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Project Title: To the Dogs (A Poetry Unit)

CCS Lead School: Clay Middle School

Grant Focus: Innovation Instruction

Application Type: Team

Anticipated # of students benefiting from this project: The entire 7th grade at Clay Middle School- 550+

Age/Grade Level: 7th Grade

Project Overview: To the Dogs (A Poetry Unit) is an engaging unit that centers around Auggie, our school's therapy dog. Through this unit students get to interview Mrs. Naas, our guidance counselor, and Auggie about the important work that Auggie does every day at Clay. They are then challenged to create a poem about Auggie for a poetry contest. Mrs. Naas and Auggie choose the winners, who receive books about dogs. During this unit, we also talk about as many books about dogs as we can. Over the past few years we have noticed that these books always hook even the most reluctant readers. We are hoping to bring some of these books into our classroom libraries where they will be easily accessible to our students.

Project Description: In this unit, we strive to introduce our students, not only to writing interesting poetry about our daily lives at Clay, but we also hope to introduce them into genres that they wouldn't otherwise explore. Auggie, our school therapy dog, serves an entry point into creating a more caring and compassionate classroom culture. Students are initially introduced into the unit by exploring books, stories, poems and articles about dogs (and other pets). We always ask our students to bring in pictures of their own pets for a bulletin board too. This has proven to be a wonderful way to connect.

Next in the unit, students invite Auggie and his handler, Mrs. Naas into the classroom to learn more about the role that Auggie plays at school. In the interview students learn about a very important resource in our building, and in such an anxious time as this pandemic, a very useful resource at that. After the interview, students are challenged to write a poem about Auggie or from Auggie's perspective. They can also submit these poems into a 7th grade Poetry Contest. (Auggie and Mrs. Naas choose the winners, who receive dog books and a picture of Auggie.) During the writing process, the teachers like to talk about all genres of



books about dogs. We find that this is a great hook for many reluctant readers. It's a topic that is universally appealing. We are hoping to stock our classroom libraries for just this purpose.

Why is this project needed? Students need access to engaging books, so that they become lifelong readers. Using an accessible topic- like dogs- allows for many students, especially our "reluctant" readers, to find themselves reading a genre they had never been familiar with before. This grant would enable us to purchase a diverse collection of books about an appealing topic that is tied into a unit that the kids always love.

How does this project correlate to an academic standard, CCS district initiative or school improvement plan? This is tied into our Social Emotional Learning and Reading Workshop within the School Improvement Plan. The goals which it specifically supports are: Language Arts: Continued development of Workshop Model, reading strategies AND SEL: Teachers will be confident in integrating strategies to increase social/emotional well-being for students.

Will this project have an impact beyond the completion date? Our hope is to get these books into as many hands as possible, both during the unit, and for the rest of the school year. A great book can make a reader for life. We anticipate that having these books in our classroom libraries will be just what some of our students need in order to become readers.

How will you evaluate the success of this project? Data: Check Out System for Classroom Library; Student Reviews; Student Reflections

What is your expected goal for this project? We want to grow readers! We believe that to grow a reader is the quickest way to change the world. Readers practice empathy when they engage in a book. The more empathetic our student body, the kinder our school becomes. We will use our passion about reading to promote these books and get them into our kids' hands.

What is your motivation for this project? I saw how quickly the dog books flew off the shelf with our last Dog Poetry Unit. I can't wait to provide the kids with even more books. I have no doubt this will be just what some students need to become readers. In addition, reading and talking about pets is comforting and joyful work.



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Project Title: Rocks Rock!

CCS School: Clay Middle School

Grant Focus: STEM

Application Type: Individual

Anticipated # of students benefiting from this project: 165 Each school year

Age/Grade Level: 7th grade science

Project Overview: Students will act as Citizen Scientists for NASA to identify unknown samples collected and long abandoned in storage from Mission: Earth

Project Description: An abandoned storage closet, long lost behind a set of file cabinets at NASA, has finally been cracked open! In the closet, among old mission specimens, is a box simply titled: Mission: Earth. Inside, appears 24 individually collected and numbered samples, and an array of research on what appears to be rocks and minerals. However, there is no catalog accompanying the specimens! NASA, wanting to make sure that everything is accounted for, has enlisted the help of Citizen Scientists at Clay Middle School, to identify the mystery specimens so that NASA can properly catalog and store the collection from Mission: Earth.

Students will receive their kit full of specimens, along with a tool box full of “tools” with unknown purposes. They will research the differences between rocks and minerals, how to identify different rocks and minerals, how rocks and minerals are formed both above and below the Earth’s surface, categorize each specimen in their kit, and finally, write and film a press conference to convey their research findings for a NASA press release.

Why is this project needed? For this project, I will utilize an array of rocks and minerals that contain specific properties to engage students in the lessons associated with rocks and minerals in Earth Science. Typically, it can be difficult to draw student interest into Earth’s processes (like how mountains, streams, or even rocks, are made). This is for a variety of reasons, but can often



be attributed to the timeframe it takes for many of these processes to occur (usually in the millions of years). Oftentimes, it is hard to maintain interest in rocks and minerals, as well as the rock cycle and how rocks are formed. It is my goal that by making this a challenge that needs to be solved, with definite correct or incorrect answers, I will be able to engage students by giving them a concrete problem that they have to solve. By placing the identification of rocks and

minerals at the end of the module (rather than the beginning in past years), I believe it will put the “why” into the students’ hands, and create an environment where students are driven and want to march forward to solve their problem.

How does this project correlate to an academic standard, CCS district initiative or school improvement plan?

7.ES.1 through 7.ES.5 are the standards that will be covered through this project. In the Clay Middle School Improvement Plan, teachers will utilize Tier 1 instruction strategies, such as science teachers continuing to utilize PBL protocols and projects in class. According to PBLworks.com, “Project Based Learning is a teaching method in which students gain knowledge and skills by working for an extended period of time to investigate and respond to an authentic, engaging, and complex question, problem, or challenge”. In this PBL, students will be utilizing their investigative skills to gain the knowledge to solve a real-world problem. Ultimately, making a project fun and exciting to kids will keep them engaged for longer, and create a deeper investment in students’ learning.

Will this project have an impact beyond the completion date? Carmel Clay Schools encourages students to use a growth mindset:

“[This] occurs when we believe our intelligence and abilities can be improved upon with effort and the right strategies. Characteristics associated with a growth mindset include a willingness to confront challenges, viewing failure as a springboard for growth, and a passion for learning. Not surprisingly, this type of mindset is strongly linked to greater happiness and achievement in life” (Schoolwide Initiatives 2021).

The idea behind the growth mindset is that when one experiences failure, it is imperative to keep trying. At Clay, we strongly believe in “failing forward”. When something doesn’t work, we look at how we can adjust and retry. By approaching PBL with a growth mindset, we can achieve far more as a class.

I want to do this project because I think students will remember this activity far into their education. I fully remember the most engaging activities I completed even 20 years later. After a



year in which a lot of projects in science were taken from hands-on group projects, to a lot of digital independent work, I think it's important to get tools and labs back in student hands!

How will you evaluate the success of this project? I will use mini quizzes along the way to check for understanding. Additionally, students will take a pre-test and a post-test. This will allow me to see what students knew before the project started, as well as how effective the PBL was at teaching students what they needed to learn. Finally, students will be able to compare their final analysis against a key to see how accurate they were in classifying and cataloging the specimens in their kits.

What is your expected goal for this project? Ultimately, my goal is to get science back in the hands of my students. It is so easy to create lessons based on teacher led instruction. The "I do, we do, you do" approach to education is great for certain topics, but it shouldn't be the only way students are learning. I love when a student sparks a question, which turns into another, and another, and another. The more questions a student can come up with, the more interested they are in the topic we are learning about. In fact, some of the best classes I have led have been when a student asks a question and we eventually end up in a full class discussion about the answer as well as any other questions that come up when trying to find that answer. I love letting the kids' interest be the deciding factor of where the lesson goes. In a PBL, and this project, that is exactly what happens.

What is your motivation for this project? I am so excited to try something new with the project. I have never fully implemented a student led project where the students are the deciding factor of where we go with the project. I think it's going to be a lot of fun to have a challenge to solve instead of the typical one lesson at a time approach taken with these standards. Oftentimes, since it's fall semester, students really lose steam the closer we get to breaks. I think with the lesson, I will be able to retain much more interest throughout the project.



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CCS School: Prairie Trace Elementary

Grant Focus: Curriculum Enhancement

Project Title: For Which We Stand

Anticipated # of students benefiting from this project: 60

Age/Grade Level: 5th grade

Project Description:

According to Pythagoras, "The beginning of every government starts with the education of our youth." It is one thing to learn about our government, but it is another to empower students to see why it matters, even to them. These books would enrich our social studies standards and provide students with more than a basic understanding of the American Democracy, why every vote counts, and how they can make a difference.

Why is this project needed?

We have a social studies book, but it only focuses on the founding of Democracy in America. While this is essential, students need to see the impact the government has had on all the individuals after 1787. It is hard for them to understand how a structure developed over 230 years ago is what runs our country today. The idea of amendments, checks and balances, and a government for the people, by the people is hard for adults to comprehend; imagine trying to help 10-11 year olds. This book breaks it all down and shows the reader the importance of each and every piece of our country's government. Through infographics, colorful pictures, examples, and a voice written for ages 8-12, students would be highly engaged and come away with more than a basic understanding. They would KNOW why our government matters - to them!

How does this project correlate to an academic standard, CCS district initiative or school improvement plan?

There are 13 state standards (ironic, 13 Colonies) focusing on government in the Indiana State Standards for 5th grade Social Studies. They range from:

1. Making the United States Constitution and Establishing the Federal Republic: 1763 to 1800
2. Foundations of Government

3. Functions of Government
4. Roles of Citizens These standards begin in 1781 and cover the development, impact, and role of citizens through today.

Will this project have an impact beyond the completion date?

Our social studies textbook, which is amazing, doesn't go into enough depth on these 13 standards, which always leaves me the task of supplementing. While I am creative, it has always been hard to find a quality text to help kids read about these 4 areas. This book would go above and beyond. It would allow them to not only learn more deeply about our country's government, but be a window to see beyond the textbook. It would provide me the springboard to do creative projects and activities for our government because my students would have a much stronger foundation on the topic.

How will you evaluate the success of this project?

1. I will develop a project to assess the state standards.
2. I will do a preview/pretest to see what the students know beforehand.
3. This will drive my instruction.
4. I will then use a post assessment (project) to evaluate the understanding the students gained. Really, this is a longer term project. I want ALL of my future students to have a better understanding, because that is how you make a change in the world. Empowering students to see why things matter.

What is your expected goal for this project?

1. Students will develop a strong foundational understanding of our country's government.
2. I will be able to cover ALL state standards without piecing together a reading selection.
3. Students will have a much stronger understanding of how our government works and why it matters.

What excites you about this project?

I always want my students to be excited about learning. Even after 21 years of teaching, I am ALWAYS looking for new ways to teach. Why wouldn't I, the students are different each and every year, so my teaching should be too! But, finally finding a book to use that is exciting for students is a HUGE motivation. I always get excited about new things and it is that energy that I use in my classroom to excite my students.

Brief abstract of the project:

Understanding why our government matters and how we can make it work!