









# Bulletin

Highlighting Grants-To-Educators

The Bulletin highlights some of the many exceptional projects taking place in Ohio's secular schools via the Grants-to-Educators program in which teachers and administrators can apply for funds up to \$3,000 for classroom, school-wide, or district-wide projects. The program supports our mission to recognize and encourage outstanding classroom teachers and administrators in six key areas:

-  Mathematics, Science & Technology
-  Language Literacy
-  Arts Education
-  Educator Development
-  Leadership Skills for Administrators
-  Other Student Services

Second grade teacher Sara Simpson helps a student calculate how much money she has to spend in the classroom store. The activity is part of a year-long project that teaches students life-long lessons in economics.



## Daily Lessons in Economics



It's shopping day in Sara Simpson's second grade classroom at Heritage Elementary School in Medina and students are browsing through the items for sale in the classroom store.

Because it's February, the usual inventory of pencils, post-it notes, and glue sticks is supplemented with heart-shaped lollipops, valentine stickers, and sweetheart candies.

The students will purchase these items with "dollars" they earned during the past month for completing daily jobs, following classroom rules, and putting extra effort into their schoolwork.

Monthly shopping excursions are the highlight of an economics project designed by the second grade team. Tied to the mathematics standards for grade two, the year-long venture teaches students the value of working to earn money and making good decisions when it comes time to spend it.

At the beginning of the school year, the students and teachers compiled a list of two dozen "jobs" that need to be done each day in a smoothly-run classroom. These positions include classroom librarian, attendance taker, weather person, time keeper, and homework folder organizer. Each job pays a daily salary from \$1 to \$3 depending on

the difficulty of the task and the amount of responsibility it requires. Students rotate through the jobs throughout the month, earning credits on a daily basis for work well done.

"We thought it would be important for the students to understand that, like adults, they too have jobs to do," says Mrs. Simpson, who developed the project with colleagues Kelley Stobbs and Julie Weyand. Extra credits can be earned for exceptional behavior such as displaying good citizenship or taking on added responsibilities. At the same time, debits are assessed to those who break classroom rules.

The teachers tally each student's credits at the end of the month and hand out paychecks for the amount each has earned. Students then "cash" their checks at the classroom bank and use the income to shop at the classroom store. Before making a purchase, they have to calculate how much money they have, the cost of the items they want to buy, and how much change they will receive. Any leftover "money" goes into a classroom savings account, which the group will spend on something special at the end of the year.

The economics project is designed to "mimic the real world," says

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# Long Term Research for High Level Students



Students at Aurora High School are experimenting with plants. If you check the tables and shelves in the back of the biology lab you'll find many varieties growing under some fairly unusual conditions. Each is being closely observed and monitored by students in the AP and IB Biology classes over the course of several weeks.

The students' teacher, Monika Biro, set out to improve the laboratory skills of her high level students by allowing them to create their own long term experiments. With a Grant-to-Educators from the Jennings Foundation, she purchased needed laboratory equipment such as microscopes and sensors along with supplies such as soil, pots, and seeds so the students could put their hypotheses to the test.

"We discovered that the students have weak laboratory skills, yet it is hard to improve these skills because of the limited time available in these very demanding courses," says Ms. Biro, who holds masters degrees in both biology and chemistry and has 13 years experience as a science educator. Teachers and students both were frustrated with the "simple labs" they used to do. Experiments were conducted from start to finish in a 50-minute time slot and required very little thinking to complete.

"The students complained about not having time to complete a meaningful experiment," she continues. The long term project gives them ample time to carry out the experiment, collect data, analyze results, and write meaningful laboratory reports.

Working in teams of three or four, the students design their own experiments given the materials and supplies the class has on hand. This semester, one group is tracking the germination and growth of radish seeds that were radiated with three different levels of radiation. They are comparing the growth of these seeds to that of normal, non-radiated seeds. Another group is testing the effects of various hormones on the growth of tobacco plant cells. Using an oxygen gas sensor, a third group is examining how water temperature affects photosynthesis.

Ms. Biro allows the students sufficient class time to set up their labs, but after that the students monitor developments on their own. They can



Using an oxygen gas sensor, students are measuring the oxygen level in water samples at different temperatures.



AP Biology students are studying the effects of various hormones on the growth and development of tobacco plant cells.

stop in the lab before or after school or during their free time to collect data and check on the progress of their work.

"Because students have time to ask and research questions they are experimenting on, they get a deeper understanding of what they are doing and how it fits into the curriculum that we are studying," explains Ms. Biro. "If they make a mistake or their experiments do not work as designed, they have a chance to fix it. This is more real science than getting the description of an experiment, trying it in 50 minutes, and no matter what the results, moving on to something else the next day."

In addition to getting a greater understanding of the scientific process, Ms. Biro says her students are developing valuable critical thinking skills. They have to grapple with many questions: How should we set up our lab? How can we test our data? What supplies do we need to set up our experiment? What questions should we ask? "They have come up with some wonderful ideas," Ms. Biro adds, "and they have been doing really wonderful work."

Another important lesson the students are taking away from the project is a clearer understanding of how research is conducted in the real world.

"A lot of these students will go on to research and the medical field," she explains. "So they really need to understand how research works in real life and how difficult it is to have success in the study of science."

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TO APPLY FOR A GRANT Application forms for the Grants-to-Educators program can be obtained from the Foundation's Web site, [www.mhjf.org](http://www.mhjf.org). No other forms will be accepted. To apply, please follow the procedures explained on the Web site. The Foundation's Distribution Committee reviews applications ten months a year (not in July or December). Applications must be submitted by the 20th of the preceding month to be considered. Action on requests is generally communicated within two months.

# Picture Book Art



“We believe that when you put art, reading, and thinking together it just does wonderful things for children,” says Dan McKey, the principal of Winesburg and Mt. Hope elementary schools in Holmes County.

An avid admirer of children’s literature, Mr. McKey combined the three in a project called *The ART of Picturebooks*. The effort uses visual arts – in the form of picture book illustrations – to help students explore the elements of art while developing crucial thinking and reading skills. It draws attention to the artwork found in a variety of picture books to teach children to look closely at the illustrations, to think deeply about what they see, and to respond in a creative way.

Each classroom in the neighboring schools is studying a particular children’s book illustrator or illustration style. For example, some are exploring the cartoon style of Mo Willems as illustrated in *Don’t Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus!* Others are examining the cut paper style of Lois Ehlert or the collage techniques of Hanoch Piven found in *My Dog is as Smelly as Dirty Socks*. Each classroom will then create some type of artistic response as a final product of its study. That could be a class book using a similar illustration style, a bulletin board, or a group of self-portraits.

With a Grant-to-Educators from the Jennings Foundation, Mr. McKey purchased well over 100 books by a variety of notable authors and illustrators including Bob Raczka, Daniel Pinkwater, Jan Brett, Susanna Reich, and Arthur Geisert. All were published within the past year and will eventually end up on the shelves in the schools’ libraries.

“For the past several years, I have tried to keep up on the best books being published for children,” says Mr. McKey, explaining what criteria he used to select the titles. “With thousands published every year, it’s almost impossible, but it sure is fun to try!”

Mr. McKey, who teaches a college level course on children’s literature at The University of Akron, says he reads reviews of new titles routinely, checks the Internet, and most importantly, talks to students about what they are reading and what they like.

To prepare for the project, Mr. McKey held a professional development session last December for teachers in both schools. They examined a variety of picture book illustrations and discussed the components that make each effective. He explained how to use the books to teach the elements of art — such as line, shape, and color — and to develop critical thinking skills.

“I want the teachers to recognize how picture books are special in that the words and the pictures work so well together,” he says. “And I want them to be able to get that message across to our children.”

The picture book project involves every classroom at both schools — K-6 at Winesburg and K-8 at Mt. Hope. “You can never be too old for picture books!” Mr. McKey claims, adding that he has drawn upon the expertise of the art teacher to help the older students create more sophisticated projects.

A highlight of the semester-long project was a visit to each school by two award-winning children’s book illustrators, Christopher and Jeanette Canyon. The students have fallen in love with Christopher’s books, such as *Grandma’s Feather Bed* and other titles based on songs by John Denver. He shared how he took the song *Take Me Home Country Road* and eventually turned it into a picture book with illustrations that look quilted. He shared the struggles he had in turning the song into a story about memories and people traveling the country roads to a family reunion.

Jeanette Canyon designs brightly colored and richly textured illustrations based on relief sculptures she fashions from polymer clay. The children loved seeing the process she goes through to create her sculptures for counting books such as *Over in the Ocean* and *Over in the Jungle*.

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# Understanding Campaigns



Barack Obama may have won a decisive victory in last November’s presidential election, but in Erica Farris’ classroom the campaign process has just begun.

An American government teacher at Ross High School, Mrs. Farris oversees a new presidential campaign every semester. She wants students, many who are or will soon be voting age, to get a “hands-on” understanding of the effort required to run for office.

Mrs. Farris divides the class into groups of four or five and asks each to select a presidential candidate among its members. The rest become campaign staffers, taking on various responsibilities designed to get their candidate elected. Throughout the project, which they work on for several weeks, each campaign researches pertinent issues and develops a platform. The hot topic this year is the struggling economy. Each campaign also conducts a poll, produces campaign literature, and debates fellow candidates.

“I want the students to understand what it is like to run for office — how much time and effort goes into it,” explains Mrs. Farris, who has been assigning this project to her 12th grade students for the past eight years. She recently received a Grant-to-Educators from the Jennings Foundation to add a technology component to the task. With digital video equipment and Apple’s iMovie software, students are now required to create a video piece explaining why their particular candidate deserves the vote. As in “real world” campaigns, the ad may take a positive or negative slant. Most point out the candidate’s unique qualities and distinct qualifications for the job. Producing a professional-looking piece requires a lot of extra time in the computer lab, where students edit clips, add music, and create special effects all designed to grab the voter’s attention. The school’s media specialist Jane Neufarth is helping them with this aspect of the project.

“Students love to learn through the use of technology. If you give them hours and hours and days and days to work on editing, they would take every moment of that,” Mrs. Farris explains. She believes the 21st-century technology skills the students will master in this process will be extremely useful as they move on to college next year.

With voting still to take place, the most effective candidate has yet to emerge. Win or lose, all will have learned valuable lessons about the campaigning process.

For more information contact:  
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Campaign staffers record a speech delivered by their presidential candidate.



# Martha Holden Jennings Foundation

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*Mary Kay Binder, Editor*



## Picture Book Art

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Part of the visit's success, says Mr. McKey, was because students were already familiar with the books and songs when the artists arrived. He had purchased many of their books with grant funds and in several "Picture Book Assemblies" the students had studied the illustrations, discussed the elements of art, and talked about how the words and pictures work together to tell the story.

By the end of the year, Mr. McKey says, "I hope the students will have gained a greater appreciation for the beauty and creativity of the amazing illustrations in picture books."

Maybe, he adds, some will even be inspired to become artists and illustrators themselves.

*For more information contact:*

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### **Attention Superintendents**

Nomination forms for the following \$7,500 awards were mailed to all Ohio Superintendents on February 20, 2009:

- Jennings Master Teacher Award
- George B. Chapman, Jr. Teacher Award for Excellence in Mathematics Education
- Arthur S. Holden Teacher Award for Excellence in Science Education

**All forms must be postmarked by April 20, 2009 to be considered.**

## Daily Lessons

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Mrs. Stobbs, explaining that the teachers spend a lot of time discussing the concept of "wants" versus "needs." They remind the children each month to shop for school supplies they may need before buying the little extras they want.

While the teachers' taught these same economic principles in the past, they believe opening the classroom store has made the concepts real.

"They have a greater grasp on these concepts because it's more tangible to them," Mrs. Simpson says.

"And now they are living it every day," adds Mrs. Stobbs.

*For more information contact:*

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**A parent volunteer watches as a student shopper counts his money before paying for his purchases at the classroom store.**