

The District 200 Education Foundation was formed in 1993 to enhance and enrich the educational programs offered to students in D200's schools. The motto of the D200 Education Foundation is "Making Things Happen that Ordinarily Would Not." To do this, the organization provides grants to D200 staff so that they can implement innovative projects and activities for their students.

One such project that was awarded a D200 Education Foundation Grant during the 2015-16 school year was "Where is the Sears Tower?" The grant recipient was Joan Grandath, a Special Education Associate at Clay Academy. "Where is the Sears Tower" is a book written by Tad Mitchell and illustrated by France Mitchell. Each of the 13 chapters of the book features an area in Chicago—such as Shedd Aquarium, Buckingham Fountain and Navy Pier—and each chapter includes a lesson about emotions—such as conquering fear or managing anger. An ordinary lesson in using this book would be to have students read the book or do a read-aloud in the classroom, with activities and discussion about the lessons.

However, through Ms. Grandath's grant—which was supported by the D200 Education Foundation—the authors were invited to read from the book and present information regarding the lessons from the chapters. In addition, they shared videos and had discussion about how the book was handmade at the publisher as well as how the art work in the book went from the original paintings to printed art within the book. The students were able to see the actual paintings that were used to create the illustrations. They were able to ask the author and illustrator questions about the content of the book, how the illustrations were done, and relate the lessons to their own experiences.

In addition, the author and illustrator presented some of the lessons in the form of a "reader's theater" in which the authors and staff from Clay Academy performed brief 3-5 minutes sketches, taking on the roles of the characters in the book. The level of engagement and interaction with the students was well beyond what a general book study could have done. And the roars of laughter coming from the students showed that the presentation was as entertaining as it was informational.

This is one of many examples of how the partnership that D200 staff and the D200 Education Foundation can enhance and enrich an educational program and help make an ordinary lesson an extraordinary lesson.