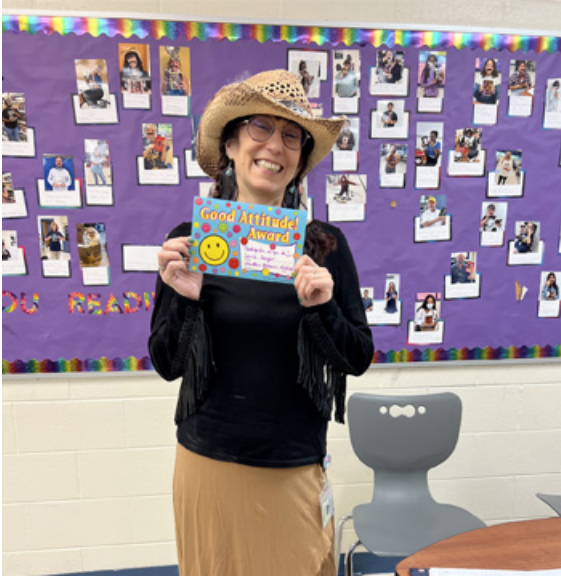


Lorie Zeiger

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My name is Lorie Zeiger, and I have been teaching for 18 years in the northern Chicago suburbs; currently I teach 7th/8th grade ELA. Sometimes, I feel as if I was born with a book in my hand, and I cannot remember a time when I was not reading. I WAS that student who always read ahead in a novel unit; I WAS that student who always had a copy of the read-aloud my teacher was reading, so I could read ahead. Now, I AM that teacher who actually allows students to read ahead during novel units. My passion for literature is definitely contagious within my classroom walls, and the favorite parts of my day are when I am helping a student choose their next great book to read, and discussing the characters and plot afterwards. Over the years, I have heard quite frequently: “Mrs. Zeiger, I did not read until you became my teacher”. And, my favorite recommendations come from my students. Reading what students recommend to you really helps with building relationships.

I began growing my classroom library during student teaching, and prior to Covid, it had grown to 11 bookshelves with almost 1000 books. The variety of my classroom library was astounding: all genres and topics were well represented. Books were not arranged by Lexile; they were arranged by topic and genre. Unfortunately, during Covid I had to pack it all up, and was only allowed to bring a portion of it back. This new normal has caused me to be creative with my implementation of independent reading within our weekly routine.

How my library was arranged reflected my philosophies on reading in general. I do not level books by Lexiles, or other reading levels, because a student should read what they want (not what an assessment deems is an appropriate level). Not pigeonholing a student into a certain reading level coincides with choice. Students will not have complete control over what they read if they can only read at their level. I also keep the check out system simple: students sign out the novel in the “check out journal”. There are no due dates. Basically, it is an honor system. I do not insist students replace a lost or ruined book. Like Penny Kittle says: “more books get read from my library than get lost every year”.

Choice should be front and center when it comes to independent reading. Students should be given the choice to read what they want. I firmly believe that anyone can become an avid reader once that perfect book is found. And, there is a book for everyone; teachers just need to be patient. In order for students to fully embrace the opportunity to choose their own book to read, they need to have access to a very prolific library. Furthermore, the absolute best way to practice the skills taught in class and increase one’s vocabulary

is by reading.

The Book Love grant will allow me to expand my currently-limited classroom library with books centering on topics about race, LGBTQ+ issues, and social justice, as well as increasing the number of graphic novels and free verse.