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## **Fund for Teachers Announces Oklahoma's Plank Fellowship Award Winners**

*National non-profit also names 2009 Fellows to Travel This Summer*

May 5 – (Oklahoma City) Celebrating America's top teachers on National Teacher Day, Fund for Teachers and its local partners the Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence and the Tulsa Community Foundation channeled Ed McMahon today – walking into Melody Afill and Donna McChesney's classrooms at Yale Elementary School and naming them Oklahoma's Plank Fellowship Award winners.

Named for Fund for Teachers' Founder Raymond Plank, the Plank Fellowship Award is given annually to the teacher who made the most of a summer odyssey (which he/she designed and Fund for Teachers made possible) upon returning to the classroom.

Last summer, Afill and McChesney designed a fellowship that empowered them to recreate the adventures of the young Abernathy Boys in the early 1900s, traveling more than 9,000 miles and taking in major and minor cultural and political landmarks from Oklahoma to New York and across Wyoming and California, to inspire students to seek their own adventures. Back in their classrooms, the duo led their students in creating an ABC picture book about the Abernathy Boys to share with younger students, provided primary source documents collected on the journey to assist students in research, assisted students in their use of video and still photographs from the trip to create media projects to enter in the Oklahoma State Media Festival, created a teachers guide for available Abernathy literature, and spoke about their experiences at the Tulsa Historical Society and the State Superintendents Regional and State Professional Development Conference. They plan to author a children's book based on the boys' story using still photographs taken on the journey as illustrations.

"Since receiving our fellowship, we've focused on helping students internalize President Theodore Roosevelt's quote that begins the book Bud and Me: The True Story of the Abernathy Boys: "...far better it is to dare mighty things..." The Abernathys were ordinary boys who did extraordinary things: We are ordinary teachers who had extraordinary dreams; our students are ordinary children who have extraordinary futures ahead of them," said the teacher team.

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After witnessing the impact of the teachers' experiences gained from traveling cross-country, a colleague remarked, "As a high school science teacher, I felt a renewed sense of ambition to go back into my classroom with enthusiasm for my subject matter and to encourage my students to be lifelong learners. These teachers are a class act and exemplify what teachers can be and can do." One of their students added, "The only thing that would be better than these teachers receiving the grant and traveling across the country would have been if we all could have gone, too."

Fund for Teachers named Corey Pickering, Millennium High School in Manhattan, its national Plank Fellowship Award winner. Additional winners from the nonprofit's partner programs include: Kathy Clunis, Boston; Trey Thames, Houston; Cindy Coughlin and Sandra Collins, Expeditionary Learning Schools; Ziomara Perez and Megan Whitney, Chicago; Erin Goodling, San Francisco; Donna McSweeney and Lynn Talamini, Rural School and Community Trust; Robert Jeffers, Los Angeles; and Julie Anderson, Oakland.

Fund for Teachers also announced today its list of 2009 grant recipients. Descriptions of the new Fellows' upcoming odysseys, as well as how the Plank Fellowship Award winners implemented their 2008 fellowships are available at <http://www.fundforteachers.org/press.html>.

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Made possible by individual and corporate donors, Fund for Teachers has awarded more than \$12 million in grants to approximately 3,500 of America's top educators over the past nine years. Based in Houston, Fund for Teachers enriches the personal and professional growth of America's top teachers as they identify and pursue opportunities around the world that will have the greatest impact on themselves, their students and their communities. For more information on how you can make teachers' dreams a reality, visit [www.fundforteachers.org](http://www.fundforteachers.org).

Founded in 1985 by then-U.S. Sen. David L. Boren, the Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence is a nonprofit organization dedicated to recognizing and encouraging academic excellence in Oklahoma's public schools. Its programs include a televised academic awards program to recognize outstanding students and educators, a training and outreach service to public school foundations, a partnership with the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation to provide teacher training and electronic field trips to Oklahoma schools, a teacher scholarships program for professional development, and a mentoring initiative to promote the establishment and growth of school-based mentoring programs throughout the state.

Tulsa Community Foundation (TCF) was organized in 1998 by a group of esteemed business and civic leaders to be the recognized community institution that initiates, teaches and encourages personal and corporate charitable giving today to ensure that the philanthropic needs of eastern Oklahomans can be met for all generations. Through donor-created and nonprofit endowment accounts, TCF grants tens of millions of dollars each year to area charities.