



Educators Experience The Luck of the Irish Through Fund for Teachers Grants Summer Experiences Bring Ireland Alive For Their Students Across the U.S.

March 16, 2010 (HOUSTON) St. Patrick's Day brings out the green in all of us for one day a year, but for several teachers who spent their summers in Ireland on Fund for Teachers fellowships, Irish Eyes smile on them and their students year-round.

"Students are still excited when I pull out our artifacts from the Ireland trip and show them Oscar Wilde's home and Davey Jones' pub made famous by James Joyce," said Beatrice Hoxie, 2007 Fellow and teacher at Rogers High School in Tulsa, OK. With a team of teachers, she forged links between urban American high school students and the literature of Ireland by exploring the literary past, present, and future of Irish writers. "We talk about the state of vampires in literature as inspired by Bram Stoker. We read works by not just Wilde and Stoker, but also Yeats and Behan. The students feel a closer connection to these works of literature since I am able to share my journey that followed many of the same footsteps as Ireland's literary giants."

Another type of Giant brings a wee bit of the Green Isle to Mary Cody's students at Grew Elementary School in Boston. After her 2008 fellowship traveling across Northern Ireland and the Giant's Causeway to develop storytelling skills to enrich language intervention, Cody brings to life Tomie DePaola's retelling of the Irish legend Fin McCoul: The Giant of Knockmany Hill through primary sources she gathered there. "My students are wide-eyed as I display pictures of farm houses similar to those depicted in the story book," said Cody. "As we look at the globe and talk about the setting of the story, many questions arise like, 'How can I get to Ireland?' And 'Is the Giant's Causeway really real?' It's been wonderful to share this experience with my young students."

Bill Smiljanich, teacher at Chicago's Scammon Middle School, explored reasons why people emigrated from Ireland as he traveled the country on his fellowship in 2008. He draws on his experiences in Ireland to help students find links between their families' immigrant story and those of immigrants from the past. "This fellowship is an inspiration for my students. Many of them view a trip to some far off land impossible, but I encourage them that they, too, can travel to their dream destination and realize that the issues and feelings they experience here at home are not that distant from what others experience around the world."

"It has been almost three years since I completed my Fund for Teachers fellowship in Ireland and I still enjoy the rewards of this amazing experience on a daily basis," said Sarah Grote, 2007 Fellow from Sequoyah Elementary in Oklahoma City, OK. She spent two weeks studying traditional Irish violin and now teaches the Irish tunes every semester to students who are regularly asked to perform their repertoire for the community. A short documentary was recently released about her fiddler's retreat which is available on youtube.com.

History formed the framework of Sarah Vilensky's Irish expedition in 2009 when she studied Ireland's cultural-infused literature and theater to lead students in writing a play about their own culture. "The historical knowledge I gained even helped me with my music history class," said Vilensky, teacher at All City Leadership Academy in New York City. "When studying Gregorian chant, I was able to show my students pictures of actual chant manuscripts that reside in one of Ireland's convents. I was also able to illustrate where and

when music was used during ancient times using many of the pictures I took of Ireland's castles and landmarks." Players and parties represented in Irish literature will inspire her students to create a historical drama next month that represents their lives and illustrates that even they can have a big voice when they unite behind a cause.

A camera accompanied Laurie Littlefield, teacher at Mt. Abram High School in Salem, MA, on her 2008 trek across Ireland on a photographic journey through unspoiled villages to promote enthusiasm for art, history, and culture. In the years since her return, Lori annually presents photos of Ireland's flora & fauna to sophomores who compare the similarities and differences to local species on their school's property. She also teaches Irish emigration to juniors who learn about the impact the Irish had in the development of our country, especially in constructing railroads, subways, skyscrapers, and police and fire departments. In addition, the entire school enjoys a hallway bulletin board housing a genealogical map and the local phone book to help our students find their surnames and literally connect to their Irish roots.

In late March, Fund for Teachers announces its tenth class of Fellows who join the ranks 3,500 teachers from across the country who have pursued destinations and disciplines around the world they deemed vital to remaining engaged and inspired in their classrooms. For more information about Fund for Teachers or names of our 2010 Fellows, please visit fundforteachers.org.

In April, Fund for Teachers announces it's 10th class of pre-K-12 teachers from around the country who will embark on learning odysseys they designed this summer. Check back at fundforteachers.org for a complete list.