

Wendy Gassaway

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I'm Wendy Gassaway, and I am a middle school teacher in a small town outside the suburbs of Portland, OR. I've been an educator since 1992, when I became a volunteer English teacher in a fishing village in newly independent Latvia. I've taught in Oregon, my home state, since 1998.

My biggest passion is connecting students to books they actually want to read. The BookLove grant exploded my classroom library from a few shelves of scrounged books into the base of a library that now contains over 3,000 volumes. It is HARD for a student to claim "There's nothing good here!" My students, whether in reading class or language arts, begin every period with 10 minutes of silent reading. When we celebrate our book stacks at the end of each year, students are invariably stunned to see how much they read. I try to increase the impact of the grant as well. Students up and

down the hall know they can borrow books from me, and I often get visitors saying, "I heard you had the third book of *The Circuit*" or "Do you have any *Naruto* I can borrow?" or even--my favorite--simply asking for recommendations.

My BookLove colleagues have introduced me to new authors, allowing me to vastly increase the number of books I have that represent my students in all their identities. They've also emboldened me to celebrate all kinds of reading--this year I'm focused on building up my manga collection, a genre I have little knowledge of but one that my students are enthusiastic readers of. I'm following my students' lead in which series to invest in.

In 2018, I started our school's Battle of the Books club, which I continue to sponsor. After finding that the selections skewed heavily towards white characters and authors, I joined the title selection committee so I could advocate for wider representation. Last year I helped on the 9-12 grade committee, and this year I'm volunteering on the 6-8 grade committee. In addition, I blog at [Falconer's Library](#), which has given me the opportunity to be a round 2 judge for the Cybils award. This means that every January I get to read books chosen as the best of the best from the previous year. I've served in the categories of YA fiction, YA speculative fiction and YA/MG nonfiction. All of my involvement in the wider community of readers was directly inspired by getting the BookLove grant.



Because these books were granted to me and to my students, I've been able to deliver books to homes throughout the pandemic, even when our school and county libraries shut down. (Photo on next page of my "Bookmobile" loaded and ready to go.)

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