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Rick Atkinson, right, talks with students at the Lake George Jr./Sr. High School on Dec. 12. Also pictured is Lake George Jr./Sr. High School Librarian Sarah Olson. Alex Portal

A lesson they'll never forget

Lake George Jr./Sr. students take notes from Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Rick Atkinson

LAKE GEORGE – Students at Lake George Junior and Senior High School were the first to partake in the commemorative experience on Dec. 12. Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and historical author Rick Atkinson spent time speaking with the seventh-, eighth-, and 11th-grade classes.

“An event like this speaks volumes of our partnership with the community, but also this opportunity for our kids is once-in-a-lifetime,” said Lake George Jr./Sr. High School Principal Francis Coccozza.

“They’re so excited just to actually meet the author that we’ve been talking about, they’ve been reading his books, talking about him in classes and learning the content in classes.”

As part of their summer reading projects, seventh-grade students read a young-reader version of Atkinson’s book, “The British are Coming,” while eighth graders chose between two of his World War II books, “D-Day,” or “Battle of the Bulge.” Each of those were also edited for younger readers. The 11th-grade class read excerpts from Atkinson’s newest release, “The Fate of the Day,” the second in his American Revolution trilogy.

The students were able to ask Atkinson questions about his writing process, how he chooses a topic to tackle, what drives him in his work, as well as what historical figure from the Revolution he would most like to meet.

“Those are the things that kids will remember. The things that can spark something in a student of like, ‘oh, maybe I could do this,’” Lake George Jr./Sr. High School librarian Sarah Olson said. “And that, that author would spend that time with them, valuing that time with them, I think is also something that’s meaningful to students.”

For the record, Atkinson’s response to that last question was that he’d love to grab a beer with Benjamin Franklin.

The students at Lake George seemed to leave an impression on Atkinson as well. He said he was impressed at how well the students’ questions seemed to indicate their reflection on the material.

“I thought their questions were really sophisticated, really on point,” he said. “They were attentive and way more well-behaved than I would have been in this circumstance,” he added with a chuckle.

Although Atkinson said he’s more accustomed to speaking at universities and history conferences, he enjoyed engaging with younger readers.

“It keeps you on your toes; it keeps you young,” he said. “What I do is so solitary it’s good to be around people and especially good to be around young people.”

Following his trip back to school, Atkinson took in the sights of Lake George, including the Henry Knox landing reenactment. Then he mingled with other community members at a special reception at the Holiday Inn Resort, before returning to the High School auditorium for a town hall-style discussion with the public.



Atkinson signs copies of his book, "The Fate of the Day," the second in his American Revolution trilogy, during a reception at the Holiday In Resort on Dec. 12.
Alex Portal