

# Kirsten Strand-Gnam

*“The truth about stories is that’s all we are” ~ Thomas King.*

As a naively optimistic education student in my early 20s, Thomas King’s “The Truth About Stories” sparked a fire in me. I was (and still am today) inspired by the power of story in each of our lives and excited by the prospect of sharing this love for story with my students.

Fast forward a decade, and today I am a passionate literacy advocate and English teacher in Innisfail, Alberta. I have just completed my first year teaching 7th grade English, previously having taught High School English for seven years. Part of the reason I was open to moving to grade 7 from high school (despite loving my former role) was the ability to more fully immerse myself in what I believe is quality reading and writing instruction (workshop style, focused on engaging and building readers and writers) without the pressure of the provincial exams which dictate a certain amount of the instruction in our high schools. After spending years working with self-proclaimed “non-readers” I have dedicated myself to improving those odds, and helping connect students to texts that matter to them and develop their confidence and voices as readers. Anytime we can create readers out of our students, not only do we set them up for years of academic confidence and success, but we also instill in them a sense of self-worth and empathy that they can carry into our communities.

I fundamentally believe that classroom libraries are the heart of language education. For a student who sees themselves as a “reader”, they are comfortable walking into a K-12 library or bookstore and know where to aim themselves to find what they are looking for. But, for most of my students who consider themselves “non-readers”, libraries can be daunting and overwhelming. My classroom library allows students to start with a genre and then explore in a more manageable way. I always have the most popular titles displayed so that they’re an easy pick for students who don’t know where to start, and of course our Bookflix board offers suggestions as well. Through book talks, engaging displays and conferences, students quickly learn that “reading is what we do here”.



I see books as a bridge to create empathy and connect people. In my classroom, I use books and diverse characters as a tool to create conversations about human differences and perspectives. As part of my ongoing mission to create a thriving, relevant classroom library full of diverse and engaging voices, this Book Love Foundation grant presents a unique opportunity to continue to add to the collection and spark inspiration in the minds of future students.

