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Students have the right to read works where the characters are mirrors of them, and also to read works where they are afforded the opportunity to see into other cultures. This isn't just about pages or words or books; this is about my students finding reflections, examples, paths, however imperfect, that resemble their own. This is about finding characters that are just like my students in the pages. It is my belief and my message that every student deserves to have these moments, and access to books to find them.

Now I have students emailing me - at night, on the weekends, after school, years after they graduate - to tell me what book they are reading, thank me for a recommendation, or to tell me what I need to put next on my own reading list, or what novel I must put on the shelves of my classroom library. They pop in, months after they leave my class, to tell me the shock of how a novel concluded. This past year, a junior in my college prep class, who was about 30 pages from the end of his book, told me, "This is the first book I will ever finish." And then the student in front of him agreed, chiming in with "Me too!" I feel so incredibly proud both of these young men completed this unbelievable milestone while sitting in my classroom. I had a part in creating a lifelong reader. Now my students and I are forever connected by a love and habit of reading, and that is invaluable.





My experience with Mrs. Decker as my English 151 Dual Enrollment teacher this past semester has made an impression on me that will last throughout the rest of my high school and college journey. So much so, Mrs. Decker was acknowledged as the 2020-2021 teacher of the year for her incredible ability to understand her students' needs and accommodate them.

Before attending Mrs. Decker's class, I was never much of a reader. I used to dread going to English classes and did pretty much everything to take the easy way out. Throughout the semester, I found a love for reading and writing because of Mrs. Decker's passion for teaching. She provided exciting and interactive lesson plans in the beginning like assigning us groupings amongst our classmates to discover which book genres we would soon fall in love with from her classroom library. Following the "speed dating," Mrs. Decker tailored book recommendations to each student based on the results of the activity. This individual guidance has opened me and my classmates up to a whole new world of books that most of us did not know even existed; an invaluable experience made possible to me only through her teaching.

Every day, class starts with twenty minutes of choice-reading. This allows students like myself to explore what books they like to read and it encourages them to actually read them. Aside from our choice-reading books, Mrs. Decker supplies every student with books from the course curriculum. She assigned us book club books and allowed my classmates and me to work through challenging topics together. Contrary to other common teaching styles, this specifically helps those of us who are afraid to speak up and address the teacher directly. Mrs. Decker's accommodations for her students allow us to thrive both in and out of the classroom.

- Ava Taub, Grade 12

My overall goal for my students is to make them readers, giving them time and opportunity to find novels where they are the focus, and pages that showcase characters just like them, and at times most importantly, characters that are nothing like them.