Fontana Students Enhance Their Performing & Producing Skills through Trolley Dances

Nicole Robinson, Visual & Performing Arts Teacher at A. B. Miller High School, has a positive vision for her dance students. She recently used a portion of her IFT Grant to bring a group of students to the Barrio Logan area of San Diego to witness the country’s oldest Trolley Dances.

Featuring 45 dancers, the 15-year-old production has inspired spinoffs in both San Francisco and Riverside. The October 6, 2013 San Diego event included a stop at a school for homeless children.

In the shadow of the Coronado Bridge and before a large crowd of appreciative onlookers, young dancers perform as part of the San Diego Trolley Dance project. On hand were more than one dozen student dancers from A.B. Miller High School. They were inspired by the dynamic performers and returned to the Inland Empire to participate in the 2nd-annual Riverside Trolley Dances.

Fontana students, some visiting San Diego for the first time, wait for the beginning of the 15th-annual Trolley Dances. The annual performance draws up to 3,000 spectators during its two-day run.

Robinson and several of her teaching colleagues developed the A.B. Miller Dance Conservatory (www.abmillerdance.com). The four-year program is designed to allow a student to focus on a specialized dance education within a public school setting. She received a $5,000 grant from the IFT to support a partnership with Riverside Community College, the City of Riverside and the Riverside Transit Authority to produce the community-based Riverside Trolley Dances.

Her goal was to give students the opportunity to work on a community based dance event as dancers, choreographers and production managers. In addition, they would assist in the development of advertising, production management, community outreach, choreography and performance.

The idea of trolley dances is simple. Audience members board a trolley at a designated station and are guided to various stops along the route where mini dance performances are presented in different and unexpected places. Each performance is 10-15 minutes long and is created by a different choreographer.

The grant project was designed to support collaboration between A. B. Miller High School and the greater community by creating original, site-specific work along a local trolley or bus line. According to Robinson, the dance performances offer a fresh take on the city, making it feel more accessible and inclusive.

The grant recipient is the Director of the high school’s Dance Conservatory program. It’s rigorous training provides students with the skills to earn admission to a university dance program or to enter the dance profession immediately after high school.
Marysville Agriculture Literacy Grant Crosses Subject Areas and Grade Levels

To be part of Bonnie Magill’s IFT grant project at Marysville High School, her students have to be on a team, like the “Prune Team” or the “Beef Cattle Team.”

And, that is entirely OK with them, because then they get a chance to provide agricultural literacy lessons to students at nearby Kynoch Elementary.

Over a three-day period in December, more than a dozen high school students descended on the classrooms of 17 different elementary teachers to teach the Kindergarten through 5th-grade students all about agriculture here in this central California town.

Magill received a $13,880 IFT grant to support her passion. As she wrote in her application, “In today’s society, many students have lost, or have never acquired, the knowledge of our country’s important agrarian roots. It’s essential for students to know where their food and fiber comes from and that the process is more than going to the clothing or grocery store.”

Magill’s vision involved 280 FFA students from the Marysville High School Agriculture Department becoming the educators to 2,800 District K-8 students. This education would integrate agriculture education into the common core standards of K-8 curriculum and cover all disciplines, including language arts, social studies, math and science.

The student teams used both self-created teaching materials, as well as fact sheets composed by the California Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom (www.cfaitc.org). They taught many critical topics, including Forestry, Fish and Fisheries, Wetlands and Water Fowl, Recycling and Wildlife.

In addition, the grant helped to provide for a follow-up visit to the living laboratory; transportation for all 3rd-grade students to attend the annual Yuba-Sutter Farm Day at the local fairground; and transportation for K-8 students to the annual National Ag. Day celebration on the high school campus in March.