



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

Assigned Grant Proposal #: _____

Project Title: _____

Grade Level(s): _____ # of Students DIRECTLY involved: _____

Subject Area(s): _____

Amount Requested: \$ _____

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

Building Beyond the Page: Literacy Inspired by The Stars Beneath Our Feet

Proposal #70

Project Description

This project combines reading, creativity, and collaborative learning through a hands-on, literature-based unit anchored by *The Stars Beneath Our Feet*. Grant funds will be used to purchase a class set of hardcover copies of the novel, reusable Lego building materials, and storage for those materials. Because Lego building is central to the novel's story itself, the hands-on building component serves as an authentic extension of the text rather than a separate activity. The multi-week unit will focus on reading comprehension, character and theme analysis, academic vocabulary, grammar and language conventions, and structured writing skills aligned to state assessments.

The Rationale

This project aligns with the Waco Education Foundation's focus areas of enrichment and emphasis on student performance, and qualifies as a creative classroom project that goes beyond standard instruction. The selected anchor text, *The Stars Beneath Our Feet*, is a critically acclaimed novel recognized as a New York Times Notable Book, a Time Magazine Top 10 Children's Books of the Year, and a Coretta Scott King/John Steptoe Award winner. With a Lexile level of 650L and an interest level spanning grades 4 through 8, it is both accessible and appropriately challenging for middle school students. Its themes of grief, identity, community, and resilience are deeply relevant to the real experiences many of our students navigate every day.

This project directly supports goals outlined in the Waco ISD District Improvement Plan, which prioritizes increased student growth and academic achievement in literacy and expanding effective parent and family engagement. This novel study addresses both priorities by deepening literacy skills through an engaging, project-based format.

Students at Tennyson would benefit from creative, enrichment-focused instruction that connects academic content to real-world thinking skills. Many students respond more deeply to

literacy instruction when it is paired with a meaningful, hands-on component. The materials requested are not currently available in the classroom and are not covered by existing campus resources, making this grant the means by which this experience becomes possible.

The Goals

As a first-year teacher, one of the most consistent challenges I have witnessed is students struggling to connect with what they are reading. When students cannot see themselves in a text, or when the characters, settings, and experiences feel foreign to their own lives, engagement fades and comprehension suffers. After completing challenge day and getting a clearer picture of what many of our students navigate on a daily basis, I became even more intentional about finding a text with real heart. That led me to *The Stars Beneath Our Feet*. It is a story about a young person dealing with grief, community pressure, and the search for identity, experiences that are deeply real and relevant to many of our students. I want them to read something they can genuinely connect to, because I believe that connection is the door they must walk through to successfully unlock everything else: the willingness to read, to think critically, to write honestly, and to show up fully in the classroom.

Specifically, this project would aim to::

- Build students' ability to analyze characters, themes, and author's choices in *The Stars Beneath Our Feet*, supporting their thinking with textual evidence in both discussion and writing
- Improve students' structured writing skills through responses and a culminating written essay tied to the novel
- Develop creativity and innovation through Lego-based projects in which students design and revise original models to represent ideas from the text and their own creative interpretation
- Strengthen collaboration skills as students work in small groups to plan, build, problem-solve, and present their ideas effectively
- Increase students' reading stamina and positive reading identity, measured through pre and post engagement surveys

By the end of the unit, students will have completed the novel, produced multiple pieces of analytical writing, and collaborated on a Lego build project presented to their peers, demonstrating growth in both literacy and learning skills.

Plan of Operation

This project will be implemented during the Fall 2026 semester across six ELAR classes. Students are seen on an A/B block schedule, with each class meeting twice per week for 90 minutes per session, and an additional 45-minute period on C days (Fridays). This schedule will allow for sufficient instructional time for reading, discussion, and hands-on building work.

The Stars Beneath Our Feet will not replace the existing curriculum but it will aim to enhance it. The novel will be taught in alignment with the current textbook units and the MyPerspectives adopted ELAR curriculum, serving as a high-interest text that brings the same skills and standards to life in a more engaging and culturally relevant way. All reading, writing, and language instruction in this unit will be directly tied to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for middle school ELAR, including standards for literary analysis, author's craft, theme, character development, academic vocabulary, evidence-based writing and more.

The objectives of this are as follows:

- Students will read and analyze *The Stars Beneath Our Feet* in its entirety
- Students will produce analytical writing connected to character, theme, and author's craft, etc.
- Students will design and build a Lego project that represents a meaningful connection to the text
- Students will collaborate effectively in small groups to plan, build, and present their work

Objectives will be met in the timeline as follows:

Week 1 Pre-Reading & Launch: Students complete a reading attitude survey and participate in background-building activities on the Harlem setting and the novel's central themes of grief, identity, and community. Lego build challenge expectations and group norms are introduced, and the campus librarian leads a book talk to generate excitement about the text.

Weeks 2–4 Reading & Discussion: Students read the novel together during class using a combination of whole-class, small-group, and independent reading structures, ensuring every student has equitable access to the text regardless of circumstances outside of school. Instruction

focuses on character analysis, setting, emerging themes, and reading response journaling. A mini Lego challenge is introduced midway through this phase to connect hands-on work to the text from early on.

Weeks 5–6 Deeper Analysis & Build Planning: Students complete the novel and shift into deeper analytical work focusing on theme development, author's craft, and evidence-based writing, with grammar and language conventions taught through mentor sentences drawn directly from the text. Student groups are assigned and begin planning their culminating Lego build project using structured planning templates.

Weeks 7–8 Culminating Build, Presentations & Celebration: Groups design, construct, and revise their Lego builds during class, documenting their creative choices in writing throughout the process. The unit concludes with a gallery walk and student presentations.

Communication & Dissemination

The Waco Education Foundation is welcome to observe the project at any point during the unit, including the culminating gallery walk and student presentations, which will provide excellent opportunities for photos and firsthand observation of student learning. Upon completion of the unit, results including student work samples, and TCA Data, will be shared with campus staff and the ELAR department. The goal is to give colleagues a clear picture of how a cross-curricular, literature-based approach can increase student engagement and inform future instructional planning across the department at Tennyson.

Evaluation

The success of this project will be measured through a combination of student performance data and student feedback. Academic growth will be monitored through TCA scores, with pre and post results compared to determine whether students demonstrated measurable improvement in reading comprehension, analytical writing, and the literacy skills targeted throughout the unit. Classroom assessments including reading response journals, analytical writing pieces, and the culminating Lego build project will also be used to evaluate student mastery of key TEKS standards.

In addition to academic data, student satisfaction and engagement will be measured through observations of their overall experience with the novel and the hands-on building component. Together, these data points will provide a well-rounded picture of the project's effectiveness. Not just in terms of academic success, but in terms of whether students felt genuinely engaged, connected to the text, and motivated to learn.

Long Term Implications

The long-term goal of this project is to build a reusable, sustainable unit that can be taught every year without additional funding. Because the books are hardcover and the Lego sets are durable, both materials are intended to last well beyond the 2026-2027 school year. Students will be expected to handle all materials with care, and the Lego pieces will be inventoried and stored properly at the end of each use to ensure nothing is lost or damaged. As long as the materials remain in good condition, this novel study and the accompanying Lego build project will continue to be a part of instruction each fall, giving future students the same opportunity to connect with a meaningful text in a creative way.

Key Personnel

The primary individual responsible for carrying out this project is me, the classroom ELAR teacher. During the 2026-2027 school year, this will be my second year as a middle school ELAR teacher, and this project reflects the kind of intentional, student-centered instruction I am committed to bringing to my classroom. Prior to teaching, I worked at a domestic violence shelter, an experience that gave me a deep understanding of trauma, resilience, and the importance of creating safe, supportive spaces for children. That background directly informs why this project matters to me. My responsibilities will include planning and delivering all instruction, managing materials, facilitating student groups, collecting and analyzing data, communicating with families, and coordinating with any necessary staff during the unit.

Budget Narrative & Justification

A class set of 32 hardcover copies of *The Stars Beneath Our Feet* will be purchased through Bulk Books at a bulk rate of \$10.25 per copy, totaling \$328.00. Hardcover copies are intentionally selected for durability, as the books will be reused with students each year.

The quantity of 32 slightly exceeds the average class size to account for potential damage or loss over time, ensuring the set remains complete and usable for future school years.

Fifteen Lego Classic Large Creative Brick Box sets will be purchased at \$59.99 each, totaling \$899.85. Each set contains 790 pieces and provides sufficient materials for student groups to design and construct meaningful builds during the culminating project. Having multiple sets ensures that all class periods have access to adequate materials simultaneously, and the sets will be inventoried and stored carefully for reuse each year.

One six-pack of LEGO Education classroom storage bins will be purchased for approximately \$212.22 for a pack of six.. These bins are specifically designed for classroom use, are stackable, and include transparent lids for easy inventory and secure storage between class periods and school years. Shipping is estimated at 10% of the total materials cost. All purchases will be made through district-approved vendors.

Waco Education Foundation

Grant Budget Form

Assigned Proposal #	70
Project Title:	Building Beyond the Page: Literacy Insp
Number of Students Served by Grant:	32

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						
32	The Stars Beneath Our Feet Novel (Hardcover)	Y	\$ 328.00			\$ 328.00
15	Lego Classic Large Creative Brick Box sets	Y	\$ 899.85			\$ 899.85
6	One 6-pack of classroom Lego storage bins	Y	\$ 212.22			\$ 212.22
						\$ -
						\$ -
						\$ -
total Consumable Supplies			\$ 1,440.07		\$ -	\$ 1,440.07
Technology						
						\$ -
						\$ -
total Technology			\$ -		\$ -	\$ -
Long-Term Supplies / Equipment (items that will last beyond the grant year)						
						\$ -
						\$ -
						\$ -
						\$ -
						\$ -
						\$ -
total Long-Term Supplies			\$ -		\$ -	\$ -
Contracted Services						
						\$ -
						\$ -
total Contracted Services			\$ -		\$ -	\$ -
Personnel						
						\$ -
						\$ -
total Personnel			\$ -		\$ -	\$ -
Travel / Other						
						\$ -
						\$ -
						\$ -
						\$ -
total Other			\$ -		\$ -	\$ -
Totals			Total Requested from the WISD Foundation	Foundation Cost Per Student	Total from Other Sources	Total Cost of Project
			\$ 1,440.07	45.0021875	\$ -	\$ 1,440.07