

Assignment: Here's \$25, shop for books

Parkdale students get rare chance to replenish library with part of \$62,000 grant

Sarah O'Donnell The Edmonton Journal - Wednesday, September 03, 2008 EDMONTON

Parkdale School gave a whole new meaning to back-to school shopping Tuesday on an unusual field trip to help buy books for their library.

The students, sure to be the envy of bookworms and shopaholics, spent the morning on a buying spree at West Edmonton Mall's Chapters bookstore.

Their assignment: Help spend a portion of the \$62,000 grant awarded to the school by the Indigo Love of Reading Foundation. Each student, from the smallest pre-kindergarten pupil to the toughest Grade 9s, had an hour Tuesday morning to pick out \$25 worth of reading material for the school library. The boxes quickly filled with everything from car magazines to some of English literature's great classics.

"It was totally a dream come true, everything that I imagined would happen today and beyond that," principal Marlene Hanson said, as store clerks boxed up the school's 410 picks.

"I heard many conversations with students in the stores asking teachers about the books they selected. Students didn't hesitate to come up and ask, 'What do you think about this book?' "

It was an unorthodox field trip -- one not part of the school's original plans for the Indigo grant.

Parkdale is an inner-city school that puts extra emphasis on literacy and writing.

The school had applied to the Indigo foundation for the past three years, hoping to secure some cash to replenish, update and enhance its library. Initially, only Grade 9 students moving to high school this fall were slated for a bookstore trip last June as a way to thank them for the letters they wrote as part of the grant application.

It was on that June field trip that teachers learned some of their students had never been in a bookstore before, sparking plans for the school-wide shopping expedition.

"We really see this as an opportunity for our students to learn about wise choices, learn about genres of literature and just to help make that dream come true that we can all be strong readers," Hanson said.

So, while many students across the region went back to school for the first time Tuesday, Parkdale students who have already been back in class for three weeks, headed out for their retail excursion.

The field trip ended up being part literature lesson, part math class. With a price limit, students had to figure out each book's Canadian price and how much money they had left. Some, with a few dollars left over, opted to pool their money with a friend and get an extra book.

Shopping tactics varied. Some, particularly the youngsters just learning to spell their

own names, seemed to judge books by their covers. One of the first on the pile came from seven-year-old Austin Komo, who handed his teacher a big, shiny green book emblazoned with a dragon and a phoenix called *Monstrous Beasts*. The reason behind his choice was simple. "It's my favourite one. It's about dragons," he explained.

Grade 6 student Lizzy Feigelstock, 11, also had her book picked within minutes of entering the store. "It's about dinosaurs, space and the olden days," Lizzy told teacher Becky Medwid as she handed over the natural science hardcover.

Grade 6 student Michael Roosenberg and some friends headed straight for the magazine racks, looking to stretch their \$25 and fuel their passion for cars.

"We like car magazines because when we grow up we have to know how much they cost, what they look like, how nice they are," the 11-year-old said.

"We like them because at our school there's some magazines, but old and all ripped up. We like these ones because they're brand-spanking new."

Away from the busy children's section, grade 9 student Cynthia Chiwanza took her time looking through thousands of titles.

She browsed through the store's Manga section, but decided against any of the graphic novels in favour of the two books already in her hand, including a Stephen King title. Chiwanza said she felt some pressure to make exactly the right pick, knowing her selection is ultimately for the school library for everyone to share.

"It's really hard, but if you know the kind of books that you read, that helps," she said.

Teachers spent the field trip with smiles on their faces.

"That's amazing," said one teacher, as one of her special needs students brought her two books about Terry Fox and another handed over a book about the human body called *Alive*, which included pop-ups and the sound of a beating heart when it opened.

Store general manager Liza Robinson said though Parkdale School is not the only Edmonton area school to receive an Indigo Foundation grant, the school field trip to the store was unique.

It was an exciting opportunity, she said, to encourage a love of reading among children while bringing attention to the Indigo foundation's goal of lobbying for more government money to be funnelled into schools and their libraries.

"The whole mission of the Indigo Love of Reading Foundation is to put ourselves out of business. We don't want to have to be doing this in five years," Robinson said. "The provincial governments need to be doing this."

STUDENT SELECTIONS

Here's a small sample of the 410 books Parkdale students picked for their school library on Tuesday.

- My Little Counting Book
- A Book of Things That Go Zoom
- The Talented Clementine
- The Two Towers
- Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants 2
- Kung Fu Panda
- Halo
- Bear Feels Scared
- A Treasury of Jillian Jiggs
- High School Musical: Under the Stars