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FOR EXCELLENCE IN MIAMI-DADE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

2017-2018

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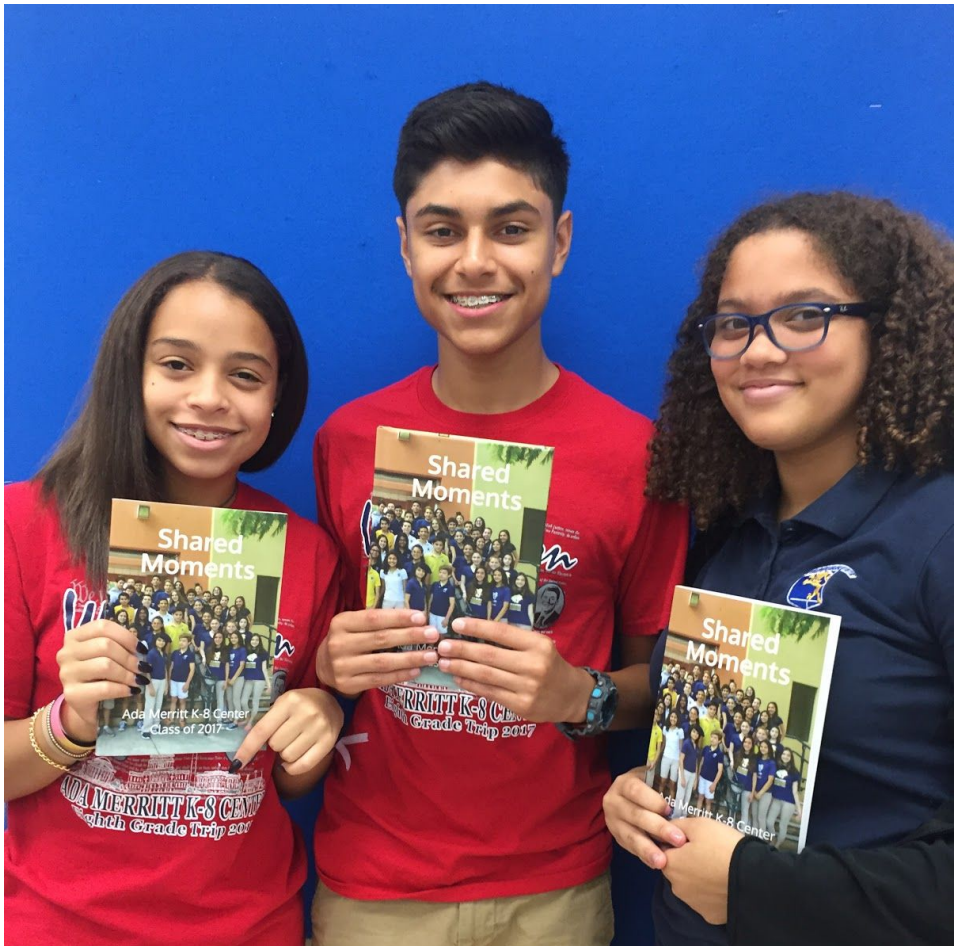

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Goals

- Students will recognize the features of fiction and creative nonfiction literary genres, acknowledging similarities and differences.
- Students will read and comprehend unfamiliar texts.
- Students will understand how an author's choices affect the reader, identifying specific choices and describing their effects.
- Students will reflect on their own experiences and select an appropriate writing topic.
- Students will make appropriate stylistic choices, use organizational structures and conventions that are suitable to the context, and employ literary techniques effectively.
- Students will draft, revise, edit, and publish original writing, taking into consideration feedback from instructor and peers.
- Students will recognize the role of storytelling in connecting people across time, space, and cultures.

Florida Standards for Language Arts

Reading

Key Ideas and Details

LAFS.3-12.RL.1.3 Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.

Craft and Structure

LAFS.3-12.RL.2.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.

LAFS.3-12.RL.2.5 Compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts and analyze how the differing structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style.

Speaking and Listening

Comprehension and Collaboration

LAFS.3-12.SL.1.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade-level topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

Writing

Text Types and Purposes

LAFS.3-12.W.1.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

Production and Distribution of Writing

LAFS.3-12.W.2.5 With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed.

Language

Conventions of Standard English

LAFS.3-12.L.1.2 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

LAFS.3-12.L.3.5 Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

Florida Standards for Social Studies

In grades 9-12, some of the following social studies standards may also apply. The choice of memoir(s) selected for study will affect which standards are applicable.

Humanities

Identify and analyze the historical, social, and cultural contexts of the arts.

SS.912.H.1.2: Describe how historical events, social context, and culture impact forms, techniques, and purposes of works in the arts, including the relationship between a government and its citizens.

SS.912.H.1.3: Relate works in the arts to various cultures.

SS.912.H.1.5: Examine artistic response to social issues and new ideas in various cultures.

Respond critically and aesthetically to various works in the arts.

SS.912.H.2.1: Identify specific characteristics of works within various art forms (architecture, dance, film, literature, music, theatre, and visual arts).

SS.912.H.2.2: Classify styles, forms, types, and genres within art forms.

SS.912.H.2.3: Apply various types of critical analysis (contextual, formal, and intuitive criticism) to works in the arts, including the types and use of symbolism within art forms and their philosophical implications.

SS.912.H.2.5: Describe how historical, social, cultural, and physical settings influence an audience's aesthetic response.

Sociology

Culture

SS.912.S.2.1: Define the key components of a culture, such as knowledge, language and communication, customs, values, norms, and physical objects.

SS.912.S.2.4: Give examples of subcultures and describe what makes them unique.

SS.912.S.2.5: Compare social norms among various subcultures.

SS.912.S.2.7: Explain how various practices of the culture create differences within group behavior.

Social Status

SS.912.S.3.2: Explain how roles and role expectations can lead to role conflict.

SS.912.S.3.3: Examine and analyze various points of view relating to historical and current events.

Social Groups

SS.912.S.4.1 Describe how individuals are affected by the different social groups to which they belong.

SS.912.S.4.11 Discuss how humans interact in a variety of social settings.

SS.912.S.4.5 Analyze what can occur when the rules of behavior are broken and analyze the possible consequences for unacceptable behavior.

Social Institutions

SS.912.S.5.3 Discuss how societies recognize rites of passage.

SS.912.S.5.4 Investigate stereotypes of the various United States subcultures, such as "American Indian," "American cowboys," teenagers," "Americans," "gangs," and "hippies," from a world perspective.

SS.912.S.5.6 Identify the factors that influence change in social norms over time.

SS.912.S.5.7 Use various resources to interpret information about cultural life in the United States and other world cultures, both in the past and today.

Project Overview

The storytelling tradition has always served as a way to connect people across time and place. Reading creative nonfiction allows students to recognize the shared human experience that connects all people across cultures and time. Writing their own original memoirs gives students the opportunity to reflect on important moments in their lives and become an active part of the storytelling community.

Students begin this unit by reading memoir selections and making text-text and text-self connections that encourage empathy. Memoirs can be chosen to highlight specific cultures and/or time periods in order to introduce sociological connections.

After reading published memoirs and analyzing the characteristics of creative nonfiction and the similarities and differences between this genre and fiction genres in terms of style, structure, and literary elements, students prepare to write their own short memoirs. The process of planning, drafting, and sharing their own true stories invites reflection, offers students the opportunity to make stylistic choices that reflect an awareness of their audience, and encourages them to explore their own ways of connecting to the reader.

This project is suitable for students of all ages and abilities. It is especially relevant to students in a transitional grade (5/8/12) since these years invite reflection on growth and change. The reading selections should be chosen to meet instructional needs of the specific group of students, and the writing project can be tailored to an appropriate level of challenge by modifying the topic, length, stylistic requirements, and level of instructor support.

To facilitate publishing, students will need access to computers with word processing software. There is a wide variety of on-demand printing companies that produce professional, high-quality books in hardcover and paperback and a variety of sizes. I prefer to publish with Blurb, which offers free, easy-to-use layout software. Printing costs vary depending on the number of pages and printing options selected. Bulk orders are discounted, and there are frequent promotional discounts for book authors.

Unit Timeline

The schedule below reflects 85-minute blocks on alternate days. The total duration of work on this unit is approximately six weeks.

Study of the primary text is designed as a combination of at-home readings and in-class close reading, analysis in literature circles, discussions, and writing exercises. Literature circle activities focus on identifying and analyzing the author's use of literary techniques that students will be expected to incorporate into their culminating writing task, an original short memoir. This task may be modified as needed to address the abilities of the specific class, and a rubric that describes expectations should be provided.

The timeline may be adjusted to accommodate texts of different lengths. Reading quizzes and other formative assessment may be incorporated as needed.

Week 1

- Introduce nonfiction genre of memoir and discuss its characteristics.
- Review literary elements terminology.
- Conduct background research on the cultural/historical context of the primary text.
- Begin reading the primary text.
- Working in literature circles, analyze the author's use of figurative language and comment on its effects on the reader.
- Connections quiz: identify how elements of cultural/historical facts are reflected in the text.

Week 2

- Continue working in literature circles on activities related to analysis of literary techniques.
- Complete Establishing Setting/Establishing Mood activity. (The memoir excerpts in this activity are taken from *Tasting the Sky* by Ibtisam Barakat. A similar activity using the primary text your class is studying may be substituted.)

Week(s) 3+

- Continue literature circle activities.

Week 4

- Upon completion of book-length memoir, select 3-4 short creative nonfiction essays representing a range of writing styles and techniques. Students work in literature circles, reading these short selections, comparing the author's style and techniques to each other and to the primary text.
- Using the primary and short nonfiction selections and recalling works of fiction the students have read, complete the Defining Genres activity and discuss observations and conclusions. This task should be tailored to provide support for the techniques required in the summative writing assignment.
- Introduce the Memoir Writing summative assignment and discuss specific requirements. Students may need support in selecting an appropriate topic.

Week 5

- After topics have been selected, write a one-paragraph summary of the chosen event that has a beginning, a middle, and an end.
- Conduct a guided brainstorming session, encouraging students to explore vivid sensory memories and write down sensory details.
- Guide students in drafting their memoir, incorporating both events from the summary and descriptive and figurative language to create a powerful sensory experience for the reader.

Week 6

- Peer critique of memoir drafts, using Guidelines for Constructive Critique.
- Revise drafts and prepare for publication.

Establishing Setting

In the passages below, Ibtisam Barakat, the author of the memoir *Tasting the Sky*, uses figurative language to create a vivid sense of place or to establish a mood. For each sentence:

> a) Notice the details Barakat chose related to setting. Consider the connotations of the author's word choices. For words with multiple meanings, be sure to consider in what sense the author is using the word. What do the author's specific choices communicate to the reader?
>
> b) How could Barakat have communicated the same idea without using figurative language? Write a sentence that expresses the literal meaning of Barakat's sentence, without using figurative language. Choose words that precisely describe the nuances the author communicates through her use of figurative language.
>
> c) Transfer the meaning to a different setting. Imagine that you want to communicate the same literal idea as each of Barakat's sentences, establishing the setting at your school. Write a sentence that communicates the SAME literal idea, using your own original choice of figurative language that reflects details of your school. Remember that your choices should be specific to this setting and create for your reader a vivid sense of place.

Example:

I watch for him every day **the way I watch for the snipers** (13)...

> a) Barakat refers to snipers to evoke the sense of imminent danger of living in a war zone.
>
> b) I watch for him alertly every day, feeling anxious.
>
> c) I watch for him every day the way I watch for the security guard to walk into the cafeteria when a food fight starts.

1. The moon was full like a cantaloupe (46).

2. The hibiscus blossoms rolled themselves like cigarettes when they went to sleep (50).

3. With his face pale as a lemon, he lay on the street, crying (53).

4. Shoes piled up by the door like beetles (55).

5. [The rooster's] posture was proud, almost like that of a soldier - our own soldier (101).

Establishing Mood

In each of the examples below, Barakat uses figurative language to create a specific mood. For each sentence:

a) Identify the mood the author is creating.

b) Identify the figurative language she uses, and explain how her choices create this mood, making connections between the connotations in her figurative language choices and the mood she seeks to establish.

c) Change the mood by changing the figurative language.

d) Explain the difference your change makes in the mood.

Example:

Fear is a blizzard inside me. (4)

a) Barakat creates a mood of overwhelming terror

b) The metaphor of a blizzard connects fear to the image of chaotic, swirling, blinding snow. We understand that her fear is so great that it blots out everything else.

c) Fear is a frog hopping in my stomach.

d) By changing the metaphor to a hopping frog, the level of fear is greatly lessened. Instead of a force of nature, it is a small creature reminding us of its presence but not overwhelming us.

6. The compound feels like the carcass of a giant animal that died a long time ago (5).

7. The hours stretch like rubber bands that break and snap against our skins (7).

8. Soon I would see him emerge from the curtain of evening shadows on the long gravel road (19).

9. Hills and valleys curved like the laps of a thousand mothers (67).

10. At night, a giant beam of light like an endless sword scraped from one end of the sky to another (93).

11. The lines on the pages were planted with words that opened up like rows of flowers (109).

Defining Genres

Think about the examples of fiction and memoir you have read. What features do they share? In what aspects do they differ? By considering multiple examples of writing in each genre, identify as precisely as possible the characteristics of each genre with respect to the literary elements below.

Element	Fiction	Memoir
Topic		
Structure		
Point of view (narration)		
Characters		

Perspective		
Setting		
Conflict		
Style (use of language, literary techniques)		
Theme		

Conclusions:

Memoir Writing

Memoirs use narrative techniques to tell a true story. Reading and writing personal narratives is a way to share individual experiences and discover commonalities between individuals.

What people, places, and events have made a lasting impression on you? What details of your experiences will you want to remember years from now? Choose one person, place, or event as the focus of a memoir vignette. The subject of your memoir may be someone or something that only you experienced, or an experience that you shared with others, but your telling of the story should be personal and specific to your own experience and recollection of the event. Limit the scope of your vignette—don't try to tell a story that spans weeks or months. Focus on using imagery—vivid sensory details that will evoke the time and place where the subject of your memoir occurred. Because the format of this piece of writing is short, every word must be purposeful. Choose your words carefully.

As you select the topic of your memoir and go through the drafting and revising processes, ask yourself:

- Does the situation have a recognizable conflict (either between characters or within one)?
- Do the characters all measurably contribute to the memoir—i.e., what function(s) do they serve?
- Do I establish enough of a setting, in both time and place, to allow the reader to picture the events? Have I developed the setting through use of vivid sensory detail?
- Do I focus on telling events from my own perspective and in first person point of view?
- Does the dialogue in the memoir (if it contains any) contribute to the development of events and characters? Does it accurately capture the voices of the speakers?
- Does my memoir emphasize using details that resonate in the reader's mind? Do I use figurative language effectively?
- Is my tone consistent with my intentions as a writer? Does my writing have a recognizable voice, and is the voice sustained throughout?
- Does the ending invite reflection and leave the reader with a strong emotion?

Proofread your writing carefully for errors in verb tense, homophones, punctuation, and word usage.

Guidelines for Constructive Critique

Audience:

- Read the piece with an open mind, as free from expectations as possible.
- Remember that there is no single right way to tell a story. Rather than judging how closely the story matches the way you would have written it, consider the author's intentions and give feedback about how effectively the writer carried out their intentions.
- The focus of a critique is on the content and style of the story, not the mechanics. If conventions such as spelling or punctuation are a problem, address them in a general comment (for example, "The grammatical errors were a distraction.") rather than pointing out each individual error.
- Keep the focus of your comments on the story and the author's techniques in telling that story. If you have a negative comment about some aspect of the story, offer a suggestion for how the problem might be addressed. Remember that it is the author's choice whether to take that advice.
- Avoid general comments (for example, "It was really good.") and focus on making specific comments on techniques that you appreciated ("The simile in the final paragraph was effective.")
- Use the project guidelines to help you address important aspects of the writing task. Also consider the following general questions:

  o Did the story engage me? Why or why not? Did it hold my attention throughout? Where was I most engaged and why?

  o Did the piece draw me in? How effective is the first sentence: The first paragraph?

  o Are any things confusing to me? What else did I need to know?

  o How does the story move along? Is the pace effective? (Consider the author's intentions.)

  o How would you describe the author's use of language? How appropriate is it to what the author is trying to do in the piece?

Author:

- Your role in the critique is to listen.
- Take notes on your group's feedback so that you can review it again later.
- As difficult as it may be to hear criticism of your work, try not to take it personally. Remember that every reader brings their own set of expectations and judgments, and the feedback you get reflects the opinions of those particular readers. Don't argue with the reader about their criticism.
- Avoid explaining the story to your readers. Remember that readers usually don't get an opportunity to have the author explain the story to them. If your readers express confusion, think about what steps you might take during the revision process to resolve the confusing elements.
- If there are specific aspects of the story that you would like feedback on, you may ask questions after your readers have all had an opportunity to give their feedback.

Recommended Reading

Short creative nonfiction selections are available from a variety of sources including basal readers, anthologies, and trade books that may be found in the school library or purchased. The book-length suggestions below represent memoirs from a range of authors, time periods and cultures, but they are just a small fraction of the many quality selections available.

Primary

Robinson, Sharon. *Testing the Ice: A True Story About Jackie Robinson*. illus. by Kadir Nelson. Scholastic. 2009. pap. $7.99. ISBN 978-0-698-11581-1.

Rylant, Cynthia. *When I was Young in the Mountains*. illus. by Diane Goode. Dutton. 1982. pap. $6.99. ISBN 978-0-14-054875-4.

Shulevitz, Uri. *How I Learned Geography*. illus. by author. Farrar. 2008. Tr $16.95. ISBN 978-0-374-33499-4.

Middle Grades

Abirached, Zeina. *A Game for Swallows: To Die, to Leave, to Return*. tr. from French by Edward Gauvin. illus. by author. Lerner/Graphic Universe. 2012. pap. $9.95. ISBN 978-1-57505-941-9.

Bridges, Ruby. *Through My Eyes*. Scholastic. 1999. Tr $17.99. ISBN 978-0-590-18923-1.

Kehret, Peg. *Small Steps: The Year I Got Polio*. Albert Whitman. 1996. Tr $14.95. ISBN 978-0-8075-7457-7; pap. $7.99. ISBN 978-0-8075-7458-4.

Liu, Na & Andrés Vera Martínez. *Little White Duck: A Childhood in China*. illus. by Andrés Vera Martínez. Lerner/Graphic Universe. 2012. pap. $9.95. ISBN 978-0-7613-8115-0.

Sís, Peter. *The Wall: Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain*. illus. by author. Farrar. 2007. Tr $18.99. ISBN 978-0-374-34701-7.

Tillage, Leon Walter. *Leon's Story*. illus. by Susan L. Roth. Farrar. 1997. pap. $6.99. ISBN 978-0-374-44330-6.

Young Adult

Barakat, Ibtisam. *Tasting the Sky: A Palestinian Childhood*. Macmillan. 2016. Tr $9.99. ISBN 978-1-250-09718-7.

Gantos, Jack. *Hole in My Life*. Farrar. 2002. Tr. $16.99. ISBN 978-0-374-39988-7; pap. $9.99. ISBN 978-0-312-64157-3.

Jiang, Ji-li. *Red Scarf Girl*. Harper. 2004. pap. $7.99. ISBN 978-0-0644-6208-2.

Lewis, John & Andrew Aydin. *March: Bk. 1*. Illus. by Nate Powell. Top Shelf. 2013. pap. $14.95. ISBN 978-1-60309-300-2.

Yousafzai, Malala. *I Am Malala*. Little, Brown. 2016. Tr. $10.99. ISBN 978-0-3163-2791-6.

High School

Alvarez, Julia. *A Wedding in Haiti*. Workman. 2013. pap.$15.95. ISBN 978-1-61620-280-4.

Beah, Ishmael. *A Long Way Gone*. Farrar. 2008. Tr. $13. ISBN 978-0-3745-3126-3.

McCourt, Frank. *Angela's Ashes*. Simon & Schuster. 1999. Tr. $17. ISBN 978-0-6848-4267-7.

Walls, Jeannette. *The Glass Castle: A Memoir*. Scribner. 2005. Tr $24. ISBN 978-0-7432-4753-5; pap. $16. ISBN 978-0-7432-4754-2.

Wiesel, Elie. *Night*. Farrar. 2006. Tr. $9. ISBN 978-0-3745-0001-6.

Resources

Community Resources

This project offers the opportunity to involve members of the community in sharing compelling true stories from their own lives. Guest speakers might be drawn from within the school community. Field trip options include:

Miami Book Fair International	https://www.miamibookfair.com/
History Miami Museum	http://www.historymiami.org/

The Miami-Dade Public Library System sometimes hosts events related to memoir. Check their website for a schedule of upcoming events.
http://www.mdpls.org/programs/special-events/special-events.asp

Publishing Resources

Blurb	http://www.blurb.com/
Smashwords	https://www.smashwords.com/

Recommended Materials

It is assumed that students have access to computers or tablets with a word processor such as MS Word or Google Docs.

Blurb BookWright software (for teacher computer)	free
Publishing	$5/ea*

*Cost will vary depending on printing options selected. Example represents a 50-page 6x9” economy B&W paperback trade book printed by Blurb. A bulk order and/or promo code can reduce this price.

Adapting This Project

Oral History

While the summative task for this unit was designed as a piece of creative nonfiction writing, the task could be adapted as an oral history project culminating in a live or recorded spoken performance. There are numerous resources online for help with producing oral histories.

You can hear examples of live performance of oral histories at *The Moth* podcast (https://www.themoth.org/). Locally, the organization Lip Service: True Stories Out Loud produces live shows and also works in conjunction with the Miami Book Fair International. Information is available at http://www.lipservicestories.com/.

Producing a video or audio recording of students' live performances before an audience would require a performance venue with amplification and a video camera or audio recorder.

Recommended materials:

Pyle PWMA220BM Wireless Microphone PA System	$90
HD digital camcorder	$60
32 GB SD card	$15
Tripod	$15

Alternatively, students' oral histories could be recorded individually in a studio setting and made available as downloadable podcasts or burned to CDs. Guidance for recording oral histories and a catalogue of recordings are available on the website of The American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress (https://www.loc.gov/folklife/familyfolklife/oralhistory.html).

StoryCorps (https://storycorps.org/), also has examples of oral histories recorded in a studio setting and resources for producing your own.

Implementation of the recorded audio project would require recording equipment such as smartphones with a voice recording app or digital voice recorders to be shared by students; and smartphones, tablets or computers with audio editing software such as GarageBand (iOS/Mac) or the free program Audacity (Windows/Mac/Linux), which can be downloaded at http://www.audacityteam.org/.

Recommended materials:

Digital voice recorder	$20/ea
Audacity software	free
Podcast hosting	free*
CD-R discs (50-pack)	$15
CD sleeves (50 pack)	$5

*some services charge a fee beyond a set storage limit

Visual Arts

If you use a picture book or graphic novel as your primary memoir study, you may choose to incorporate visual artwork as part of the final product. This adaptation of the unit would work well as an interdisciplinary project with support from the visual arts teacher and could result in a published magazine of student writing and artwork.

Recommended materials:

Flatbed scanner	$65
Art supplies	cost varies
Publishing	$4/ea*

*Cost will vary depending on printing options selected. Example represents a 20-page 8.5x11” full color economy magazine printed by Blurb. A bulk order and/or promo code can reduce this price.

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To apply, you must contact the teacher who developed the idea before submitting your application. Contact can be made by attending a workshop given by the disseminator, communicating via email or telephone, by visiting the disseminator in their classroom, or by having the disseminator visit your classroom.

Project funds are to be spent within the current school year or an extension may be requested. An expense report with receipts is required by Friday, June 1, 2018.

APPLICATION DEADLINE: December 13, 2017

Apply online at educationfund.org

For more information, contact:

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