

ODYSSEY



Volume 8
Spring Issue 2012

A PUBLICATION OF FUND FOR TEACHERS



Heather's mode of transportation once in Morocco.



Following the path trod by pilgrims since the 12th century.



Amid a parade of pilgrims near Uterga, Spain.



One village wall's inscription directs pilgrims on their way.

The Journey of Heroes

The Odyssey, *The Alchemist* and a Fund for Teachers fellowship: Each represents challenges, triumphs and life-lessons; all comprise Heather Wade Green's "Hero's Journey" curriculum developed after walking El Camino de Santiago in 2008.

Following in the footsteps of Paulo Coelho, who authored *The Alchemist* after his own pilgrimage down El Camino, Heather trekked 500 miles across Spain and into the town of Santiago de Compostela before boarding a ship to culminate her journey in Morocco and the Sahara Desert. She designed this fellowship to help students explore the value of personal initiative and perseverance.

"When I taught in the Bronx, my students from the projects lacked hope and couldn't envision rising above their situation. I now teach at a nationally-ranked high school in San Francisco. These students face extremely bright futures, but can also benefit from

learned optimism and goal-setting skills. Finding and following one's way is a universal quest, so I created a curriculum addressing life's journey based on my fellowship walking Spain's ancient path," explained Heather. "To encourage students' perseverance, we also study heroes in *The Alchemist*, *The Road Not Taken*, *Siddhartha* and *The Odyssey*."

"I wanted my students to experience their own odyssey."

Heather's personal challenges also inform the curriculum. An extended battle with Lyme disease prevented her from attending high school. Instead, Heather studied with tutors in hospital rooms and earned a scholarship to Boston College. She eventually recovered to later finish seventh in an Iron Man Triathlon.

After gaining inspiration from literary heroes and their teacher, students draw

maps depicting the courses of their lives. They begin by writing their eulogy and work back toward present day, contemplating potential milestones and steps required to become the hero of their own journey. Heather concludes the curriculum by sharing photos from her fellowship and stories that eerily mirror those in *The Alchemist*.

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"There is only one way to learn," the alchemist answered. "It's through action. Everything you need to know you have learned through your journey."
Paulo Coelho, *The Alchemist*

Thousands of exceptional preK-12 educators design journeys for knowledge, experiential learning, and inspiration using Fund for Teachers grants. This edition of *Odyssey* reflects on a few of those journeys – the paths teachers pursue and the action they initiate back in their classrooms.



2000 Post Oak Boulevard, Suite 100
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713-296-6127 or 800-681-2667
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Our Mission

Fund for Teachers enriches the personal and professional growth of teachers by recognizing and supporting them as they identify and pursue opportunities around the globe that will have the greatest impact on their practice, the academic lives of their students and their school communities.



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From the Executive Director

Welcome to this edition of the *Odyssey*. By definition, an “odyssey” represents an intellectual or spiritual quest – an experience synonymous with Fund for Teachers fellowships. The word derives its meaning from Homer’s Odysseus, a skilled warrior and leader who displayed outstanding wisdom, eloquence, resourcefulness, courage and endurance. That sounds like a teacher to me.

I recently gathered with more than 100 of these skilled leaders in Boston for a Fellow event hosted by BPE. The evening included a gallery of materials, curriculum and videos produced as a result of FFT fellowships. That same week, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced the RESPECT Project, a national conversation led by classroom teachers to help reform teaching. (RESPECT; **Recognizing Educational Success, Professional Excellence and Collaborative Teaching**. Duncan said, “Our goal is to work with teachers and principals in rebuilding their profession and to elevate the teacher voice in federal, state and local education policy. Our larger goal is to make teaching not only America’s most important profession, but also America’s most respected profession.”



Dottie Engler, BPE director of special projects and FFT board member, Karen Kovach Webb, and Dr. Carol Johnson, Boston Public Schools superintendent, at a February event honoring Boston Fellows.

Fund for Teachers welcomes and applauds this expanded effort. As we prepare to award our 5000th Fellow, we celebrate these goals that continue to guide our work. We strive to honor the value of preK-12 grade classroom teachers by providing monetary support for their self-directed learning and development. Some teachers choose traditional methods of learning; others pursue more innovative outlets. Each paves their own road. The teacher, by vocation and passion, then shares and expands on that learning in their school communities. We all benefit from the journey.

Fund for Teachers continues a steady expansion. This year we added state-wide programs in Louisiana, Alabama and Mississippi and broadened our Texas reach to include teachers throughout the state’s Panhandle region. We’re also pleased to announce a new partnership with the San Francisco Education Foundation. Collaborating with New Visions for Public Schools’ YouPD.org site, we launched a city-wide pilot program offering New York City public high school teachers the opportunity to define their own learning with FFT grants.

To better share our Fellows’ stories, we revamped our website with innovations that include clear links to videos, interviews, blogs and classroom experiences. The content is as rich as the stories themselves, and the navigation crisp. I invite you to log onto and explore fundforteachers.org.

I am challenged and pleased to be on this FFT odyssey with all of you. Our journey continues.

Karen Kovach Webb
Executive Director



Working with a visually-impaired student at the Markeaton School in Derby, England.



Bidding farewell to Paula Bress (2006 Boston Fellow) in the London train station.

Connecting the Dots

There is power in dots. More specifically, six dots raised in various arrangements. By modifying the French military's code for communicating at night on the battlefield, 18-year old Louis Braille invented the single most important pathway to education for the visually-impaired. Almost 200 years later, Gloria Moyer designed her FFT fellowship to follow the Louis Braille Trail to enrich her life's work teaching visually-impaired students at Chicago's James Otis Elementary.

"My mother temporarily lost her vision when I was five," explained Gloria. "I'm one of those people who always wanted to be a teacher, so when I enrolled at Northern Illinois University, I naturally gravitated toward a degree in visually-impaired education."

Three decades later, Gloria's principal casually mentioned a new teacher grant program in Chicago called Fund for Teachers. "I jumped on the idea, deciding Louis Braille was now going to do something for me, as well as my students," she said.

In preparation for her departure, colleagues in the small world of visually-impaired education surfaced to help. A Welsh school teacher from a school similar to Gloria's connected her with England's director of Braille literacy. An additional European peer informed Gloria that a Boston teacher

at the Perkins School for the Blind was pursuing the same path – also with a Fund for Teachers grant. They unknowingly booked the same flight to begin their Louis Braille odysseys. For Gloria, the Trail started at Braille's childhood home in Coupvray, France, and led to England, the first country to adopt Braille as a language. There, she volunteered at a summer camp for visually-impaired children near Lancaster; met with administrators at the Royal National Institute of the Blind in London; and toured Europe's

largest Braille production facility in Peterborough.

"Interacting with international experts and European colleagues gave me the kick I needed to pursue my national Braille certification. Now, I was going to do something for Louis Braille," Gloria said. For the next three years, she completed coursework through the National Institute for the Blind, eventually submitting a 35-page Braille book she produced. Last December, the Library of Congress notified Gloria that she can now officially transcribe literary

"Interacting with international experts and European colleagues gave me the kick I needed to pursue my national Braille certification."

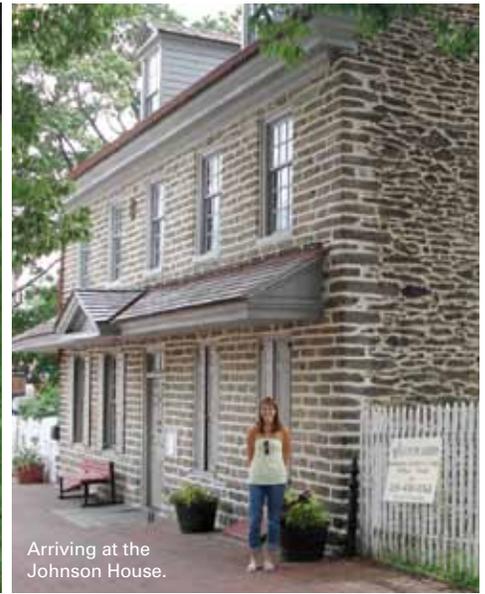


Proudly displaying her Braille Transcriber certificate from the Library of Congress.

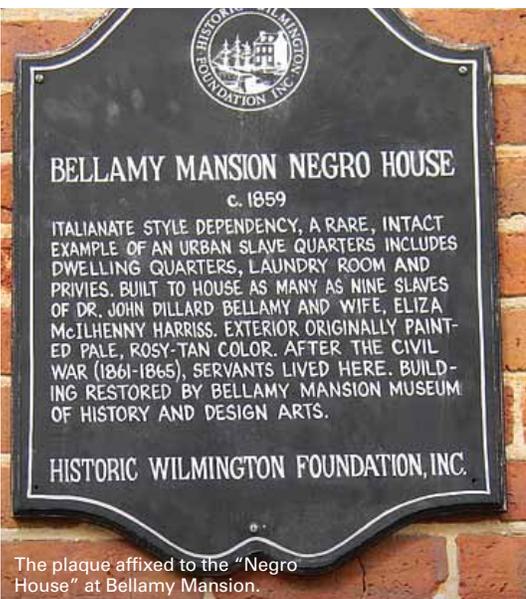
books in Braille for visually-impaired people across the country.

Gloria credits this fellowship with bringing her life-long dreams into focus. "When I entered Braille's home and touched his things, I felt validated in my daily work with students," said Gloria. "Following the Braille Trail reminded me that my work is worthwhile and, more importantly, that Louis Braille's work continues to give the gift of literacy to those who cannot see."

Boarding the Underground Railroad at Ft. Mose in St. Augustine, FL.



Arriving at the Johnson House.



The plaque affixed to the "Negro House" at Bellamy Mansion.



Reaching Harriet Tubman's home in Auburn, NY.

Retracing the Flight to Freedom

"No, the Underground Railroad is not an actual railroad that goes underground taking slaves to freedom."

Students' misconception of the Underground Railroad surprised Crystal O'Brien, especially after completing an entire curriculum on the subject at Thompson Magnet Elementary School in Vero Beach, FL. Crystal decided to follow slaves' path to freedom during the summer of 2010, beginning in Florida and culminating in Portland, ME, to add authenticity to facts students knew, but failed to grasp.

"In preparation for my eight-state trek, I spent hours researching the Underground Railroad and marking my map with museums, plantations and walking tours. Then, for two weeks, I moved from former safe houses to

historical landmarks, gathering pictures and primary sources that typified a fugitive slave's experience," said Crystal.

Moving north from Fort Mose, America's first free African settlement, Crystal toured the Bellamy Plantation's slaves quarters in Wilmington, NC; visited the Johnson House in Charles City, VA, where runaway slaves hid in the attic from bounty hunters; heard recordings of escaped slaves taped in the 1930s and archived at the Underground Railroad Museum at the Belmont Mansion in Philadelphia; and sat on the porch of Harriet Tubman's home in Auburn, NY. Using photographs, maps and artifacts gathered at each stop, she later led her students in the re-enactment of a slave's possible flight to freedom. Students also used Crystal's experiences

as a starting point for creative writing exercises that explored what they would have done to assist slaves along the Underground Railroad.

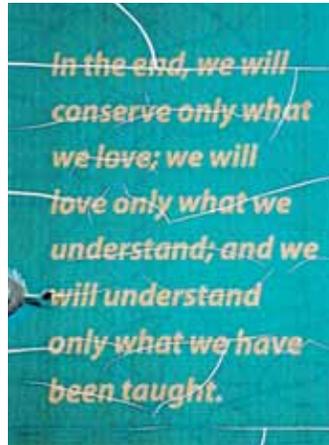
"Personally, I learned so much about the bravery displayed by people, black and white," said Crystal. "Professionally, my fellowship proved how much more teachers are capable of sharing with students when allowed real-life learning experiences. Students mildly interested in the topic before my fellowship showed great enthusiasm after I returned from actually "going" on the Underground Railroad. When a teacher brings passion and knowledge into the classroom, students are just more motivated to learn."



Taking in a vista at Yellowstone National Park.



Juliana outside the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center.



Life is a Highway

The National Register of Historic Places lists approximately 2,500 cultural resources across the country. Juliana James, teacher at St. Anthony Park Elementary in St. Paul, MN, typically introduced her fourth grade students to a few of them during geography lessons; but a book's one-dimensional coverage of America's greatest landmarks left students unimpressed. With a rental car and an FFT grant, Juliana embarked on a 5,000 mile "Great American Road Trip" to deepen students' appreciation of our country's identity embedded in geography.

"I spent six weeks exploring our country out on the open road," said Juliana. "Interstates, corn fields, coffee shops, small towns – and National Historic Landmarks along the way – filled my writer's workshop journal with questions, wonderings, drawings and reflections. I discovered hidden treasures throughout the Midwest and West that, once discovered, strengthen one's appreciation of America. I brought that magic back to the classroom through primary resources students could touch, feel and read."

Last fall, Juliana created a geography/creative writing unit to encourage students and their families to experience their own road trips. She invited students to get behind the wheel, figuratively, and gave them actual road maps as guides. "You can go ANYWHERE. Plot it out! What roads would you take and why? Passing by historic landmarks? Traveling for education or entertainment, or both?" she prodded. Incorporating longitude, latitude, the National Register of Historic Places, students charted their courses from sea to shining sea. At the end of their road trips, students created travel brochures describing their adventures.

"Planned journeys through life are determined by everyday choices. Too many times, we make split-second decisions -- like zooming past historic landmarks signs -- that limit our knowledge and growth," said the 26-year teaching veteran. "By scouring historical sites in 11 states, I give students a taste for adventure beyond state borders and model the value of slowing down to take it all in."

For stories about these and other Fund for Teachers road warriors, visit fundforteachers.org.

Jennifer Brouhard (2011 Oakland) visited museums and ports in Barcelona, Madrid, Liverpool and London to deepen her understanding of the European influence on the Transatlantic Slave Trade and engage students in history and critical thinking.



David tours the German Audi facility.

Shelly Smith and David Shields (2011 Oklahoma) observed engineering practices at German auto manufacturers to create an International Automotive unit that equips students with current technology skills.

Naomi Brown (2007 Houston) followed the migratory behaviors of hummingbirds in the Huachuca Mountains of southeastern Arizona under the direction of the University of Arizona's Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology to create a school nature center where students can monitor seasonal migrations.



Christina writing at Henry David Thoreau's desk at Walden Pond.

Christina Martini (2008 New York City) drove across America accumulating experiences and research at literary landmarks, such as Robert Frost's family farm and the John Steinbeck Collection at the University of Texas, to create a new elective entitled "New York Through Art and Literature."



Kate with her Masai guide after a nature walk.



The sun sets on the Serengeti.



Wildebeests migrating to Kenya's Masai Mara Reserve.



Kate observed large land mammals in diverse eco-systems.

The Search for Food, Water and Authentic Teaching

Kate Belfay plays the first five minutes of *The Lion King* when introducing the Serengeti's circle of life to biology students at Manhattan's Millennium High School. Afterwards, the cartoon characters come to life when she shows personal photos, journals and video clips from her 2011 fellowship following the migration of two million wildebeests from Tanzania to Kenya's Masai Mara Reserve.

"The more I studied wildebeests, the more I wanted my students to know about their 1,800-mile round trip search for food and water," said Kate. "Teaching the epic nature of this journey needed to be authentic, not taken from the Internet or a textbook. I designed an FFT grant to spend 21 days in Africa, observing its people, flora and large land mammals, and watching wildebeests – first thousands, and later millions – cross

the Mara River into the safety of greener pastures."

In addition to academic "a-ha" moments (why is a hyena's stool white?), Kate brought back equally as important observations concerning a fulfilled life.

"This fellowship gave me permission to be a student again, to look, learn and listen."

"My students quickly feel sorry for themselves and base personal satisfaction on the newest shoes or phones. But the Masai people feel lucky to have family, good friends, and a good story," said Kate. "If money was no object, I'd take my entire class back to Africa so my students could witness

the Masai people's appreciation for life and realize how much they already have to be grateful for at home in New York City."

In lieu of a transatlantic field trip, Kate staged a class debate over land conservation in the Masai Mara Reserve. Students represented politicians, farmers, ecologists, Masai warriors, urban businesspeople or tourist company owners to highlight the causes and effects of deforestation.

To Kate, the most valuable part of her experiences was assuming the role of a learner. "I didn't know what I didn't know," she said. "This fellowship gave me permission to be a student again, to look, learn and listen. In doing so, I discovered that teaching is not my job, rather it's who I am."

I AM A FUND FOR TEACHERS FELLOW

Name:

Siobhan Johnson

School:

O'Donnell Middle School –
Alief ISD, Houston, TX

Most Fulfilling Aspect of My Job:

Taking a “Whatever it Takes” approach to teaching. Because I work with struggling students with diverse cultures and learning abilities, I have the freedom to creatively reach each child where they are.

Favorite Teacher:

Mrs. Waldo. I struggled through middle school and, through her actions, Mrs. Waldo communicated that she believed in me. She talked with my parents, made sure I had what I needed, sat me in the front of the class and checked on me in other classes. I think that’s why I teach middle school now – I know how important a teacher can be during those tough years and I want to do for my students what Mrs. Waldo did for me.

I’m reading:

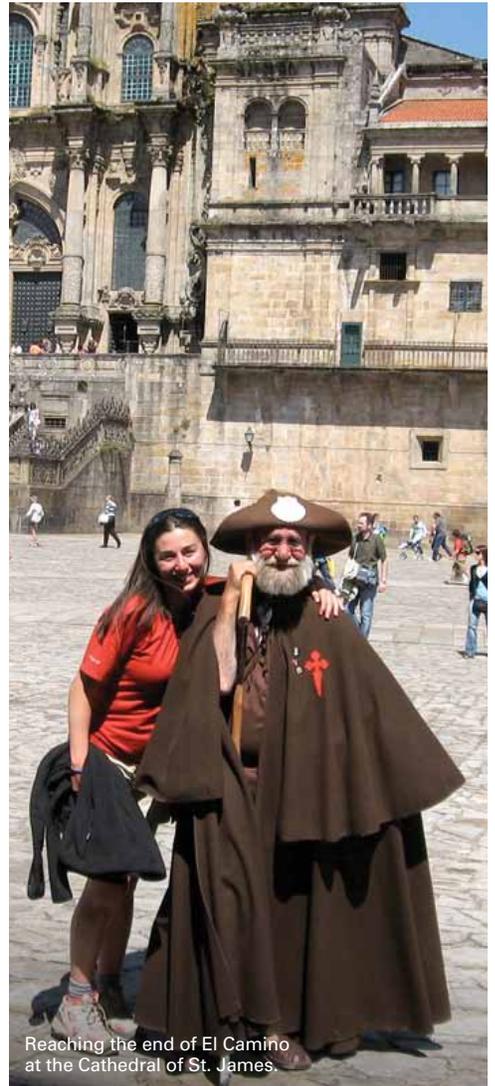
The Element: How Finding your Passion Changes Everything, by Sir Ken Robinson. I’m learning how to dissuade my students from fitting into a mold and, instead, find and align themselves with their passion to have a more fulfilled life.

Biggest Inspiration:

People who see a need and are the catalyst for change. Ordinary people make extraordinary differences in our world through simple actions, like refusing to sit in the back of the bus or believing in a scared middle school student.

My Take on School Reform:

I’m committed to playing a role in securing that every child receives a quality education. And I agree that we need more parental involvement and more engaged students. However, I also agree that we’re “Waiting for Superman” when we can all be super heroes. We can all impact the lives of students who go out later in life and change the world.



Reaching the end of El Camino at the Cathedral of St. James.

The Journey of Heroes

(Continued)

Last summer, the path of learning led to Nicaragua for 24 of Heather’s students when they accompanied her on a service learning project. “I wanted my students to experience their own odyssey,” said Heather. “As a teacher, I’m concerned about students’ growth and development; both benefitted greatly from helping people in the second-poorest country in the Western Hemisphere.”

Minneapolis Fellows Betsy May and Carolyn Serrano (2010) also chose the El Camino de Santiago as their fellowship destination. For more about their experiences, visit www.fundforteachers.org.

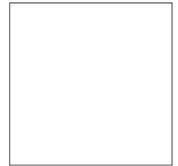
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Alumni Updates

Aaron Reedy (2008 Chicago) spoke at the annual TED Conference in Long Beach, CA, on teachers' ability to impact students. Aaron paddled a sea kayak the entire length of the Lower Mississippi River (during flood stages) to conduct scientific research and develop a river ecology unit on his fellowship.

Ahlene Shong (2011 Houston) hosted a school-wide "Prairie Exhibition" at Kolter Elementary, with fourth graders presenting research projects on a selected aspect of a North American prairie. On her fellowship, Ahlene explored Canada's Manitoba Tall Grass Prairie Preserve, Montana's Comertown Pothole Prairie Preserve and the Kansas Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve to bring the histories and cultures of prairies to life.

Alicia Carol (2006, 2010 Boston) spoke at the national Fulbright Conference, titled "Living in a Diverse, Crowded World." She presented the book she researched during her first FFT grant entitled *Malindi's Gift*, as a model of excellence in early childhood education and international education.

Los Angeles Fellows, led by **Lisa Ward** (2011) sponsored an application review event in January, providing input to teachers preparing to submit their first FFT grant proposal.



In December, 60 Houston Fellows gathered at The Parish School to connect and network. **Mitch Pengra** (2010), **Kristie Long** (2011) and **Natalie Sansom** (2007, 2011) hosted the event.

In March, **Denise Pedersen** (2011 Nebraska) presented to Nebraska's State Board of Education about her fellowship observing the peaceful co-existence of Christian Bantou and Muslim Fulani people in Cameroon, Africa.

Margret Atkinson (2011 Baton Rouge) brought Northwestern Middle School students to the Holocaust Museum Houston in February as part of a curriculum she developed after researching Europeans' resistance to intolerance during World War II.

Tamara Arroyo (2006 Oakland) directs Teach for America's Teacher Leadership Initiative.

Andrew Redmon (2011 Houston) created Grace Middle School's first Madrigal Feaste, an evening of Yuletide merriment at which fine arts students sang and performed a program fit for kings. Last summer, Andrew attended Medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque music festivals around England to better understand these particular styles and create student performances from this range of music.