receive considerable help from our parents and community members, who are so supportive and integral to our success. It really is a team and family effort. We could not do this without them.”

### PHOTOS:

**BUSD\_RAMONA\_DRAMA1:** Ramona Middle School Drama Society touring group members are all smiles after earning an “Excellence in Ensemble” award for performing a scene from “Annie, Jr.” at the Junior Theatre Festival in Sacramento, held in February. The Drama Society competed with drama programs from across the United States, as well as Canada, New Zealand, South Korea, China, and Australia.

**BUSD\_RAMONA\_DRAMA2:** Ramona Middle School eighth-grader and Drama Society president Noah Craven flexes his muscles as he prepares to play the title character in the Drama Society presentation of “Shrek, Jr.” in March. The musical was a resounding success at Ramona, with three performances, including a sold-out, standing-room-only show on the final night.

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