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Eight years ago I had just taken a teaching job in a Behaviour Learning Assistant Program in inner city Edmonton. One day a package arrived for me at the school from Chapters. My mother-in-law, who also happens to be a retired librarian and high school English teacher, had sent me a few of her very favourite novels for teens. It had a little note in it saying that these books were to start my very first classroom library. I was thrilled and proudly put the books on a shelf in my classroom. Inside that box was an old classic called, *Among the Hidden*. I offered it up to one of my reluctant readers, and I couldn't have imagined how much it would impact the course of my teaching career. This student, who had literally never read a book in his life, devoured it. He read every second of every day, I had to start locking it up during math or science because I would find him hiding in a corner, buried deep in the book (this is a problem I definitely did not mind having). This boy went on to devour every book in the series. As he finished each book, he became more confident in his abilities and began to not only see himself as a reader, but also reading as a welcome activity. This has now become my "go to" book for students who are struggling to commit to a book. I know that if I did not have those books readily available in my classroom, and if they weren't books that those kids could relate to, I would have never been able to convince that child to read a book. I could go on for days telling stories similar to this, stories about how having access to the books in my classroom library have converted many non-readers into readers.

A lot of my reading instruction revolves around the classroom library. Students choose books that are of interest to them and use their novels to apply the skills learned in the classroom lessons. With access to the classroom library it means that we don't have to wait for a designated time to look for books. I can meet students at the classroom library at any point during the class which helps maintain reading momentum and student engagement. If a student forgets their book, no problem, they can grab a title that contains short stories or test drive a new book that day. I try to make sure that students can see themselves in the books on my shelf. I also want the books to give them an escape from some pressures of navigating these tough teenage years. Having diverse books that hook every reader is a priority for me.

The timing of receiving the Book Love Grant really could not have been better. With new COVID-19 restrictions there have been even more barriers put in place between kids and the school library. With access to a classroom library I have been able to maintain student engagement and momentum with their reading lives in a year when they need, more than ever, a chance to escape into a good book.

"Having books in the classroom has helped me read more, a lot more." -Josh, Strategies 7

"I love having all this access to these books really, it has impacted my life, thank you." - Oliver, Strategies 7

"My reading has got better because I get to choose books that we like, and we are willing to read them

because we chose them.” - Landen, Strategies 7

“I don’t have a lot of books at home so having the classroom library really helps me find books that I want to read.”- Chase, Strategies 7