



## Pilgrims Become Pertinent for Lake Geneva Students

*Local Teacher Team Uses Grant to Bring American History Alive in the Classroom*

November 18, 2010 (HOUSTON) For English Language Learners, as well as students from high-poverty situations, Pilgrims and the first Thanksgiving hold little significance. But a teaching team from Eastview Elementary School wanted to make these topics springboards for deepening knowledge and achieving grade-level standards. So they went to the source this summer, on a [Teacher Fellowship grant](#) through the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, to explore Plimoth Plantation's Living History Museum, the *Mayflower* and additional historical sites throughout New England.

"The focus of our fifth grade social studies curriculum and reading themes are early American history, yet none of us had explored the rich history integral to the curriculum we teach," explained Michelle Barnes, team leader. "We all have a passion for learning new strategies that enable us to motivate our students and create life-long learners, and we were eager to have strong American history expertise to make us more effective teachers. So this grant was a chance of a lifetime!"



During the last week in June, Michelle Barnes, Kristin Fish, Terri Lightheart and Tami Martin (a.k.a. the "Fifth Grade Patriots") journeyed to the roots of American history, visiting Boston, Plymouth, Salem, and Cape Cod. While touring and speaking to experts, the teachers created multi-media presentations so students could visualize historical events, artifacts, and places. They also collected replicas, costumes, and games in order for students to make meaningful connections to history. A fellowship highlight was participating in an individualized workshop at Paul Revere's house to learn ways primary sources can enhance reading, writing, and social studies skills. Students followed their teachers on a [blog](#) the team populated with photos, videos and commentaries.

"Plimoth Plantation was an exceptional experience," said Lightheart.

"The people who role played the various people who lived there brought history to life for us and gave us great ideas on how we can role play for our students in our classrooms. It also gave us a true accounting of how the Native Americans and Pilgrims lived. There is not a text book around that could make such an impact on us."

Back in the classroom, students are building on their teachers' experiences as they engage in a year-long, multi-media project about American history. Additionally, the "Fifth Grade Patriots" developed

simulations where students experience life as a Pilgrim through authentic food, games, costumes, chores, and period education experiences. A new Historical Fiction writing project is supplemented by a Wiki the team created.

“This is my first year teaching fifth grade,” explained Barnes. “This fellowship allowed me to immerse myself in the curriculum so now, not only do I have rich background knowledge, but I’m excited to share all I have learned with my students. My passion for teaching early American history has sparked their interest and made it more meaningful for them. They are constantly asking me, ‘Is it time for social studies yet?’”

The Eastview Elementary School teachers represent [43 teachers from around the state](#) who pursued a Fund for Teachers grant through Wisconsin Department of Instruction’s [Schools of Recognition](#). Any teacher employed at one of these schools and meeting additional eligibility requirements is invited to [apply online](#) for a 2011 fellowship grant.

*Fund for Teachers is a national, donor-supported organization celebrating its tenth year of awarding teachers the chance to pursue learning opportunities that have the greatest impact on themselves, their students and their communities. Over the course of a decade, Fund for Teachers has invested more than \$14 million in educators who, through their own life-long learning, transform classroom experiences for students. For more information, visit [fundforteachers.org](http://fundforteachers.org), or view teacher testimonials and photos at [facebook.com/fundforteachers](https://facebook.com/fundforteachers).*

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Photo Captions: 1) Eastview Elementary’s “Fifth Grade Patriot” team stands before the accurate replica of the original *Mayflower* moored at State Pier in Plymouth, MA. 2) Terri Lightheart, Tami Martin and Michelle Barnes, enter Plimoth Plantation, a living museum in Plymouth, MA, that depicts the original settlement of the Plymouth Colony.