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For Immediate Release

Storyteller Blazes Trail with First-Time Award (Again!)
Jennifer Jacobson Receives Creative Teaching Fellowship

The Massachusetts Cultural Council (MCC) recognized five teaching artists for exceptional work, releasing \$37,500 in new funds for Creative Teaching Fellowships. This program, *the first of its kind in the nation*, supports master teaching artists in schools as part of the MCC's *Creative Minds* initiative to promote arts education and creative learning in Massachusetts. The MCC's Creative Teaching Fellows will each receive \$7,500 to implement their projects in schools.

Jennifer Jacobson, storyteller and Artistic Director of When Children Save the Day, will receive a Fellowship to create and implement a **Curriculum** and **Assessment Portfolio** for an after-school program designed to inspire children through storytelling and community service. The **Curriculum** is based on her work with area schools: Wildwood, Crocker Farm, Smith College Campus School and most recently, Orange Elementary, where she was part of their 21st Century Community Learning Center Grant.

This is not the first time Jacobson has been chosen to be a part of an inaugural grant program. In 2004, she received the first Brimstone Award for Applied Storytelling given by the National Storytelling Network. This Award recognizes service-oriented models that inspire excellence and increase ways that storytelling promotes change in individuals and communities. Brimstone funded Jacobson's work at Crocker Farm where she first implemented When Children Save the Day (WCSD), her program uniting language arts and social action.

The 2008 Creative Teaching Fellowship will allow Jacobson to build on the success of the original WCSD model but with after-school students as its primary audience.

Jacobson considers WCSD is a great investment as an after-school program because it:

1. Provides a multicultural curriculum for grades K – 6 that meets the National Standards for Language Arts.
2. Engages students in age-appropriate community service.
3. Strengthens youngsters' self-esteem through making a positive difference.
4. Creates a blueprint for action that young people can apply to any project.
5. Includes children in rich language experiences to enhance their speaking, reading and writing skills.

The WCSD After-School Program meets for twenty sessions (twice a week for ten weeks). Participants hear world folktales and true stories about children who are the agents of positive change. Students conduct a “personal inventory” to identify their strengths. They learn storytelling skills and the program culminates in a student storytelling festival. But that is not all.

Through town meetings students identify the community action they will manage. Past WCSD projects include designing a Community of Hope Quilt for The Amherst Survival Center (Wildwood), sewing pillowcases for children at the Athol-Orange Family Shelter (Orange), raising salmon fry to encourage salmon re-population in the Connecticut River (Smith College Campus School).

Tested in schools since 2005, the WCSD model proves that uniting storytelling with social action is an effective model for student achievement as well as community action. In a recent questionnaire, 20 out of 21 students felt they made a “very strong” connection to the community. Mary Keily, a parent of a participant wrote: “I wanted to tell you how impressed I was by the WCSD storytelling presentation. The deep sense of community in the class was palpable and very touching. At the same time, because each child had crafted his or her own story, there was ample opportunity for individualized expression and achievement.”

The Creative Teaching Fellowship will support the creation of a **Curriculum and Assessment Portfolio** for WCSD’s after-school program. These resources will be “portable,” for use in any after-school setting. The **Curriculum** will include lesson plans connecting WCSD’s content to National Standards for Language Arts. Each unit will offer a lesson outline, materials needed, suggested assignments, and explicit connections to reading and writing. In addition, the **Curriculum** will focus on after-school issues such as: working with multiple grades, developing a flexible model to accommodate variable attendance, and strategies for managing a variety of learning styles.

The Fellowship will support the development of several evaluation tools for the **Assessment Portfolio** designed *specifically* for storytelling and social action. They will include rubrics, questionnaires and assessment options as handouts for program users. Jacobson plans to work with storytellers, arts educators, and cultural councils to identify best practices from the field as she creates these tools. The goal for developing these resources is to provide storyteller/educators with a tested and effective program that they can implement and evaluate in after-school settings across the country.

“I am deeply honored by the Council’s support and its commitment to children, storytelling and community action with this dedication of resources,” Jacobson says. “Working together we can make sure that children in after-school programs engage with storytelling and strive to make a positive difference in the world.”

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