



Father Ryan Arts Center

of Focus On Renewal

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Father Ryan Arts Center Receives Grant to Expand Reader's Theater Program

McKees Rocks, PA, September 28, 2009 — As former students will attest, combining elementary school children with fantastic stories of life and adventure, student-made props and a real theater setting, add in a little imaginative storytelling along with a few sound effects, and the end result is a reading and comprehension class disguised as a fun, creative learning experience for self expression.

Take Tara, for instance, who said, "I would rather read *now* than watch TV."

Building on the success of last year's Reader's Theater program, the Father Ryan Arts Center of Focus On Renewal, has invited six more schools, in addition to the two already served, to participate in its innovative reading enrichment program. This is the second consecutive year that the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation has supported this program by awarding the Father Ryan Arts Center an additional \$90,000 grant to expand Reader's Theater for the 2009-2010 school year to include a total of more than 500 children from eight local schools:

1. Sto-Rox Elementary School: (5) third-grade classrooms
2. St. John of God Catholic School: (3) third-, fourth- and fifth-grade classrooms

Along with the addition of the following schools:

3. Montour School District: Ingram Elementary School: (2) second-grade classrooms
4. Montour School District: Burkett Elementary School: (4) second-grade classrooms
5. Montour School District: Forest Grove Elementary School: (6) second-grade classrooms
6. Cornell Elementary School: (3) second-grade classrooms
7. St. Malachy Catholic School, Kennedy Township: (2) third- and fourth-grade classrooms
8. St. Joseph Catholic School, Coraopolis: (1) third-grade class

Commenting on last year's program, Sto-Rox Elementary School reading coach John Skender said he witnessed first-hand the dynamic effect this program had on his students. He said, "It is remarkable how students have taken the elements of Reader's Theater and incorporated them into their daily reading. Students read with inflection, emphasizing key words and phrases. They are more confident and excited to read. I, along with the teachers, use a program called Dibels to chart

the fluency of each student. In many cases, students have doubled and tripled their fluency rate.” Mr. Skender noted that much of this progress can be attributed to the skills and confidence gained through the Reader’s Theater program at the Father Ryan Arts Center.

Reader’s Theater incorporates drama, music, hand-made props and storytelling by re-envisioning the written word so students using expressive voices and gestures may explore subjects and characters more thoroughly. During the first term, which begins October 6, second, third, fourth and fifth graders will receive age-appropriate introductions to the reading materials, as well as hands-on involvement from professional theater experts and visual artists, (who will provide coaching and help create props,) while spending their reading classes at the arts center. The second term begins March 9 and runs through May 12. At the end of each nine-week course, students will stage their presentations before their peers and families.

Sto-Rox third grade teacher, Jennifer Bannon, also noticed a weekly improvement in her students’ fluency during last year’s program. “Their reading comprehension improved as they became more involved in the characters and plots of the stories,” she said.

Pat Moran, Father Ryan Arts Center director, said Reader’s Theater is a wonderful example of a program designed to enhance existing teaching methods through innovative partnerships to ignite and encourage the interests and talents of students. “Thanks to the Benedum Foundation we will be able to provide this enjoyable and artistic opportunity to more children and schools throughout our area,” she added.

For more information on the Reader’s Theater Program at the Father Ryan Arts Center or to learn how your school can participate, please call 412.771.3052 or visit www.FatherRyanArtsCenter.org.

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