WACO ISD EDUCATION FOUNDATION
COVER SHEET – PART II
Application for Grant:
2026-2027 Funding Cycle

Assigned Grant Proposal #: 43

Project Title: Roots, Rivers, & Wildlife

Grade Level(s): Pre-K/Kindergarten **# of Students DIRECTLY involved:** 20

Subject Area(s): Literacy and Science

Amount Requested: $ 3323.50

Grant Focus Area(s): In order to be considered, Waco Education Foundation Innovation Grant proposals must fall under one or more of the E4 focus areas: early childhood development, enhanced programming for advanced students, extended education for staff, and emphasis on student performance. NOTE: In addition to meeting one of the E4 focus areas above, grant readers are especially interested in creative and innovative grant requests that target fine arts, STEM, literacy, or enrichment.

(check all that apply)

- ☑ Early Childhood Development
- ☐ Enhanced Programming for Advanced Students
- ☐ Fine Arts
- ☑ Literacy
- ☐ Extended Education for Staff
- ☐ Emphasis on Student Performance
- ☐ STEM
- ☐ Enrichment

Assigned Proposal #43
Roots, Rivers, & Wildlife

Project Description:

This project will introduce students ages 3–9 to literacy and environmental science through the *Parts of a Biome Readers* and hands-on biome materials. The readers build phonetic reading skills while teaching about key ecosystem components such as plants, animals, soil, air, water, and the Sun. Students will also use biome puzzles, continent biome cards, and Cosmic Curriculum studies to explore how these elements interact to form ecosystems. By combining reading development with interactive science lessons, this project encourages curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking while helping students build foundational literacy skills and develop a deeper understanding of the natural world.

Rationale:

Biomes and Cosmic Curriculum study can begin as early as three years old in the Montessori Classroom. Since Lake Air Montessori has a focus on outdoor learning and connecting students with the outdoor world around them, these materials having an emphasis on plants, animals, soil, air, water, and the Sun, they are perfect for demonstrating how each of these parts works and connects to form our Universe. Hence, they help the child establish a sense of place in the vast web of life.

The *Parts of a Biome Readers* and accompanying biome materials support early literacy and environmental science for children ages 3–9. These readers progressively introduce phonetic elements aligned with the Waseca Reading Program, helping emerging readers build confidence and fluency. Hands-on lessons using biome puzzles, continent biome cards, and Cosmic Curriculum studies introduce children to plants, animals, soil, air, water, and the Sun, demonstrating how these elements interact to form ecosystems and our universe. By combining reading development with scientific exploration, these materials foster curiosity, creativity, and a

sense of connection to the natural world while supporting learning across primary and elementary classrooms.

Many of these materials are present in the other classrooms at my campus. The teacher in charge of the classroom before me provided these materials at her own expense and, thus, took them with her when she resigned at the end of last school year. My goal is to replace these materials through grants and Donors Choose projects.

Goals:

Engaging with these materials will enable students to:

1. **Develop Early Reading Skills**
   Students will practice recognizing letters, phonetic sounds, and simple words through the *Parts of a Biome Readers*, building confidence as emerging readers.

2. **Identify Parts of a Biome**
   Students will learn to recognize and name key parts of a biome including plants, animals, soil, air, water, and the Sun.

3. **Understand Basic Ecosystem Connections**
   Students will begin to understand that living things depend on non-living elements (sunlight, water, soil, and air) to survive.

4. **Explore Biomes Around the World**
   Using continent biome cards and puzzles, students will identify that different places on Earth have different environments where plants and animals live.

5. **Develop Observation and Critical Thinking Skills**
   Through hands-on materials and discussions, students will observe, sort, and match biome components while beginning to ask questions about the natural world.

Plan of Operation:

As students begin to read at a simple phonetic level, they will be introduced to the *Parts of a Biome Readers* that correspond with their individual reading ability.

Students will read the appropriate reader independently or with guidance from the teacher. After reading, the class will participate in a discussion where students share what they learned about the biome concepts presented in the story, including plants, animals, soil, air, water, and the Sun.

Students will then connect their reading to hands-on learning by building biome puzzles for each continent. While assembling the puzzles, they will compare the visual information with what they learned from the reader and discuss how different biomes exist in different regions of the world.

Next, students will trace and color paper copies of continent biome maps to reinforce geographic awareness and biome identification. They will also work with biome cards by matching them to the correct biome categories. To extend the activity, students will create their own small paper book using the biome cards, labeling and coloring each page. This process will strengthen reading comprehension, reinforce vocabulary, and encourage creativity while helping students better understand the relationships between living and non-living parts of ecosystems.

Project Timeline:

Summer 2026

The biome readers, puzzles, and continent biome card materials will be ordered.

Late July 2026

Once classroom setup is permitted for the 2026–2027 school year, the materials will be unboxed, assembled, organized, and integrated into the Montessori classroom.

Beginning of the 2026–2027 School Year

The materials will be fully available for student use. Students who are already reading at a phonetic level will begin using the Biome Readers appropriate to their reading level.

Throughout the School Year

Students who are not yet reading will work with the biome three-part matching cards and the biome puzzles to learn biome vocabulary and build foundational understanding before progressing to the reading materials.

Communication and Dissemination:

Members of the Waco ISD Education Foundation are welcome to visit the classroom to observe students as they engage with the materials. I will also provide photos of students using the materials during their learning activities and would be happy to share the outcomes of this grant by presenting the results at a Waco ISD Education Foundation meeting.

Evaluation:

The success of this project will be measured through student engagement, literacy development, and understanding of biome concepts. Students who are reading at a phonetic level will demonstrate progress by successfully reading the *Biome Readers* appropriate to their level and participating in discussions about the biome concepts presented in the stories. Their ability to explain basic relationships between plants, animals, soil, air, water, and the Sun will help show their comprehension.

Students will also demonstrate understanding through hands-on activities. Successful completion of biome puzzles, correct matching of biome cards, and accurate identification of biomes on continent maps will indicate that students are learning key vocabulary and concepts.

Additional evidence of success will include student-created work such as labeled and illustrated biome maps and student-made biome card books. Teacher observations of student participation, comprehension during discussions, and increasing independence with the materials will further indicate the effectiveness of the project. Together, these measures will help determine whether the project successfully supports both early literacy and foundational environmental science learning.

Long Term Implications

This project will have lasting benefits for both students and the classroom learning environment by supporting early literacy development while fostering an understanding of environmental science. By integrating the *Parts of a Biome Readers*, biome puzzles, and continent biome cards into daily classroom activities, students will gain foundational reading skills while also developing an appreciation for how living and nonliving elements interact within ecosystems. These early experiences help build curiosity about the natural world and encourage students to think critically about how different parts of the environment are connected.

Over time, students who engage with these materials will strengthen their reading confidence and comprehension as they progress through phonetic reading levels. At the same time, they will deepen their understanding of biomes and the relationships among plants, animals, soil, air, water, and the Sun. Introducing these ideas at a young age helps students develop a sense of place within the broader web of life and lays the groundwork for more advanced science learning in later grades.

An important aspect of the long-term impact of this project is the exceptional quality and durability of the materials. The readers, puzzles, and cards are produced using high-quality components designed for repeated classroom use. Because of this durability, the materials will remain a valuable instructional resource for many years and will benefit multiple groups of students beyond the initial year of implementation. This ensures that the investment made through the grant will continue to support learning long after the project begins.

In addition, students in the Montessori classroom are intentionally taught to value and respect the learning materials they use. From an early age, students learn that classroom materials are shared tools that support everyone's learning. As a result, they are encouraged to handle the materials carefully, return them properly, and maintain them in good condition. This culture of respect helps ensure that the materials remain usable for future students while also teaching responsibility and care for shared resources.

Overall, the long-term implications of this project extend far beyond a single school year. The combination of durable, high-quality materials and a classroom culture that values respectful use will allow these resources to continue enriching student learning for years to come. By supporting both literacy development and environmental awareness, this project will provide lasting educational value and help cultivate thoughtful, curious learners who understand their connection to the natural world.

Key Personnel:

As the lead teacher in the classroom, holding a Bachelor's degree and Texas Teacher Certification in Early Childhood Education as well as Montessori certification for the 3–6-year-old environment, I will oversee and implement every stage of the project. This includes ordering, unboxing, organizing, and integrating the materials into the classroom, guiding students in how to properly use the materials, and evaluating the overall effectiveness of the project.

Budget Narrative:

Line 1: The requested funds will be used to purchase the *Biomes and Cosmic Curriculum Package – Primary*, which includes a comprehensive set of materials designed to support early literacy development while introducing young students to foundational environmental science concepts. These materials will allow students to explore the parts of a biome—energy, soil, air, water, plants, and animals—and understand how these elements interact within ecosystems and within the larger context of our planet and universe.

The package includes instructional materials such as the *Cosmic Nesting Boxes*, an introduction to biome curriculum cards with storage trays, and several hands-on learning mats that allow students to explore topics including seasons, land and water environments, backyard ecosystems, and basic landforms. In addition, the *Parts of a Biome Readers* will support emerging readers by allowing students to practice phonetic reading skills while learning scientific content related to the biome materials.

Together, these materials provide an integrated set of durable, hands-on resources that will be used regularly in the classroom to support both literacy and science learning for young students.

Line 2: Grant funds will also be used to purchase a set of *Biome Puzzle Maps* and the accompanying *Puzzle Map Cabinet* for classroom use. These wooden puzzle maps allow students to explore the continents while identifying the different biomes found across the world. Each continent puzzle is color-coded by biome, helping young learners visually recognize how ecosystems vary across geographic regions.

The puzzles include double-sided control charts that students can reference while completing the maps, supporting independent learning and reinforcing biome identification. A map legend stamp is also included so students can create and label their own biome maps as part of follow-up activities. The Puzzle Map Cabinet provides organized storage with sliding trays that keep the maps and charts protected and accessible for daily classroom use. The durable wooden construction ensures these materials will remain a long-term resource for future students.

Line 3: Grant funds will also be used to purchase the *Sound Sorting System* to support early phonetic awareness and reading readiness in the classroom. This material is designed to reinforce students' understanding of the pure sounds of

the alphabet after they have been introduced to letters and sounds through Montessori materials such as sandpaper letters and the moveable alphabet.

The system organizes the alphabet sounds into five groups, introducing commonly used sounds first to help students build confidence as they learn to recognize and distinguish letter sounds. Through activities such as initial sound sorting and spelling cards, students practice identifying beginning, middle, and ending sounds in simple words. These hands-on materials will help strengthen phonemic awareness and provide an important foundation for students as they begin developing early reading skills, thus preparing them for the rigors of the biome readers later.

Line 4: Grant funds will also be used to purchase the *Animals of the World Measuring Tape* to support lessons in measurement, comparison, and animal science. This material allows students to visualize and compare the actual sizes of animals found around the world. By using the measuring tape, students can explore how the size of different animals relates to familiar classroom objects, their own height, or the size of furniture in the room.

This hands-on tool encourages students to practice measurement skills while also learning about animals and their physical characteristics. It supports discussions about scale, size, and diversity in the natural world while engaging students in interactive and meaningful exploration.

Line 5: Grant funds will also be used to purchase a set of storage boxes designed to organize the *Continent Biome Cards* used in classroom lessons. The set includes seven boxes, each labeled with a biome, allowing the cards to be sorted and stored by biome for each continent. This organization will make it easier for students to access the correct cards during lessons and independent work.

Each box is designed to hold the animal and people cards associated with a specific biome, helping students connect the organisms and cultures that exist within those environments. The storage system will support classroom organization, protect the materials, and make the card sets easier for students to use during hands-on learning activities.

Line 6: Grant funds will also be used to purchase *Wheel of Life Puzzles* to support students' understanding of natural cycles and patterns found in the environment. These puzzles introduce students to the concept that many processes in nature occur in repeating cycles. By working with the puzzles,

students will explore how living things grow and change over time while recognizing that many natural processes continue in ongoing patterns.

The puzzles also provide an opportunity to discuss how different cultures observe and describe cycles in nature, including the idea of directional patterns that begin in the east and move clockwise. Through hands-on exploration, students will develop an appreciation for the rhythms of the natural world while strengthening observation and sequencing skills.

Line 7: Grant funds will be used to purchase the *Continent Mat Bundle* to support hands-on learning in geography and environmental science. The canvas continent mat uses Montessori color-coding to help students identify the continents and oceans. Three-part cards for the continents and oceans will be used during group lessons and independent work to reinforce geographic vocabulary and recognition.

The bundle also includes wooden animal figures that students can sort onto the correct continents, helping them connect animals with their natural habitats while strengthening continent identification skills. Matching cards include a control of error to support independent learning. A wooden continent cube and storage box are included to keep the materials organized and accessible for regular classroom use.

Line 8: Grant funds will also be used to purchase the *Continent Biome Cards – Primary* set to support student learning about the biomes found on each continent. The card sets include continent cards, biome cards, animal cards, and cards introducing indigenous people from each region. These materials will help students explore how plants, animals, and people live and adapt within different environmental conditions.

Animal cards introduce a variety of species found within each biome and provide age-appropriate information about their characteristics, diets, and adaptations. Cards featuring indigenous peoples highlight how different cultures meet their basic needs—such as food, clothing, shelter, and transportation—within their natural environments. The cards are color-coded by continent and include a control of error to support independent student work and organization during classroom activities.

Line 9: Grant funds will also be used to purchase *toddler tiles* that support hands-on learning of basic plant and animal identification for younger students in the classroom. These materials will help introduce three-year-old students, many

of whom have limited prior knowledge of plants and animals, to foundational vocabulary and recognition skills.

The wooden tiles are durable and designed for frequent classroom use by young learners. In addition to supporting early identification skills, the tiles will expose emergent readers to the written names of plants and animals, reinforcing early literacy development. The matching format includes a built-in control of error, allowing students to check their work and supporting independent learning.

Waco Education Foundation

Grant Budget Form

				Assigned Proposal #	43	
				Project Title:	Roots, Rivers, & Wildlife	
				Number of Students Served by Grant:		20
Qty	Budget Item	Verify Vendor (Y or N)	$ Requested from the WISD Foundation	Other Secured Source	$ from Other Source (if applicable)	Total Amount
	Consumable Supplies					
						$ -
						$ -
						$ -
						$ -
						$ -
						$ -
	total Consumable Supplies		$ -		$ -	$ -
	Technology					
						$ -
						$ -
	total Technology		$ -		$ -	$ -
	Long-Term Supplies / Equipment (items that will last beyond the grant year)					
1	Biomes Readers and Cosmic Curriculum package-Primary from Wasecabiomes.org		$ 1,105.00			$ 1,105.00
1	Complete set of biome puzzles with cabinet from Wasecabiomes.org		$ 625.00			$ 625.00
1	Sound sorting System from wasecabiomes.org		$ 275.00			$ 275.00
1	Animal Measuring Tape from wasecabiomes.org		$ 30.00			$ 30.00
1	Biomes of the Continent Boxes from wasecabiomes.org		$ 150.00			$ 150.00
1	Wheel of Life Life Cycle Bundles		$ 200.00			$ 200.00
1	Continent Mat Bundle from Wasecabiomes.org		$ 175.00			$ 175.00
1	Complete set of continent biome cards—Primary from Wasecabiomes.org		$ 270.00			$ 270.00
1	Nature Words Toddler Tiles from wasecabiomes.org		$ 60.00			$ 60.00
	total Long-Term Supplies		$ 2,890.00		$ -	$ 2,890.00
	Contracted Services					
						$ -
						$ -

	total Contracted Services		$ -		$ -	$ -
	Personnel					
						$ -
						$ -
	total Personnel		$ -		$ -	$ -
	Travel / Other					
						$ -
						$ -
						$ -
						$ -
	total Other	Shipping	$ 433.50		$ 433.50	$ 433.50

Totals	**Total Requested from the WISD Foundation**	**Foundation Cost Per Student**	**Total from Other Sources**	**Total Cost of Project**
	$ 3,323.50	**$166.18**	**$ 433.50**	**$ 3,323.50**

