

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 9/30/20

Thornton Fractional District 215
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New York Times Bestselling Author Speaks to Thornton Fractional South High School Students on a “Virtual Field Trip”



Lansing, IL- Honors English 9 students of Thornton Fractional South teacher Lupe Ramirez attended a “field trip” on September 28, 2020. The virtual field trip was held during fourth period, when all of Ramirez’s students were invited to join a special webinar that featured New York Times bestselling author Daniel José Older. Ramirez’s students have been reading through Older’s young adult novel [“Shadowshapers.”](#) and when Ramirez reached out to Older via social media and invited him to speak to her students, who have started the school year in a remote learning environment, he agreed. In the 40-minute interview, Older shared with students his journey to becoming an author and why he believes all art makes some sort of political statement. Older encouraged students regarding the importance of telling their own stories; and noted that there are many ways to use different kinds of art to tell one’s story. He also encouraged students to persevere in accomplishing their dreams, noting that his first book was rejected 39 times before finally being published by Scholastic. In response to a [“thank you” tweet](#) from Thornton Fractional District 215, Older [replied on Twitter](#), “These kids were amazing. Showed up more prepared than some professional interviewers I’ve talked to. Had the whole series read PLUS the novellas and were ready to talk craft, publishing, politics, story points and ships. I was impressed as hell.”

Older was interviewed by Kyndall Jackson and Breanna Lopez, students who serve on TF South’s yearbook staff and who read the book last year in Ramirez’s class. When asked about

preparation for the interview, Jackson said, “I was really nervous before going into the interview. I am a really big fan of the ‘Shadowshaper’ series and was super anxious on making a good impression. Before the interview, Breanna and I re-read and annotated the whole series in three days because even though we both had already read the trilogy beforehand, we didn’t want our questions to be surface level.” Lopez added that she felt the interview went very well, stating, “I feel way more informed on the choices and the things Daniel José Older experienced in order to write the novels he does, incorporating the things he does in them. I’m super grateful for this experience. It was so much fun.” After Jackson and Lopez worked through their list of questions for Older, the rest of the students were invited to type questions into the chat for Older, many of which asked specific questions about some of the characters in the book. Ramirez said she is “incredibly proud” of Jackson and Lopez for the professionalism with which they conducted the interview; and she noted that many of her students were very excited to talk about the webinar afterward.

Thornton Fractional South principal Jake Gourley also attended the virtual field trip. He stated, “When Ms. Ramirez brought up the possibility of a virtual field trip for students, I really loved the idea, especially because this field trip gave students an amazing opportunity to hear from a bestselling author whose book they have been reading. Despite all the challenges of remote learning, this is an example of a great opportunity for students that most likely would not have happened in a traditional learning environment. Mr. Older really gave a wonderful gift to our students by agreeing to the webinar.”

About Thornton Fractional High School District 215: District 215 serves the students of Burnham, Calumet City, Lansing, and Lynwood at Thornton Fractional North High School, Thornton Fractional South High School, Thornton Fractional Center for Academics and Technology, and Thornton Fractional Center for Alternative Learning. The mission of District 215 is to provide diverse learning opportunities that inspire all students to become life-long learners who contribute to their community.

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