

## Chicago teachers win Golden Apple Awards

**Music helps teach children what is beautiful, says honoree, but students find her classes fun, exciting and not just about music**



Mayor Richard M. Daley presents Peirce School music teacher Brooke Tippet Thompson with a Golden Apple Award on Tuesday. (Tribune photo by Nancy Stone / May 6, 2008)

By Carlos Sadovi Tribune reporter 10:07 PM CDT, May 6, 2008

Whenever Andrew Billups struggles to muster the inspiration to go to school, the 8th grader at Peirce School of International Studies simply has to picture music teacher Brooke Tippet Thompson.

He remembers the times she has broken out into opera, demonstrated purposely offbeat dance steps from the Middle Ages and how she manages to use music to help reinforce other subjects.

"She brings excitement, you don't just learn about music in her class . . . there's never a dull moment," said Andrew, 14. "She always makes everything fun."

On Tuesday, as Tippet Thompson led Andrew and nearly a dozen other students through rehearsals for an upcoming music show at the Andersonville school, an intruder walked in.

Students, teachers and school officials broke out in loud applause for Mayor Richard Daley, who quickly announced the purpose of his visit: Tippet Thompson, a 10-year veteran of the school and a former opera singer—was one of 10 teachers to win a coveted Golden Apple Award recognizing superior educators in the Chicago area.

Tippet Thompson, 41, hugged co-workers, her husband and students as she struggled for words.

"I don't know what to say," she said. "I thank you so much. What an honor."

Schools Chief Arne Duncan said that Tippet Thompson was nominated for the award by dozens of students, parents and fellow teachers. Officials observed her classes before selecting her among the 10 best out of 850 teachers.

Daley called Tippet Thompson a devoted teacher and said her award testifies to the need for greater funding for school arts programs.

Referring to students, the mayor said, "When you look in their eyes, you see how much they appreciate you."

Before going into teaching, Tippet Thompson was a professional opera singer and public relations officer at the Washington Opera. Along with teaching kindergarten through 8th grade, the nationally certified teacher also serves as music director for the nearby Edgewater Presbyterian Church. She studied music at Ohio Wesleyan University and received a master's degree from Northeastern Illinois University.

She said the most important thing that teachers need is an understanding of how children's brains work. She said she has found that students need teachers to take an interest in their lives because often children come from unstable homes.

"Kids need to be nurtured in a kind way . . . we need to make them feel safe," she said. "Music is important for music's sake, it helps develop an aesthetic sense, it helps teach students what is beautiful."

Each of the 10 Golden Apple winners will receive a tuition-free spring-term sabbatical at Northwestern University; a personal computer from IBM; and \$3,000, among other prizes, said officials with the Golden Apple Foundation.

The other Golden Apple winners named Tuesday in Chicago are:

Clark Academic Prep Magnet High School science teacher Samina Khan and math teacher Donnell White; Natalie Neris-Guereca, a 5th-grade teacher at Pershing Middle School West Campus; Monica Gil, 7th-grade teacher at Gray Elementary School; John Nieciak, language arts teacher at Sheridan Math and Science Academy.

Also getting awards Tuesday were 8th-grade teacher Holly Bontkowski at Kennedy Middle School in Plainfield and Nancy Kontney, a 5th-grade teacher at Sunny Hill School in Carpentersville. Two more teachers will receive awards Wednesday.

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