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Hi, book lovers! My name is Brianna Keane, and I'm the sophomore English teacher at Wilmington High School. I've been teaching at WHS ever since I graduated from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign with a B.A. in English (Secondary Education) in 2008. I earned my M.A. in Reading & Literacy from Lewis University in 2013, and I achieved National Board Certification in 2020.

I love being asked "What's your dream job?" because I can honestly answer with "This! Being a high school English teacher IS my dream job. I'm living it!" And that's no surprise to anyone who knows me because I've been an avid reader my entire life. But somewhere along the way, my brain made the association that reading for school is different than reading for fun. We have books that we study in English class and books that we read because we enjoy them, and these two circles rarely overlap. I remember reading mostly classics as a student. I did the work and sometimes enjoyed it. I did well because I was a good reader, but it all felt just... fine. And that's coming from someone who LOVED to read! I couldn't imagine how it felt to someone who didn't like reading to begin with. But the books I was reading for fun? I was devouring them. I would think about every little detail and look forward to discussing them with anyone who would listen.

When I started teaching, I went with the flow. I used the materials the previous teacher left behind and taught the same way I had been taught. Most of my students said they hated reading and that English is usually their least favorite class. I felt their pain. I remember just thinking English was okay myself, despite my LOVE for reading. I knew I needed to make a change, but still held the belief that reading the classics was just what we had to do. I thought that if I could make my lessons and activities engaging enough, they would be more motivated to complete the assigned reading and maybe even enjoy class more. And it... kinda worked. It motivated them to read a summary online or ask a friend what happened. They were more engaged with the activities, but were they really improving as readers? I had my doubts.

In my quest to find a solution, I came across Penny Kittle's *Book Love*, and everything changed. By the time I finished reading, I had made a promise to myself and to my future students that I was no longer going to accept that kids just don't like to read or won't read. There were tangible steps I could take to improve the attitudes & abilities of my teen readers, and I was eager to take them. I could use books that were more relevant and interesting to my students, while still teaching the skills I needed to teach. I incorporated book clubs, book talks, independent reading, and conferring. We still read some classics,

but we built the stamina and skills necessary to tackle them before jumping right in. Finally, it clicked. My students were reading more than ever. They were engaging with appropriately leveled books that interested them. We stopped studying a single novel and instead worked on improving reading skills and strategies. We were a community of READERS!

The missing piece to this puzzle was access to books. I knew that I needed to build up my very limited classroom library. In 2017, I applied for the Book Love grant, where I shared the success I had seen so far, while also recognizing that a larger, more diverse classroom library would help me to better achieve my goals. I was fortunate enough to be selected, and I've had access to high quality, high interest materials that I could grab on the fly ever since. I could use a book from my shelf as a mentor text, and when a student inevitably said they wanted to read more from that novel, I could pull it from the shelf and set it on the desk immediately. When a student was struggling through a book, I could pull an alternative that would be equally interesting but appropriately challenging. If a popular book was checked out from our school library, I could provide a backup immediately instead of the student having to wait weeks for it to be returned. It was a total game changer.

I collected data the year before and after I introduced choice reading, and while I could tell it was going well just from being in class, I was still surprised at what the numbers revealed:

- Percent of students who said they enjoyed reading: 34% increased to 82%
- Percent of students who said they have a book that they want to read next: 16% increased to 63%
- Total number of books read by my students in one year: 814 increased to 1,817

And the students were noticing a change in themselves, in each other, and in our classroom culture. Here are a few testimonials from students who took my class after I made these changes:

"I saw kids who had never read more than the instructions on the back of a Hot Pocket, toting choice novels to class with them." ~ Anthony

"I never felt forced to read. Instead, for the first time in my life, I wanted to read. Ms. Keane's class was centered on bettering my reading ability and English skills as a whole, instead of giving us the same grueling work and boring essays we'd grown used to. I learned that I was actually pretty good at reading and writing and I decided to challenge myself by taking Honors English this year." ~ Mason

"I will always be thankful for Ms. Keane helping me to learn to love books. I used to dread reading because I wasn't good at it. It was hard for me. But I made a promise to myself that I'm going to continue reading for the rest of my life. I even bought a Barnes & Noble gift card for myself!" ~ Sara

There's nothing I love more than seeing my students bloom as readers. I used to field questions like "Do I HAVE to read this at home?" but just yesterday, I was asked, "What if I finish this whole book this weekend even though it's not due for three more weeks?" I can't tell you how many times I've heard a student say





“This is the first book I’ve ever liked” or how many parent emails I’ve gotten saying that they’ve never seen their child read at home before now. I have former students who still reach out to ask for book recommendations, or even better, to recommend a book for me to read. I always felt like teaching English was my dream job, but teaching English like THIS specifically? It makes me the luckiest person in the world.

You can keep up with my quest for spreading book love on Twitter @edukeane or on Instagram @keanereads.