

TEF Great Idea Grant Final Report

All Thompson Education Foundation (TEF) grant recipients must submit a final report to TEF by **May 31, 2026**. The final report is required. If you do not submit a final report for this grant by the due date, you will not be allowed to apply for future TEF grants.

Name: Meridith Russell

School: Lucile Erwin Middle School

Project Name: The Wonder of Wonderbooks

Award Amount: \$2,500.00

Objective of project as stated in the grant application:

The purpose of this grant is to purchase ready-to play- audiobooks combined with print text. Reading comprehension is a foundational skill that directly impacts students' academic success and long-term achievement. Research shows that audiobooks can significantly support the development of this skill by reducing the cognitive load of decoding, thereby allowing students to focus on meaning and the integration of new information. The company Wonderbooks combines print texts with ready-to-play audiobooks and feature titles from leading publishers such as Penguin Random House, HarperCollins, Hachette, and Weston Woods. With the addition of Learning Mode, Wonderbooks encourage deeper comprehension and active engagement with each book. Each device provides over 30 hours of portable listening, giving students and library patrons the freedom to access literature beyond the classroom or library walls. Additionally, research shows that dual-language books with audio components foster metalinguistic awareness by allowing students to compare and analyze languages, strengthening their understanding of language structures. Collectively, these resources provide powerful tools to enhance literacy, engagement, and equitable access to reading opportunities for all students. These books can be costly as they are both print and audio so having the grant would help purchase the quantity and titles we would like to offer to our student population. The requested list of titles numbers approximately 37 books at roughly \$65.00. Titles chosen on the proposal list were based on current interest/checkout from the library, titles that are award winners, authors that are award winners, student requests, or a combination of these factors. We would like to recapture "the essence and the delights of hearing stories beautifully told by extraordinarily talented storytellers (Baskin & Harris, 1995).

1. Describe how you implemented your project.

We received permission to order books at the start of 2026. Once the books arrived in late January, we began the process of barcoding and preparing them for our catalog so students could begin checking them out.

Before circulation began, I shared the books with our staff during a Wednesday professional development meeting. Staff could touch, read, and listen to the

audiobooks. A few staff members checked the books for themselves/families, and to promote to their classes.

I then shared the books with all ELA classes visiting the library. During this time, I introduced the Wonderbooks and explained how they work, as well as the benefits of audiobooks in general and how this combined both the physical books with the audio. I started with an open-ended discussion asking students who in our building might benefit from Wonderbooks. Their responses were thoughtful and inclusive. Many students immediately responded with "me!" while others mentioned students with dyslexia, ADHD, visual impairments, varying reading levels, and students who read in multiple languages.

Some of the books use other languages (**Invisible** by Christina Diaz Gonzalez), some use sounds and music to enhance the story (**The First Cat In Space Ate Pizza** by Mac Barnett) which entranced the students as well.

2. Please provide the results of your project. This information needs to correlate to the "measurements" provided on your original grant application. If you changed your measurements of success, please detail the reason for the change with your results.

To promote the collection, I created a display on the front circulation counter featuring the Wonderbooks. Students could either check them out or read them in the library before school and during lunch periods, which many students chose to do over the following weeks. This was in addition to the discussion of the books during our library class.

When reviewing circulation data, every single Wonderbook was checked out at least once, with several titles being checked out two or three times. Some students expressed concern about the cost of the books and wanted to be especially careful with them, which contributed to many students choosing to use them within the library instead of taking them home. While this type of usage was encouraged and still demonstrates strong student interest, it does mean the circulation numbers do not fully capture how frequently the books were being used.

3. Did anything surprise you or your students during the implementation of your project?

The books are a bit more delicate than I expected due to the audio component sticking up and causing the book cover to become snagged or torn. We have reinforced the spine of each book with special library tape to prevent as much wear and tear as possible. I also created a bookmark that has some basic rules and reminders that go

with each book when checked out. One book did become damaged and because of the two year warranty, I was able to purchase a separate audio component at a fraction of the cost. We do expect wear and tear on books and we will continue to remind students of book care. I personally would rather have books be in the hands of students and being read, then in perfect condition sitting on a shelf. Overall, students have been mindful and when returning books they will often hand deliver to me instead of putting it in the book drop.

I was also incredibly impressed with the conversations students had surrounding the different groups of students who could benefit from and enjoy the Wonderbooks. While students recognized that certain populations—such as our ELD students—might especially benefit from the format, they also understood that the books were not limited to any one group. Across all three grade levels, many students loudly and enthusiastically proclaimed that the Wonderbooks were perfect for them as well. It was encouraging to see students recognize audiobooks and accessible reading formats as something valuable and enjoyable for everyone, rather than something intended only for specific learners.

4. Please provide a copy of the final budget for the grant (you may attach a separate sheet of paper).

Attached in email.

5. Do you feel the project can be easily replicated in additional classrooms in Thompson School District, and, if so, is there any advice you can share?

I do believe that these books could be purchased for libraries in our district and can impact students, both in terms of academic success and long-term achievement. With care, and reminders, these books will enhance our libraries and student lives.

Optional:

6. Comments for the grant committee or TEF board.

Thank you for your support. Please enjoy these pictures of students reading:

