

Lincoln School Foundation

Lincoln Journal – March 3, 2011

LSF Grant Offers a Fun Way to Read!

Cathlin O'Reilly wanted to find a new way to inspire her third graders to practice reading. She desired something fun and different, but needed a program that would also incorporate the comprehension and fluency requirements of the third grade curriculum. And when she discovered Reader's Theater, she knew she had hit upon the right thing: reading for a purpose! So this third grade teacher at Smith School made application to the Lincoln School Foundation in early 2010 and received approval for a grant called Reader's Theater, a program that is now fully integrated into third grade studies.

Ms. O'Reilly's goals are to develop confidence and reading expertise in her young students by using the theater aspect to bring in more creativity. "Some students are shy, some have speech or language issues and reading out loud is a way to overcome these inhibitions," she explains. So, along with her third grade teacher colleagues, Liz Stanziola and Scot Dexter, Cathlin developed scripts for the children to read out loud in front of their peers or any audience. Some of the scripts produced fall in line with the "social" curriculum underway at the school: topics like bullying, welcoming new students into the school and dealing with the peer pressure to be "cool." Other scripts tie into their science or social studies curriculum such as the required Massachusetts studies, and in particular a reading about the Salem witch trials. Other readings are about folk tales or their Greek mythology studies. The scripts run five to ten minutes in length and, ultimately, the goal is to make reading more fun and to better understand the concepts of literacy and fluency.

Initially, Reader's Theater has been set up as a four-day project for students that includes: (1) reading the scripts as a class (2) choosing groups or teams to read with (3) choosing a part for each team member and (4) performing the scripts in front of the class. Ms. O'Reilly stresses to her students that they are not to memorize their script - it is not meant to be presented as a play - but to know the material well enough to stand up in front of an audience and read it confidently and correctly.

The overall plan includes using the school camera to videotape the readings and then posting them to the class website for parents to view and enjoy. This fall, many parents attended the readings in the classroom, as well as the Smith School assembly in

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November where the third graders "performed." The feedback from all grades was so positive that they were invited into the Kindergarten classes for readings and discussions.

Thus resulted an unforeseen bonus: older students mentoring younger ones. Reader's Theater will run throughout the school year at different times. And, as Cathlin O'Reilly proudly states, "Reader's Theater is a wonderful instructional technique to use in the classroom because not only do students have fun, they are practicing their reading skills in a meaningful and authentic way. Having an audience to show off their fluent reading is great motivation!"

The Lincoln School Foundation's annual grant cycle for 2011 is now underway. Grant applications are being accepted from K-8 teachers until Wednesday, March 16th at noon. Decisions on 2011 grants will be announced by the LSF board in mid-April. LSF grants help energize teachers, provide technology and training for the classroom, and enable curriculum enrichment beyond state standards. Students all around Lincoln can tell you about grant programs they have experienced - from literacy, reading and technology to fitness, math and music.

The LSF was created in 1988 as a local education fund intended to provide financial resources without replacing tax-based support for schools. Its leadership works closely with school principals and administration to ensure that the programs it supports have a promising future in the school system. There are many wonderful examples of successful programs funded initially by the LSF that are now financed by the School District or the PTA. The LSF provides a valuable opportunity to the Lincoln school communities: to experiment with new ideas, teaching methods and tools. And that is the LSF mission: advancing education through innovation.

Last year, with \$50,000 raised from donations, the LSF funded over 20 grants to the Lincoln and Hanscom campuses. This year, with new grant applications arriving weekly, the LSF continues its appeal to Lincoln residents to reach this \$50,000 goal again. If you have donated, the LSF extends a thank you! If not, please consider mailing a donation check to LSF, PO Box 256, Lincoln, MA 01773 or donating online at lincolnschoolfoundation.org. Looking forward to another great year of grants and enhanced curriculum benefits in 2011! Let's make Lincoln schools the best they can be - for our children, our town and our future.