



Sample of a Winning Educator Initiative Grant Application

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| School Name | Cuyahoga Valley Christian Academy |
| Grade Levels Encompassed by School | 6-12 |
| Team Leader Name | Joy Meszaros |
| Project Title | The Big Read |
| Amount Requested | \$4,000 |

Brief Project Description

Following a class read of the powerful book, *Hidden Figures*, my students will demonstrate mastery by developing close-reading guides and chapter-by-chapter discussion templates. Next, students will engage in their community through initiating community reads and discussions in three major segments: schools, nursing homes, and local libraries. Each partner will be given free books and the student-developed reading guide to facilitate discussions. Students will then interact with these community groups over the course of the year as they lead this impactful dialogue. With a growth mindset, *The Big Read* aims to bring the community together one great book at a time

Anticipated Project Start and End Date: Spring 2018 - December 2018

More Details:

Spring 2018: The materials will be developed in the AP Language class this Spring (2018).

September 2018: Students will complete the in-class read using the materials developed

October-December 2018: Students engage in community reads

Spring 2019: Project finalized and results analyzed

*Note: This project will repeat each year using this timing template

Please provide a description of your proposed project in 500 words or less. Provide the need for the project, what K-12 grades are served, and what data informs and supports the stated need. Include the Learning Standards that are addressed by your proposal.

Our communities are divided. As we sink deeper into our digital world of talking heads, we disconnect and stop talking about relevant issues. In addition, student reading is often formulaic. With reading quizzes and reflection worksheets, students often read to get a grade, but little else. These efforts to engage readers often have disappointing results. In a recent analysis of our ACT Aspire Test data for our targeted 10th grade students, improvement in reading comprehension and analysis emerged as a great need. Several reading metrics indicated that 28% of our 10th graders identified as NOT ready for ACT reading expectations. As a result of this data, the anecdotal evidence of a lack of student engagement in readings, and the observation of our current climate, we developed this project.



A “Big Read” is a community initiative to read the same book at the same time. NEA’s website rationalizes their version of The Big Read by stating that, “Studies show that reading for pleasure reduces stress, heightens empathy, improves students’ test scores, slows the onset of dementia, and makes us more active and aware citizens”. By implementing The Big Read: Cuyahoga Falls, we hope to bring these same benefits to our community and students.

In the Spring, students will complete an in-class reading of the text. For year one, we have chosen *Hidden Figures* for its relevant themes of equality, perseverance, STEM, etc. Following the completion of the reading, students will be divided into three teams. Each team will be assigned one of the three community groups: students at Walsh Jesuit High School, patrons of the Stow Public Library, and residents of Altercare Western Reserve nursing home. Within these collaborative teams, students will develop thematic reading and discussion guides, complete with artistic responses to the text, for each chapter with their end audience in mind.

The following Fall, the students will initiate the community read. Each community partner will receive the books and a printed packet of the student-created reading and discussion guides, along with an invitation to participate in the culminating public art show. Over the course of a four week period, these three groups AND our own students will read the text and utilize the guides to engage in meaningful dialogue. Students will visit each of the partners to collectively discuss the relevant themes and chapters together. Furthermore, students will help organize additional relevant opportunities connected to the book, including a visit to NASA Glenn Research Center. The project will close with a culminating public art show, in which students and community members will share their artistic responses to the text and celebrate that year’s big read. That following Spring, we will choose another powerful and relevant text and repeat the process for the following year with the aim of growing the reach of this iteration of the Big Read.

ELA Ohio Standards Met:

RL. 11-12.2

RL. 11-12.3

RL. 11-12.4

RL. 11-12.5

RL. 11-12.6

RL. 11-12.10

How does the project prepare students for college and career readiness? At what transition point on the cradle-to-career continuum does your project fit? Please limit your answer to 250 words or less.

This project plans to prepare students for the transition of College & Career Readiness. The origin of this project was based on ACT Aspire’s test data that indicated 28% of our students were not currently deemed to be ready for this transition. Through utilizing this best practice, we aim to decrease this number and ensure that all of our students are ready to perform at the highest level at the college level. In addition, this authentic experience helps students develop 21st century skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, problem solving, global and cultural awareness, leadership, civic literacy and citizenship,



oral and written communication skills, social responsibility, technology literacy, and more. Each of these skills better prepares students for both college and career. Therefore, this project effectively fits within the Cradle-to-Career Continuum.

Please explain the specific outcomes you expect from the project. How will you measure success?

What evaluation tools will be used?

Through this community read aspect, students will be incentivized to read critically utilizing the skills being taught in class in order to better engage and support their target community partners. Research has long supported the use of an authentic audience to increase engagement and performance. When students are engaged in learning activities that engage them in “real world problems, inquiry activities that practice thinking skills and metacognition, discourse among a community of learners, and [that provide] student empowerment through choice (Rule, The Components of Authentic Learning, 2006-8) they participate in the integration of skills and apply them at the highest level!

Therefore, we fully expect to see an increase in student engagement, an increase in student mastery of critical/close reading skills, an increase in student performance on standardized test performance on reading comprehension and analysis, and an increase in 21st century skills such as civic literacy, social responsibility, critical thinking, problem solving, and collaboration. Finally, we expect to utilize this to produce a positive relationship with our community partners that results in an increased enjoyment of reading.

We will utilize pre- and post-assessments to isolate the positive impact of this project on isolated student reading and 21st century skills. Student-developed resources and responses will serve as formative assessment measurements to track progress towards mastery in the targeted reading skills. Furthermore, we will analyze the AP test data in order to measure the student mastery of reading skills. This will help us predict if this could have a similar impact on all students in the 10th grade with a more widespread school Big Read in the future.

We hope to measure the positive impact this has on the community through a post-survey that will question them on their experience with The Big Read.

Describe in detail any teacher professional development that will be a part of the project's implementation, including the use of one-on-one coaching.

I will work closely with the Curriculum Coordinator in a one-on-one coaching professional development relationship. He will help guide me through best practices for data-based decision making, developing and implementing authentic learning experiences, and implementing best-practice project-based learning. With monthly meetings (and more frequent when needed), I will be able to receive focused professional development that is directly applicable to this particular project.

I will also be attending the PBL Ohio Coaching 3-Day workshop. This workshop will enable me to collaborate with PBL experts on this particular project. I am confident that this coaching session will help me implement the absolute best version of this project in year one.



In addition, following the first year of The Big Read implementation, I will help train other teachers and staff in our school to implement this project within their classes. In this further iteration, I will be the one-on-one coach for future collaborators. In more informal terms, I will actively collaborate with other English teachers at my school and our partner school to help develop and implement best practices for this project.

Please describe how technology will be integrated into the project and what instructional best practices will be implemented.

In order to develop the reading and discussion guides, students will interact with much technology. Students will be tasked with creating flow charts and graphic organizers that effectively organize, question, and guide discussions/reading. In order to accomplish this, students will utilize the online resource Creately.com . This online website provides a powerful digital toolkit for developing these educational tools. In addition, students are tasked with developing artistic responses that will be utilized to augment the community reading experience. While much of this will be through the utilization of traditional artistic tools, students will also have the option to utilize digital art tools such as sketch.io and canva.com . In addition, students can utilize the digital poster/video creator spark.adobe.com for developing reader guides, helps, and resources.

This project implements many research-based best practices. First, many researchers have discussed the positive impact of connecting students and communities on both parties. Cunningham & Allington (1999) in their article *Classrooms that Work*, state that the schools across America that have the most “unusually high success rates with struggling readers have high levels of family and community involvement. These schools make superhuman efforts to reach out to the community and involve them”. Couple this with the 21st century skills of civic responsibility, increased community awareness, and more that are promoted by this project, it is clear that breaking down the school walls and engaging our greater community in The Big Read can have dramatic and profound impact on our student readers and on our greater community.

In addition, this project creates an authentic learning experience for the students as their work directly impacts a real and interested audience of community readers. Gulikers, Bastiaens, & Keirschner (2004) in their article “A Five-Dimensional Framework for Authentic Assessment” outline that students that are engaged in some sort of authentic problem-solving within which they see real value will be incredibly engaged and achieve at much higher levels as a result.

This project implements student-choice. Research shows that when students have some choice, they are more likely to engage and, as a result, succeed in their pursuits. Within their teams, students are able to respond to the text and design reading/discussion guides in a variety of ways.

In addition, this utilizes the best practice of data-based decision making. This project is born out of data analysis. Furthermore, through the collection of data we will be able to assess the efficacy of this project, make adjustments, and improve it to benefit the students in improving ways.

This project implements even more best-practices. It implements collaborative practices, project-based learning practices, inquiry learning, self-pacing strategies, and much more on a daily basis.



How will the project be sustained and/or replicated by others after the funding has ended?

The main financial burden of this project is the cost of providing books. After several conversations, we believe that this first iteration of The Big Read will serve as our proof of concept. When the project is successful, we believe community partners such as the libraries and other schools will partner with us on the cost of future books. In addition, our own school provides a budget for educational initiatives. Once we prove the value of this project, we are confident we can receive additional funding from CVCA. Finally, we will be utilizing the success of this project in year one to approach sponsors, such as publishers and local businesses, to help offset future costs. With the public nature of this project, we believe that this has tremendous potential for named sponsorships. We are confident that we will be able to procure funding in the future. In addition, we hope to grow The Big Read to more English classrooms in CVCA. As a result, with several trained teachers, the future of this project is shored up.