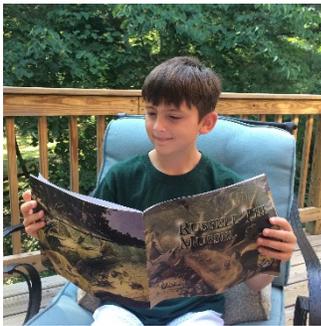




FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Russell the Mussel joins Ohio River Foundation education staff**

CINCINNATI, Ohio (September 3, 2020) – Ohio River Foundation (ORF) has a new team member to help with its popular *Mussels in the Classroom* education program. His name is Russell the Mussel, and he’s a freshwater mussel not unlike those that inhabit the creeks, streams and rivers of the Ohio River watershed.

Russell himself is a character in a Virginia Tech/U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service children’s book that bears his name. ORF spearheaded efforts to resurrect the book, which was previously out of print. The nonprofit will distribute copies as part of its *Mussels in the Classroom* program for the first time this fall. It’s most appropriate for students on fourth- through sixth-grade reading levels or for teachers who wish to read the book to younger students.

ORF launched *Mussels in the Classroom*, the only program of its kind, in 2017. Since then, nearly 5,000 students in the Greater Cincinnati, Greater Columbus and Greater Lexington areas have experienced the program. It kicks off with a visit by an Ohio River Foundation educator, who describes the freshwater mussels’ unusual characteristics and significance to their ecosystems. Although they clean water, acting as a natural filter for our waterways, most people know little about these important animals. Many species are threatened or endangered.

Following the educator visit, mussels remain in the classroom for two weeks so students can care for and study them.

“Adding the Russell the Mussel book as a leave-behind lets us share information about freshwater mussels in a new way that will benefit students who are reading/writing learners,” said Rich Cogen, Ohio River Foundation’s executive director. “Because the book will remain in the classroom after our program ends, it will also reinforce what we teach and serve as a continuous reminder about this critical species.”

Because of COVID-19, ORF is adapting the Mussels in the Classroom program to feature virtual presentations this fall. Classrooms operating under in-person learning will still receive an aquarium of mussels to observe for a two-week span.

The program is fully booked for the fall in Greater Cincinnati and Greater Columbus, but interested teachers in those regions can submit an application for spring 2021. A few spaces remain available for schools in the Greater Lexington area for this fall. For more information, [visit the ORF website](#).

### **About Ohio River Foundation**

Ohio River Foundation (ORF) is dedicated to protecting and improving the water quality and ecology of the Ohio River and all waters in its 11-state watershed. ORF works towards these goals through environmental education, conservation and advocacy activities that serve to inspire environmental stewardship for the benefit and enjoyment of current and future citizens.

In 2020, ORF celebrates its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ohio River watershed work. During its history, the nonprofit has reached 50,000 students with its freshwater education programs; restored and reconnected more than 200 miles of rivers; removed four dams; planted 6,000 trees; and removed more than 300,000 invasive plants.

For more information, visit [www.ohioriverfdn.org](http://www.ohioriverfdn.org).