

Lindsey Tilley

*Northview High School
Grand Rapids, MI*



Gift of 500 Books Stokes Students Love of Reading

by Charles Honey

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Lindsey Tilley was rocking her newborn daughter, Kate, to sleep when she heard the message on her voice mail: She had just been awarded a grant of 500 free books for her high school classroom.

For an English teacher always trying to put new books in the hands of her students, the excitement was overwhelming.

“It was one of those moments where you feel really validated in what you do,” recalls Tilley, a Northview High School teacher. “It was an incredible gift that we in public education are not accustomed to receiving.”

Freshman Sophia Rhodes pores over one of the more than 1,000 books in Tilley’s classroom library.

Tilley was one of three U.S. teachers to receive a trove of titles from the Book Love Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to promoting a love of reading among middle and high school students. Teachers from Iowa and Illinois also received 500 books in the grant program’s first year.

Tilley filled out a lengthy application this summer after learning of the grant on Twitter from Penny Kittle, the foundation’s founder, teacher and literacy consultant. Tilley had met her in Kittle’s presentations to Northview, Kent ISD and other educator gatherings. After being alerted to the grant, Tilley thought the offer of 500 books “must be a mistake.”

It wasn’t. The grant provided her with 374 titles selected by Kittle and another 126 to be chosen by Tilley and her students.

From Fantasy to Classics

Tilley recently received the first shipment of 250 books. They range from contemporary best-sellers like Laura Hillenbrand’s “Unbroken” and Malcolm Gladwell’s “Outliers,” to the sci-fi “Divergent” trilogy and classics like “The Autobiography of Malcolm X.”

Those books increased Tilley’s classroom library to more than 1,000 books, and gave students more

choices for their required reading regimen of three hours a week. She has spent \$50 to \$100 a month to keep the library growing.

Freshmen Mary O'Connor and Kayli Nagelkerk had their reading choices greatly enlarged by a grant of 500 books to their English classroom library.

"We're always trying to get kids more engaged in the process of choice reading," Tilley says. "The only way to try to connect all kids to books is to just have a lot of them available."

Junior Audrey VanEssen didn't need a lot of prompting to stoke her love of reading. She already has read two of the new titles, she says. "It was incredible just to see how many there were," she adds.

Tilley says her students were "super excited" when they began opening the boxes and uncovering new titles. And she is excited to see the new books still to come – including the ones she and the class selected.

"It's impossible to ever feel you have enough books to reach all kids," she says.