“Can I see your gun?”

Holyoke Police officer Larry Drake said this is a common question he has received from the young minds at Holyoke Elementary School.

Drake has spent the last four weeks reading books to classes at the elementary school.

As he said in March when he first began working in Holyoke, he wants to become a part of the community and get to know people. Community policing is the way he puts it. One way he is doing this is a little outreach program at the school.

Drake visits about twice a week. So far, he has been reading to students in kindergarten, first and second grades.

Holyoke police officer Larry Drake reads Guji Guji to the second graders in Allie Billings’ class Tuesday, Oct. 9. Drake visits the school twice a week to read to students and to teach them that police officers aren’t scary and they are there to help people.

—Enterprise photo

After coordinating the project with elementary principal Kyle Stumpf and getting the OK from HPD chief Doug Bergstrom, Drake grabbed some books and began reading.

Not wanting to take too much time from the teachers, Drake spends roughly 20 minutes in the classroom when he is there.

Last Tuesday, Drake read to the students in Allie Billings' second-grade classroom. After reading Guji Guji, Drake passed out some fun material for the students to take home.

Reading isn't the only focus of the visits. He also wants to assure students that the police aren't scary and they are approachable.

He also reiterates that it is important to call 911 when there is an emergency.

"So far, so good," Drake said of the outreach program.

At the end of his visit he also presents the students with a junior officer oath. The oath reads, "I promise to follow the rules of our teacher at school, and the rules my parents have at home. I promise to respect my friends, my family and myself. I promise to help make Holyoke Elementary a safer and better place."

Drake got the idea from one of his instructors at Community College of Aurora's police academy. The 26-year veteran encouraged Drake throughout his training and emphasized the

community policing aspect.

Drake has already been speaking with elementary counselor Sharon Jones about presenting a bullying workshop to some of the older students. Drake also said a D.A.R.E. program could be a possibility in the future.

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