



# The Power of the Classroom Library

by PENNY KITTLE

*When we build classroom libraries, we bridge the gap for students who do not have access to books outside of school, and we support the passionate teachers who make reading irresistible to children every year.*



## LITERACY CHAMPION: PENNY KITTLE

Penny Kittle is the president of the Book Love Foundation and was given the Exemplary Leader Award from NCTE's Conference on English Leadership. Throughout the year, Penny travels across the U.S., Canada, and beyond speaking to teachers about empowering students through independence in literacy. Learn more about Penny Kittle on her websites, [pennykittle.net](http://pennykittle.net) and [booklovefoundation.org](http://booklovefoundation.org), or follow her on [Twitter](#).

## One to Know: Book Love Foundation

Books are magic. We walk with characters and live among them. We see a glimpse of our identity and our power. Reading both inside and outside of school leads children to engage with ideas across content areas. It drives children to compassionate action in their communities. Students tell us reading makes them less lonely and builds their confidence. They are empowered by the journeys they take in books. They find themselves and lose themselves in reading. When kids have access to a diversity of books, they read more. And more matters.

But most will not get there on their own. For decades we have depended on school libraries to provide books for all students. Some schools still have a vibrant collection of titles in a central library, but far too many have cut librarians; and still other schools have dropped their libraries, too. Access to books alone is not enough; walls of books are simply wallpaper to dormant readers. It takes kind and expert guides, both teachers and librarians, to lead readers to books they will hold close. This can't happen when U.S. public schools have lost nearly 20 percent of school librarians since 2000. In 2019, 92 percent of Michigan schools did not employ a full-time, certified librarian. Sadly, of the librarians who still serve schools, most are in the wealthiest

communities. The districts that have lost the most librarians had on average 78 percent minority student populations. We cannot accept this injustice.

Teachers grow readers when they can easily put their hands on books. Students read more when they can look up from the book they have just finished and see so many other possibilities. When we build classroom libraries, we bridge the gap for students who do not have access to books outside of school, and we support the passionate teachers who make reading irresistible to children every year.

## Why Classroom Libraries Are Indispensable

Since 2013, the Book Love Foundation has funded 270 teachers determined to create a classroom library that inspires and supports all readers. Grant recipients do a gap analysis of their current collection and select titles written by authors who represent the identities of all students. They confer with children and encourage growth in volume and in the complexity of their reading. Books are soon passed hand to hand as students recommend books to each other, to siblings, and even to parents. A contagious, sustained love of reading is still possible—and it is happening now.

It takes a wise and committed teacher to create an effective reading community. For many students, there is a steady decline in engagement with school from the early years to adolescence. In fact, on average, teens today spend only six minutes a day reading extended text in books. But determined teachers are undeterred. They know books and they know their students. They can reach for a book that is a just-right fit. They know when to gather students in book clubs to increase talk and aim students towards new understandings. If we want reading to be a priority for young people, we must engage them in the rich possibilities of many books across different genres. We must hand them books they can slip into backpacks and read on the bus, while waiting for practice to start, while on break at work—as so many students admit they do when a book captivates them. Reading becomes a regular habit. The world opens in a classroom library and students walk in.

## What to Do: Participate Yourself or Help Others

Every year, the Book Love Foundation receives hundreds of applications from preK-12 teachers in North America who know that a classroom library is key to sustaining interest in their students' reading. Our "Gracie's List" of titles helps all children grow their understanding of equity across race, sexuality, and mental health. These books help teachers (and parents) have courageous conversations with children. We help grow inclusive classroom libraries for English classes, and for multilingual learners. We've funded teaching partners, prison poetry programs, and summer literacy for young Black teens. You dream it and we will try to help. Visit [booklovecfoundation.org/apply](http://booklovecfoundation.org/apply) for an application.

The [Book Love Foundation podcast](#) with Denver librarian Julia Torres includes interviews with authors, teachers, librarians, and illustrators. Our website offers professional development, and we recommend hundreds of books each year through our Pinterest and Instagram accounts. We all work as volunteers, so 100 percent of your donation goes to classroom libraries. As

dozens of local public libraries reduce hours each year in response to budget cuts, inspiring teachers put books in the hands of young people. We know inclusive classroom libraries are indispensable in nurturing young readers. We know children read more when they hold books that mesmerize them. They pass those books to friends and parents and siblings. Books carry children to compassionate action in their communities and the world. Help us help change the world, one book and one reader at a time.

## More to Know and Do

### Join Our Book Love Foundation Summer Book Club!

[booklovefoundation.org/summer-book-club](http://booklovefoundation.org/summer-book-club)

The Book Love Foundation summer book club is celebrating its fifth year in 2021 with lively conversations, dozens of author interviews, and custom-designed Seabags swag wristlets fashioned from repurposed sails. Seabags believes that sails “soak up sun, salt, smiles, and adventure.” Just like books!

- Join a community of passionate teachers and literacy leaders dedicated to professional growth through summer book study.
- Read and discuss books that help all teachers create equitable classrooms where all students become inspired and passionate readers and writers.
- Learn from the many opportunities for professional development including live discussions with well regarded educators and authors that continue throughout the school year.
- Know that every dollar we raise funds classroom libraries for teachers just like you! In the past eight years we have given almost \$600,000 to support 270 teachers in the United States and Canada.

Join more than 1000 teachers, librarians, and donors to celebrate the incredible power of nurturing a love of reading—in us, and in the young people we serve.