



Contact: Mara Tapp
Founder and Director
Cool Classics!
(773) 327-4544
mtapp@coolclassicsinc.org

**Chicago's *Cool Classics!* receives the
2017 National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award,
the nation's highest honor for after-school arts and humanities programs**

Chicago, IL— On November 9, 2017, *Cool Classics!*, one of 12 after-school programs from across the county, received the 2017 National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award from all three federal arts and culture agencies. The program was recognized for its effectiveness in promoting learning and life skills in young people by engaging them through creative youth development programs. The award was presented in the nation's capital by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), in cooperation with the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA).

"These 12 creative youth development programs represent the best of the best," said Pam Breaux, president and chief executive officer of the NASAA. "They are living proof of the power of the arts and the humanities to build the skills young people need to succeed in school and in life."

The award recognizes the country's best creative youth development programs for using engagement in the arts and the humanities to generate a wide range of positive outcomes, such as increases in academic achievement, graduation rates, and college enrollment. The awardees—chosen from a pool of 350 nominations and 50 finalists—were also recognized for improving literacy and language abilities, communication and performance skills, and cultural awareness. The award supports outstanding programs that lay new pathways to creativity, expression, and achievement outside of the regular school day. These programs excite and engage a range of students, cultivating imagination, collaboration, discipline, and academic success—with demonstrable results. They also provide safe harbors after school, on weekends, and during the summer for children and youth in some of our country's most at-risk urban and rural settings.

First presented in 1998, the National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award is the nation's highest honor for after-school arts and humanities programs. The award recognizes and supports outstanding programs that lay new pathways to creativity, expression, and achievement outside of the regular school day. These programs excite and engage a range of students, cultivating imagination, collaboration, discipline, and academic success—with demonstrable results. They also provide safe harbors after school, on weekends, and during the summer for children and youth in some of our country's most at-risk urban and rural settings.

Founded and directed by **Mara Tapp**, *Cool Classics!* uses book-based, arts-integrated curricula to improve literacy and develop critical thinking skills. Since 2006 the program has been introducing elementary school children in underserved communities to the world of ideas. By focusing on close reading, rigorous discussion and deep analysis, *Cool Classics!* creates a rich learning experience for children that develops core competencies and enriches their understanding of literature, humanities, arts and culture while expanding their vocabulary in an engaging program. Students are held to the highest academic standards and are provided with the tools for success. Designed for small groups of public elementary school students in an after-school setting, *Cool Classics!* focuses on one classic book over a span of some 25 sessions. Each session begins with reading, followed by activities that relate back to the book's themes and create the multi-faceted *Cool Classics!* experience.

"All of us at *Cool Classics!* are honored to be among the outstanding programs selected for recognition," said *Cool Classics!* Founder and Director **Mara Tapp**. "We send thanks to our corps of wonderful volunteers and partners, and to our children, who inspire us daily, and their families, teachers and school administrators."

"*Cool Classics!* has definitely been a big part of my life ever since I was a little kid," said Alex Chavez, who was in the first program offered at Horace Greeley Elementary School in 2008 and is now a junior at Northside College Preparatory High School. "When I was in *Cool Classics!* as a student, I learned so much and had so much fun in the program. As a student helper, I am still learning from the students, and I like seeing how their minds grow as the program goes on."

Developed by Tapp, an award-winning journalist and educator, *Cool Classics!* aligns with the Common Core Standards and Illinois Standards for English and Language Arts and for Fine Arts. Various measures indicate that the majority of children who participate in *Cool Classics!* achieve: increased reading skills, comprehension and analysis; expanded vocabulary; highly developed critical thinking skills; greater enthusiasm for reading; and an expanded understanding of literature, humanities, poetry, art, dance, drama and music.

Since its pilot program at the Walt Disney Magnet School, *Cool Classics!* has offered programming at two North-side schools – Horace Greeley Elementary School (now in its 10th year), and Jane's Place at Nettelhorst. Programs have also been offered at six South-side schools – CICS Loomis Primary Academy; William C. Reavis Math and Science Specialty Elementary School; Jackie Robinson Literature and Writing Elementary School, Beulah Shoemith Elementary School; Emmett Louis Till Math and Science Academy and The University of Chicago Charter School, Donoghue Elementary Campus.

For more information about *Cool Classics!* contact Mara Tapp at (773) 327-4544 or mtapp@coolclassicsinc.org, or visit coolclassicschicago.org. For more information about the National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award visit nahyp.org.

Video of the award ceremony: www.youtube.com/watch?v=QXC2YNMVLVQ

Photos from the award ceremony:
www.flickr.com/photos/pcah_nahyp/albums/72157688251301881

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