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**CONTACT:** Lesley Range-Stanton, Director for Communications  
(o) 469.752.8094 | (m) 469.360.7552  
[lesley.range-stanton@pisd.edu](mailto:lesley.range-stanton@pisd.edu)

### **Weatherford Elementary PACE Students' Research on Edmund Fitzgerald Exhibited at Museum**

#### *Great Lakes Shipwreck Museum Displays Plano ISD Student Reserch Project on Famous Historic Ship*

**PLANO, Texas, Nov. 14, 2013**— When Jeremy Robertson, Weatherford PACE teacher assigned the song “*The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald*” to his 5th grade PACE class, he had no idea of the perfect storm he set in motion – culminating in a feature story on a Michigan news station.

In a unit titled “Beyond Words,” PACE students study figurative language through various types of media, including poetry and songs. When discussing the lyrics and story behind the Gordon Lightfoot classic, Jeremy saw the kids had a great deal of interest in the actual event, in which tragically, the ship sank.

“The particular shipwreck is shrouded in mystery and controversy to some degree as they’ve never really been able to determine an exact cause, though there are many theories. I simply find it eerie and intriguing,” Jeremy said.

So did his class.

“The students not only learned about figurative language but also became involved with a very important part of this country’s history in the Great Lakes Region. Additionally, they were able to connect with real people who are still living with the history of the tragedy. This lesson on figurative language became a real-life adventure,” said Ben Benavides, principal at Weatherford Elementary.

Jeremy introduced the shipwreck with a brief explanation of what the freighters on the Great Lakes carry back and forth.

“I told the students that due to the size of the lakes, the weather and waves can be very ocean-like which led to the explanation that one ship in November of 1975 carrying iron ore nearly made it back but something strange happened and they sank,” he said.

Students learned the rest through research, leading to very interesting class discussions.

Jeremy told the students to create some form of art to pay tribute to the *Edmund Fitzgerald* itself, the men, the tragedy or anything along those lines.

The original goal was for each group of students to demonstrate some forms of figurative language; however, the project sort of took on a life of its own and to the kids it became more than a figurative language project.

“They genuinely wanted to honor the men who died, and as such, the works consist mostly creative pictures showing the *Fitzgerald* in all its glory, and the aftermath of the incident. As a bunch of 10 year-olds, their intentions are completely good and heartfelt,” Jeremy said. One group of boys created 29 small origami boats each with a crew member's name on the side.

As the students began their research and projects, Jeremy began communications with members of the board of directors at the Great Lakes Shipwreck Museum in Sault St. Marie, Michigan. Jeremy said board members were very taken with the idea of kids from a landlocked, southern city having knowledge of the shipwreck and were extremely receptive to the idea of displaying any artwork or poetry that the kids would create.

“Moving the audience outside of the classroom emphasizes how lessons in school connect to life. The addition of the museum to this unit helps students understand how the power of figurative language creates meaning in an external, real world, context,” said Theresa Biggs, gifted education coordinator. “The curriculum units and lessons for gifted students are designed to connect to the ‘real world’ as much as possible. The extension of the project at Weatherford targets the museum and its visitors as the audience for the student work.”

The museum’s annual memorial service was on Nov. 10 and as the date grew near, Jeremy collected the projects and mailed them to the museum.

“Thank you and your students again for sharing their artwork with us for our November 10 *Edmund Fitzgerald* memorial ceremony. They did a great job and we'll make certain that it is in a prominent location in our (new) *Edmund Fitzgerald: Snapshots in Time* exhibit,” said Bruce Lynn, executive director of the Great Lakes Shipwreck Museum.

Sarah Wilde, membership and marketing coordinator for the Great Lakes Shipwreck Historical Society, added, “I smiled, laughed, and my eyes watered up. Your kids did a really wonderful job.” Sarah prepared the display and later emailed Jeremy to let him know that a local northern Michigan news station, 9&10 News picked up the story. [Watch a copy of the broadcast.](#)

“The kids (and I) were completely floored by seeing that,” Jeremy said. “The looks on their faces were hilarious! Wide-eyed and open-mouthed for the most part! They asked me to replay the clip several times. One of my chatterboxes was even completely speechless at seeing his poem on the news. “

The whole news story was a very unexpected event.

“It started out originally with me telling the kids that it would be cool if we could tentatively send some stuff to the museum and see if they’d display any of it. When it turned out that they displayed all of it, that was tremendous news, and to learn that their projects and work had a spot on the northern Michigan news was stunning,” he added. “The students had already put a ton of effort and heart into the work which made me proud, but I was far beyond proud to see that their work was thought so highly of and that it touched complete strangers.”

Principal Benavides said, “When a teacher can take a simple lesson and turn it into an adventure that becomes a lifelong memory, a major goal has been accomplished. This truly exemplifies quality teaching.”

### ***About Plano Independent School District***

The Plano Independent School District (Plano ISD) ([www.pisd.edu](http://www.pisd.edu)) endeavors to foster the highest level of student learning. The mission of Plano ISD is to provide an excellent education for all students. Plano ISD is located 20 miles north of Dallas, Texas and serves the residents of approximately 100 square miles in southwest Collin County, including 66 square miles in the city of Plano, northern portions of the cities of Dallas and Richardson and parts of the cities of Allen, Parker and Murphy. Plano ISD employs 7,000 faculty and staff members who serve more than 55,000 students in 70 schools and 11 service facilities. Participating in Plano ISD schools enables students to adapt to new learning opportunities throughout their lives, collaborate with, and contribute to, the global community and to be creative and disciplined in their thinking.

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