Broadway Artist Visits Grundy Center

It only took a short verse from the highly acclaimed musical, Wicked, to bring thunderous applause from the second grade students in Ms. Eilbeck’s classroom. This was just a small part of the inspirational day at Grundy Center Elementary during a visit from their Artist-in-Residence, Ms. Hayley Podschun.

Podschun, a native of Overland Park, Kansas, has been living in New York City for the past 10 years. She made her Broadway debut at the age of 12 performing in The Sound of Music and later returned in the musical Hairspray after traveling the country in the musical’s tour and appearing in the hit New Line Cinema movie of the same name. She has since performed in Broadway shows such as Pal Joey, Sunday in the Park with George, Chaplin, Anything Goes, and Something Rotten! She also performed the title role in the off-Broadway musical Freckleface Strawberry, but perhaps is most well known for playing Glinda in the national tour of Wicked.

“Visiting Grundy Center was a dream come true!  It definitely gave me some flashbacks of my days in elementary school, and I just wanted to stay longer to hang out with the kids,” added Podschun.  “Seeing their excitement to have someone special come visit the school was beyond touching.  I couldn’t believe that I was the special guest!  Also, after being a Pen Pal with Mr. Sammons’s classes for so long, to see his work in person was really incredible.”

Principal Brian Sammons arranged the visit after his eight-year collaboration with Podschun while teaching third grade students at Aplington-Parkersburg. Begun in 2007, the partnership provided students a unique opportunity to learn from and form positive relationships with an artist in the performing arts. The program required students to use writing and reading skills along with making connections to their social studies and literacy curriculums.

“Working with Hayley gives the students so much information which would be hard to replicate otherwise. She taught the students about her job, working in the fine arts, life in New York City, and provided inspiration for students to be involved in the arts,” Mr. Sammons added. “She’s a class act and has been so supportive of our collaboration. It will be fun to see where her talent takes her next.”

“It’s an opportunity for the kids to see another part of the world that they live in,” added Podschun.  “To be exposed to a career that they might not have ever considered.  Not just being an actor, but seeing that there are tons of other opportunities in the arts (writers, directors, set designers, wig makers, lighting designers, etc.)  It expands their minds to other cultures and hopefully inspires them to think outside the box for their future.”

Podschun presented two programs giving students a look inside her life as a Broadway actor in New York City. She included fun things to do and foods you can eat there. She talked about growing up in Kansas and always knowing what she wanted to do when she grew up.

“I loved how she showed the students that even at a young age, you can be working toward your goals and dreams. She showed them that those goals and dreams will only be achieved through hard work, dedication and perseverance!” added fourth grade teacher Kelsey Meyer.

Third grader Elly Johnson added, “I loved hearing about New York City and Hayley’s shows. I like dancing and so does she. She even autographed my ballet shoes!”

Podschun also spent time in each individual classroom getting to know the students. She took photos, personalized a classroom poster, answered questions, and shared a book about New York City. The middle and high school students also got involved as Hayley spent some time visiting with those students as well.

Podschun added, “I loved being able to visit each classroom.  To have that one on one time was really special.  I got to speak to the kids directly and really connect with them.  Everyone had such wonderful questions.  I was amazed at their interest in learning about New York City, what inspires me to perform.  They’re all so very smart and eager.  It was inspiring to me to get to know them as well.”

For more information on Hayley’s visit, please go to Mr. Sammons’s blog at MrBSammons.weebly.com.