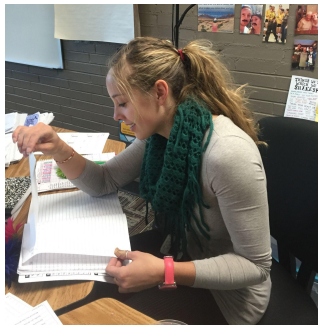


Rachel Foley
Lakewood High School
Lakewood, Colorado



~Foley Fun Facts~

Years teaching: 8

Favorite Grade to teach: 9th

I also coach: Girl's Volleyball

Favorite Books I've read so far this year: *The Ghosts We Keep* by Mason Deaver, *The Silence that Binds Us* by Joanna Ho, *Woman of Light* by Kali Fajardo-Anstine, *Firekeeper's Daughter* by Angeline Boulley, *The Bands of Mourning* by Brandon Sanderson, *The Anthropocene Reviewed* by John Green, *Atomic Habits* by James Clear, *Our Violent Ends* by Chloe Gong, *Flashfire* by TJ Klune, *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer

Favorite Authors of All Time: VE Schwab, Tomi Adeyemi, Sabba Tahir, TJ Klune, Neal Shusterman, NK Jemisin, Brandon Sanderson, Mason Deaver, Jason Reynolds

Favorite Color: Orange

Most frequent student comments:

"Foley, why do you have so many pens on your lanyard right now?"

"How old *are* you anyway?"

"You're way too excited at 8 am."

I remember the first time I felt seen reading a book. It was *Alanna: The First Adventure* by Tamora Pierce. Growing up, I was the girl who played in the mud and did sports. Instead of playing with Barbies, I played with Pokemon figures. I didn't have any friends who were girls until the fifth grade. And here was a book where a young girl bound for nobility and pomp switches places with her twin brother to train to become a knight. Alanna fights, sweats, and bleeds as she keeps her identity a secret to do what society tells her is impossible. In this fantasy novel, the girl saves herself and becomes her own hero. For ten year old me, seeing Alanna do that meant that I could be that in my own life too. The book sparked a life-long love of books, and the fantasy genre in particular. That single book led to another. And another. As Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop would say, that single book simultaneously reflected who I was and wanted to be, and opened a new door for me. I was now a reader.

Teaching 9th grade often means that students come in, like I did, with a preconceived notion of who they are as readers and writers. Unfortunately, that identity is often warped. As an English teacher, to me, my most important job is to help guide students into nurturing, uncovering, and shifting how they view themselves as readers and writers- to teach them that reading has a beneficial place in their life outside of school, and that they have important things to say and voices that our world desperately needs right now. After a rough two and a half years, many folks are losing hope. Our world seems broken. The days seem dark. And yet.

Enter, books. Throughout every impossible moment of recent history, books have been a balm for my soul, and the souls of my students. In books, we wrestle with who we are, we grieve things lost, we rest in comfort,

we kindle the flames of change, and we walk a mile in someone else's shoes. Reading teaches empathy and it teaches one to think for themselves. It is one of the most important life skills I can offer my kids: to see reading as a part of who they are.

Books have the power to unite us. To allow us to see ourselves and others. Having access to books within the classroom- a classroom library- eliminates barriers to get books into kids' hands. Grants like this change the lives of my students. If a kid wants to read something, I can just go pull it off my shelf and hand it to them. If they don't like it, they can give it back and we can try again. The Booklove Foundation helps us to make books accessible to all students to give them the best chance possible to find the book that just might trigger an avalanche of life long reading. I will be forever grateful, because investing in teachers allows us to invest in the students we teach.

After all, sometimes all it takes is one book. One book to help them discover things about themselves they didn't even know yet. One book to open their eyes to the humanity of another. One book to step into a world where they can be the hero of their own story, maybe for the first time in their life.

May you find your "one book" and may it lead you down a path to many more.

Love,
Foley

References

Sims Bishop, R.(1990). Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors. *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom*, 6(3).