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As I reflect on the last year of my life (the year of the pandemic and so much upheaval and uncertainty), Words have been one constant for both myself and the students I teach.

Words inspire us; they comfort us; they engage us. In my teaching journey I have seen just how powerful words are for my students--to understand them, to use them, and to receive them. It has shaped the changes I've made in my writing instruction, as my classes have moved past a continuous cycle of literary analysis 5-paragraph essays and into the kind of writing that real writers do out in the real world. It has shaped the changes I've made to my classes' reading rhythms, as we leave quarterly whole class novels behind and strive to find a balance between deep communal study and rich and reflective independent reading lives. What, after all, is the role of the English teacher, if not to inspire humans whose

lives are rich with reading and whose ideas are explored in writing?

In my 15th year of teaching, I was fortunate enough to be awarded one of the 2020 Book Love Foundation grants. By this point, the other English teachers in my department have started to call me their reading guru--the person who's already read that book (and probably a dozen more like it), can recommend just the right book for any situation, and can get almost any kid to pick up a book and read.

I don't know about guru. I'm just deeply, completely, head-over-heels in love with reading. And I wholeheartedly believe anyone else can be too.

Do you want to know a secret? Lean in! Stories are powerful magic. Do you want to know another secret? This is only true if students actually read them! In *On Writing*, Stephen King calls books "uniquely portable magic." This magic ripples outward; supporting me benefits not just the 100+ students I have each year, but their friends, my colleagues, their families, and our community as a whole. I am immensely grateful for the work the Book Love Foundation does to place books in students' hands, and for the many people who support the work that I and so many others are doing for years to come.



A small sampling of the books I was able to purchase through the grant. Thankfully, most are currently checked out and being enjoyed by students!

Reflections from my Students:

“At this point, reading 8:00-8:30 has just kinda become a habit for me so I don’t actually think I’m gonna need to make a new plan because I have like a zillion books on my bookshelf that I definitely won’t get all the way through this summer. I think that this idea of having reading become a habit has successfully rubbed off onto me because I just kinda read for fun sometimes. I used to watch YouTube when I’m bored all the time but sometimes I just feel like reading a book instead. Because of this I think that the reading had a very positive effect on me and my reading habits.” (sophomore student)

“If I could pinpoint a cause for why I stopped reading, it would be school. I used to love reading so much. ...At that time in my life [elementary school], books were a huge part of who I was and books really helped me get through some tough times in my childhood. As I grew up and got increasingly busy, it became harder and harder to fit books into my busy schedule. Plus whenever I had time to read, I always opted to get ahead on books for school, so I wouldn’t have to read them later. This turned into me only reading books for school. At some point, I realized I didn’t love reading anymore, in fact, I sort of hated it.

While I generally still consider myself a person who doesn’t like to read, this year has had a great impact on helping me remember why I loved books. I noticed early on in the year that I was reading far more in this class than I had in any of my previous high school English classes as a result of independent reading. Not only were the books I chose often as hard or harder than the books that were assigned in English classes, but I found so much more enjoyment in them because they all reflected my interests.” (junior AP English Language student)

[An example](#) of how student choice in reading can lead to action in addition to passion!