

Students get glimpse of their charity

NICOLE DIONNE
Times staff reporter

LINCOLN — Middle and high school students in Lincoln got a chance Thursday to see what their book drive will accomplish.

The students gathered in the high school auditorium with the founder of 'Africa Reads,' Racheal Adriko Spillberg, and watched a video showing books — perhaps the books they collected — being delivered to villages in Uganda by bicycle.

So far, the Lincoln students have donated more than 600 books to the project and are still collecting more.

Spillberg began the project last year when she was preparing for a trip to Uganda in December.

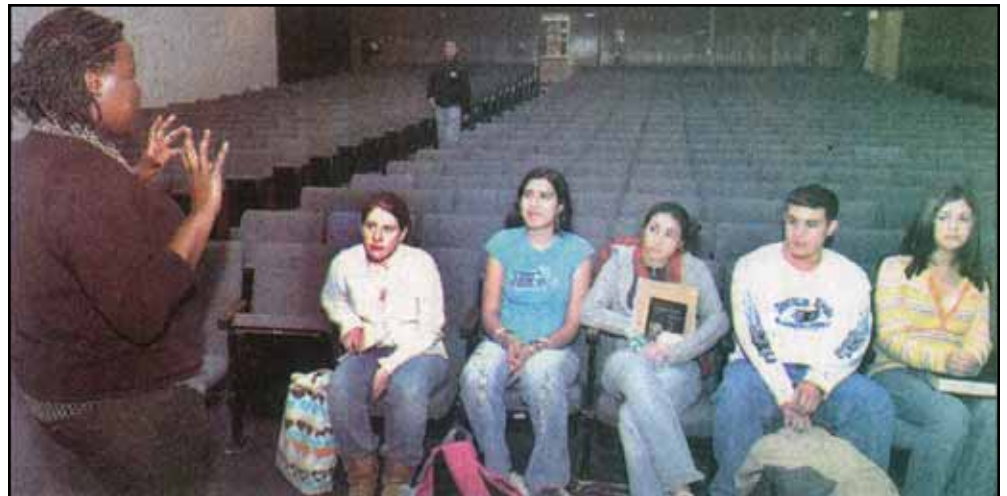
She was born in Uganda, but went to Fisher College and Suffolk University, both in Boston. She teaches elementary school at the Martin Luther King Jr. School in Cambridge, Mass.

Before her trip, Spillberg saw a box of 20 books at the school marked "free." When no one took them, Spillberg decided to take them home to her village of Arua in Uganda.

Uganda recently set up a Universal Primary Education program that allows all children to go to school for free. But the schools often are still short of books.

Ugandan students are taught English in school because Uganda was formerly a British colony.

"In Africa, they know that literacy and education is the way out of poverty,"



'Africa Reads' founder Racheal Adriko Spillberg chats with Lincoln students, from left Emily Dziobek, Geena Sundaram, Chritina Lopez, Chris Esper and Amanda Murphy.

Spillberg told the Lincoln students. "Increased literacy will help Uganda move out of the Third World."

After Spillberg decided to bring books to her home village, she went to her kindergarten class and asked them to bring in books. Her goal was 50 books. She ended up with 1,000.

Spillberg and her husband, Rich Spillberg, packed 400 of the books into suitcases and Spillberg's company agreed to ship the rest. When they arrived in Uganda, Spillberg and the village elders realized that they needed a way to get the books to the villages.

It was decided that a bicycle was the most economical and reliable way to navigate the dusty thoroughfares of rural Uganda. Before she knew it, one person had donated a bicycle, another a basket to put on the

bike, another a string to attach the basket and Erima Dickens, a village elder, had volunteered his time to deliver the books from village to village.

When the day came for the mobile bicycle library to hit the road, the villages held celebrations as children eagerly waited in line for their chance to receive a book.

Dickens now travels by bicycle to five different villages and two schools each week, bringing books to the area's children.

Since last year, Spillberg has collected 10,000 books, but she is still looking for help getting them shipped to Uganda.

For more information on the Africa Reads project or to contact Spillberg, visit www.africareads.com.