



## Arts & Entertainment

# Film, television star stops by Anoka Middle School for the Arts

By [Sue Austreng](#)

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As a 10-year-old boy, Jeremy Sumpter and his pals used to run wild around the neighborhood where he grew up in Kentucky. He'd lead them in high jinks of all sorts, jumping over fences, swinging from trees, racing down the alley ...

His mom called the gang "Peter Pan and the lost boys."

Little did she know, three years later Sumpter would star as the title role in the 2003 live-action film, "Peter Pan."

"I don't know – maybe I was born to play the part, maybe it was kismet. I don't know, but it's done wonders for me and I'm just so blessed to have that opportunity," Sumpter said last week while visiting theater students at Anoka Middle School for the Arts.



*Jalen Ahlquist (left) plays Peter Pan in AMSA's production of the classic play. Here he sword fights with Jeremy Sumpter, who played Peter Pan in the 2003 live-action film and visited the middle school Dec. 12. Photo by Sue Austreng*

The girls at Anoka Middle School seemed thrilled by Sumpter's visit, squealing as they rushed to snap selfies with him. One of the teachers said that some even broke out in tears of star-struck joy when they heard he was coming to the school.

In addition to starring in “Peter Pan,” Sumpter, now 26 and living in California, has played featured roles in the films “Into the Storm” and “Soul Surfer” and in the television series “Friday Night Lights.” The actor also appeared alongside Matthew McConaughey in the 2001 psychological thriller “Frailty” and auditioned for roles in “Hunger Games: Mockingjay – Part 1.”

It was Peter Pan, however, who launched him into stardom.

“I was one of 500,000 people auditioning for one role. I just feel really blessed to get it,” Sumpter said.

Sumpter’s visit to Anoka Middle School coincides with the school’s production of “Peter Pan” – staged in commemoration of the 110th anniversary of that iconic story and the 10th anniversary of AMSA Theater.

“We’re just very fortunate that Jeremy was available and that he was eager to be here and share what he knows about theater and television,” said Jefferson Fietek, the middle school’s theater director, who has known Sumpter’s agent, Mark Robert, for years. All it took was a phone call from Fietek to Robert and Sumpter’s visit was on the calendar.

Sumpter met with theater students in the school auditorium the morning of Dec. 12. Later that evening, he served as special guest during a Peter Pan-themed reception and autograph-signing event staged before the middle school’s 7:30 p.m. performance of the play.

During his morning visit, Sumpter described to students the “hard work and heartbreak” involved in acting and the great rewards that can result.

“It’s hard to break into this industry. It’s a lot of hard work, a lot of heartbreak – but don’t let that get you beat down. Follow your heart and go for it,” he said.

The actor then described to students his experience rehearsing and filming “Peter Pan” in London, France and Australia.

“This was the coolest role ever. I got to sword fight, kiss Wendy, have a crush on Tinkerbell. It was the best role ever,” Sumpter told students.

It took one full year to shoot the movie, Sumpter said, which presented some challenge to the crew since the then-12-year-old boy grew 11 inches during that year.

“They had to keep rebuilding the window so I looked the same size in every shot. They had Capt. Hook stand on a box in our scenes together, otherwise it looked like I was growing taller than he was,” Sumpter said, laughing at the memory of his ill-timed growth spurt.

Making the film also meant lots of hard work training, learning to sword fight and how to maneuver, move and “fly” while suspended from a wire.

The young actor also learned a tough lesson from the English policemen, he said.

“We – Jason Isaacs, who played Capt. Hook, and I – were in Hyde Park rehearsing a sword fight. Well, the English cops saw us and thought there was a man out there trying to kill a kid. They put a stop to that pretty quick. You don’t rehearse a sword fight in Hyde Park. Not a good idea,” Sumpter said.

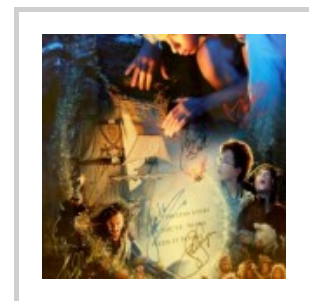
Sumpter also told the theater students what it’s like to work with a camera, the difference between television work and movies, and encouraged them to “follow your heart, do the work and never give up.”

“It’s about passion. It’s about chasing your dream,” he said. “You’ll hear a lot of ‘nos’ and not many ‘yeses’ but just know the Lord will put you through the ringer and when you get through it you appreciate it that much more, respect it that much more. Just work your way up. Follow your heart and go for it.”

Next, Sumpter appears on screen in “Take Down” directed by Jim Gillespie and scheduled for release next summer.



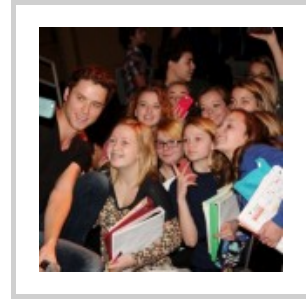
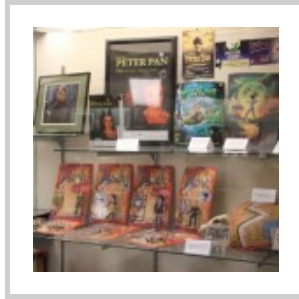
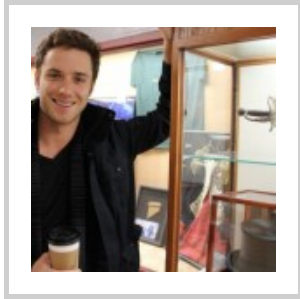
*Jalen Ahlquist (left) plays Peter Pan in AMSA's production of the classic play. Here*



*Included in the "110 Years of Peter Pan" exhibit is this autographed copy of the*

he sword fights with Jeremy Sumpter, who played Peter Pan in the 2003 live-action film and visited the middle school Dec. 12. Photo by Sue Austreng

2003 Peter Pan film, starring Jeremy Sumpter. Photo by Sue Austreng



After visiting with students in the auditorium, Jeremy Sumpter stops by the exhibit "110 Years of Peter Pan." Here, he poses next to the sword he used when filming the 2003 live-action film in which he played the title role. Photo by Sue Austreng

The Peter Pan exhibit – featuring items from Jefferson Fietek's personal Peter Pan collection – includes costumes, props, autographs and artifacts from all the major stage and film productions of "Peter Pan" and its spin-offs. Photo by Sue Austreng

Girls rushed to the stage, eager to snap selfies with Jeremy Sumpter, star of the 2003 live-action Peter Pan film. Photo by Sue Austreng

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