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SILK ROAD LAUNCHES EDUCATIONAL CURRICULUM IN CHICAGO

Program Developed for Students in grades 6 to 10 in Partnership between Stanford and the Silk Road Project

December 20, 2006, Chicago, IL –The Silk Road Project has distributed final versions of its *Along the Silk Road* curriculum to 50 Chicago Public School teachers. Developed as part of *Silk Road Chicago* by the Silk Road Project and the Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE), these thought-provoking lesson plans are designed to broaden the worldview of students in grades 6 to 10.

Active participants in the curriculum’s design, Chicago Public School teachers provided valuable feedback during an intensive training last August, which included sessions with Silk Road Project founder Yo-Yo Ma as well as symposia at the Art Institute of Chicago, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and other partner institutions. Participating teachers will introduce the curriculum in their classrooms during the upcoming months, and students will also have the opportunity to explore *Silk Road Chicago* programming offered by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Field Museum, the Adler Planetarium and Astronomy Museum and the Chicago Public Library.

“We are excited to see the curriculum being implemented in the classroom,” said Dr. Laura Freid, CEO and executive director of the Silk Road Project. “The Silk Road—as both fact and metaphor—is of particular importance today as we continue to discover the interrelatedness of our world’s many cultures. Our goal is not simply to teach the students about the history and significance of a particular region; rather we hope to use these lessons to provide young people a platform from which they will come to recognize and value the diversity of the world. We hope to instill in them a lifelong appreciation of the benefits of cross-cultural exchange.”

SPICE is internationally recognized for producing educational tools to increase awareness and understanding of issues relating to Asia. The *Along the Silk Road* curriculum has been designed to meet social studies standards as defined by the Illinois State Board of Education, and is being implemented in partnership with the City of Chicago’s International Sister Cities Program and the Chicago Public Schools. Incorporating art and music as integral elements of study, interactive, hands-on activities and exercises enrich students’ understanding of cultural, artistic and scientific contributions made by Eurasian nations within the Silk Road region.

In Lesson One of the Along the Silk Road curriculum, students learn the physical features of the historic Silk Road—a series of trading routes that connected China to the Mediterranean from the second century BCE until the 14th century—and examine the challenges that faced historic travelers. Subsequent lessons examine how travelers and traders communicated and engaged in commerce as they crossed many lands and delve into the region’s diverse belief systems and philosophies. Other lessons investigate the topic of migration and ask students to trace the origins of musical instruments.

Many teachers expressed interest in using the lessons in their classrooms, but were turned away from the initial training due to funding and space limitations. The Silk Road Project is currently seeking sponsors to underwrite distribution of more curricula to Chicago Public School classes and the training of additional teachers. Individuals or corporations interested in supporting the program should contact the Silk Road Project at 401-427-6980.

Silk Road Chicago is the vision of world-renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma, who dreamed of bringing the historic Silk Road – the ancient network of trading routes that connected the people and traditions of Asia with those of Europe – and the ideas it represents to life in one of the most diverse cities in the world. With this initiative, Chicago becomes the first city in the world to collaborate in a yearlong partnership with Yo-Yo Ma and the Silk Road Project. Focusing on the Silk Road as metaphor for artistic and cultural exchange, cultural organizations across Chicago are joining together as never before to offer a wide array of special concerts, exhibitions and other artistic programming exploring the themes of *Silk Road Chicago*. The celebration of *Silk Road Chicago* continues throughout the year with more than 150 diverse programs sponsored by the Art Institute of Chicago, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and the Silk Road Project. For more information about *Silk Road Chicago*, please visit www.silkroadchicago.org.

The Silk Road Project’s contributions to *Silk Road Chicago* include performances, master classes, workshops and educational programs featuring Ma and other Silk Road Ensemble members. Events are presented in Chicago schools, universities and cultural institutions throughout the year, concluding with extended residencies with the Art Institute of Chicago and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

About the Silk Road Project

The Silk Road Project is a not-for-profit arts organization founded in 1998 by cellist Yo-Yo Ma, who serves as its artistic director, and led by Laura Freid, executive director and CEO. The Project has a vision of connecting the world’s neighborhoods by bringing together artists and audiences around the globe. Inspired by the cultural traditions of the historic Silk Road, the Silk Road Project is a catalyst promoting innovation and learning through the arts.

The Silk Road Project is affiliated with Harvard University and Rhode Island School of Design. Ford Motor Company is a global corporate partner of the Silk Road Project. Other sponsors include Mikimoto and the U.S. Department of State.

About the Silk Road

At its height from the second century BCE until the 14th century, the Silk Road was a vast network of trade routes that connected China to the Mediterranean. For centuries, ideas, objects and people traveled along the Silk Road, making it one of the most fluid and broad arenas of exchange the world has known and a major conduit of culture and civilization. The historic Silk Road trade route continues to provide a prime example of how cultures and ideas were exchanged and celebrated. Inspired by this transmission of ideas and its modern-day manifestations, cultural organizations across Chicago are joining together as never before to present residents and visitors with Silk Road Chicago. For more information about Silk Road Chicago, visit www.silkroadchicago.org.