

# Molly Jackson

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*"We are as indestructible as we believe ourselves to be." - John Green*

When I was in high school, no one could have told me that I would end up teaching, let alone teaching English to all grade levels at a rural school out in the middle of farm country. I had grown up in the suburbs, and thought everyone was used to having a Starbucks on the corner, and a beautiful library right downtown, not to mention in their own school. I soon found out that this was not the case everywhere.

After finishing college at Augustana College in Rock Island, IL, I applied for jobs outside of my comfort zone, and wound up in a school in the middle of a cornfield. For four years, I was the sole English teacher of a high school teaching every section of English, and having students from their Freshman year, all the way to their Senior year. Last year I attended the graduation of a class whose education in English was my sole responsibility for four years. I have learned so much about myself, about them, and about school politics and funding in those years.

The most important thing I learned though – to stay true to myself and my philosophy of teaching. I knew that Book Love and freedom of choice was the way to create those who would become our next generation of intelligent minds. I spoke out for the rights of student choice in the English classroom, and fortunately my administration believed in my philosophy as well. Unfortunately, the school budget was challenging to overcome. I sought out a second job, waiting tables, to help buy books for students. Students would tell me what they enjoyed, and I would spend Saturdays at the used bookstores collecting everything I could.

The greatest gift came to me by way of the Book Love Foundation two summers ago. Penny Kittle called me, and I'm pretty sure I said, "Shut up. You're joking." Through the kindness of others, I was able to expose my students to 500 new books, ranging in genres and reading levels. Students who were familiar with YA authors were able to seek out adult authors in that same style and push themselves to improve and grow as readers. We spent our time blogging about the novels and discussing their merits. We connected them to our lives and carried on conversations about how their fiction played into our reality. In short, my students were able to live hundreds of lives outside of their current one in the cornfields. All of this was possible through this grant.