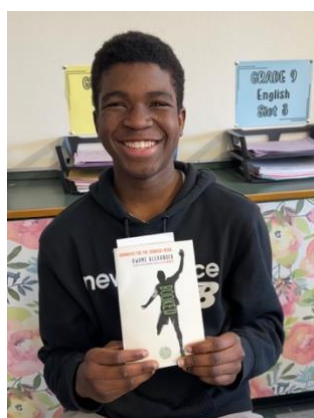




## The Book Love Foundation Grants \$41,000 to Teachers in North America

North Conway, NH (September 25, 2025) –**It's a great day for reading!**



Despite what you may have read about a lack of interest in reading since the Covid pandemic shut down schools, many, many teachers in North America are putting engaging books in the hands of students. Their students discover new interests, new authors, and an affection for the intellectual and emotional pull of great books. Students in **Book Love** classrooms ARE reading.

The **Book Love Foundation** awarded 40 teachers and one inspiring principal grants totaling \$41,000 this summer. The books, chosen to meet the interests of students preK-12 across the United States and Canada have been shipped, unpacked, and placed in students' hands.

If you have any doubt about engaging today's young people in reading, Book **Love** Foundation grant recipients (pictured right) will convince you it is not about time and not about technology; **it is about putting relevant, engaging books into students' hands, and then carving out school time to read them.** Our 2025 grant winners are extraordinary teachers who work at local, state, and national levels to inspire both students and colleagues. They join thousands of teachers who create a future generation of readers one book and one kid at a time.



## Please help us celebrate our 2025 Book Love Foundation Grant Recipients:

**Marc Achtziger** has been teaching English at W.C. Mepham High School in Long Island, New York for 24 years. A graduate of Teachers College, Columbia University and a participant in their Reading and Writing Project workshops, Marc is a lifelong reader and workshop teacher committed to helping students find the stories that speak to them. He believes every student deserves the chance to discover a book that feels like it was written just for them. Whether recommending novels in verse like *Louder Than Hunger* and *The Poet X* or guiding his AP Language and Composition students through the work of writers like Anthony Doerr and Hanif Abdurraqib, Marc knows that character and theme become more powerful when students can see themselves—or others—in the pages. Marc has created a reading and writing workshop community within his district, welcomed teachers and administrators into his classroom for model lessons and Q&A and presented at the LILAC Conference and national literacy events. He's proudest of the reading lives his students have built tracking books on Goodreads, reflecting through the Ideal Bookshelf project, and sharing reflections that show deep empathy, perspective, and pride in their own growth. While he's managed to build a small library of about 50 books, only a fraction meets the diverse and high-interest needs of his students. Many borrow from public libraries or persuade their parents to order titles online because the classroom supply can't keep up. Marc is thrilled to receive the Book Love Foundation Grant to expand his library and continue cultivating a space where every student can find a book that transforms how they see the world—and themselves.



Ms. **Grace Barry** is honored to be a recipient of the Book Love Grant! An accomplished educator, Barry is thrilled to expand her library to support underrepresented populations. After receiving her BA in English and History from the College of Charleston in 2017, Barry went on to receive her MAT in Secondary English Education in 2020, and her MEd in Literacy Education in 2022, both from The Citadel Graduate College. She has been employed at Septima Clark Academy in the Charleston County School District. Due to her passion and pedagogical knowledge, Barry has garnered several accolades throughout her career. Some of these awards are the ABCNews2 Cool Teacher Award, the SCCTE Rising Rookie Award, and a 2025 CCSD Teacher of the Year Finalist. She has also delivered several professional development seminars at local conferences, focusing on building literacy-enriching classroom environments, and secondary reading intervention. Having grown up hating books, Barry often tells her students "If I successfully convince myself to enjoy reading, I can convince you to enjoy reading." Her passion for literacy is rooted in the belief that everyone can and should experience the freedom that comes with being literate in all ways: academically, financially, visually, etc. Her goal is to help her students find that freedom. This grant will be used towards expanding her library, to include larger ranges of reading levels, as well as texts in multiple languages.

**Reggie Bell** is entering his 12th year of teaching and currently teaches Sophomore English, and Honors English 10 at Brookfield East High School in Brookfield, Wisconsin. Ironically, as the child of an educator, school wasn't always his favorite place—but everything changed in high school when an English teacher introduced him to a class called Banned Books. That class ignited his love of reading and led to a life-changing mission trip to Ecuador, where he taught Spanish to children and adults. It was there, surrounded by connection and curiosity, that Reggie found his passion for teaching. Reggie believes that students deserve classrooms that are joyful, engaging, and rooted in real choice. He models what he hopes students become—an avid reader, a curious writer, and a lifelong learner. Whether he's leading book clubs, guiding dystopian short film projects, or helping students craft personal narratives, Reggie creates a space where risk-taking is encouraged and growth is celebrated. His greatest joy is seeing a once-reluctant reader walk out of his room with a book in hand and a spark of confidence they didn't have before. He's constantly seeking new titles to support student interests—from graphic novels and memoirs to contemporary YA fiction—and believes in curating a library full of windows, mirrors, and doorways for every learner. This grant will help expand those book club options, amplifying diverse voices and stories that students connect with on a personal level. Reggie is excited to continue building a culture of reading where every student can find a story that feels like home.



**Lindsay Bullock** is in her 9th year of teaching. She currently teaches ELA at Napavine Junior High. Previously Lindsay taught elementary school in Centralia, Washington. Lindsay has always loved reading. One of her favorite things is having a former reader come back and say how much a book changed them or inspired them to read. She enjoys finding ways to connect students through the art of literature and writing. Through the Book Love Foundation grant, she hopes to build her classroom library with books that reach all learners so they may also find joy in what they choose to read. Throughout the year students are always requesting new books, and it becomes difficult to keep up with the demand. With this grant she is excited to introduce students to new worlds they can explore to foster a sense of ownership and the love for reading.

**Nicole Buys** is a passionate educator with 15 years of experience teaching a wide range of English courses and learner pathways. She is committed to bringing diverse voices and culturally relevant literature into the classroom. Inspired by Rudine Sims Bishop's concept of Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors, she strives to help students see reflections of their own identities, explore the experiences of others and imagine new possibilities beyond their immediate worlds. The books supported by this grant will deepen and enrich my students' reading lives—sparking curiosity, empathy, and critical thought—while empowering them to engage with literature in meaningful and transformative ways. She plans to use her grant allocation to purchase a new set of culturally relevant novels that will enrich her grade 9 students' literary experience and introduce them to different voices than we typically feature at my high school.







**Stephanie Cilia** teaches grades 6, 7, and 8 in Scarborough, Ontario. She has been an elementary teacher for 15 years. For as long as she can remember, she has heard comments like, “Oh, you’re reading again?” “You have ANOTHER new book?” Reading has been such a huge part of her life. She can’t recall a time where she hasn’t had a huge “to be read” pile. Summers became her chance to read as many books as she could. About three years ago she decided she wanted to share her love of reading with her students, and to do that, she needed to be reading what they’re reading. So, she began a journey of first, discovering what exactly students like to read, and then making time to read those books! It allowed her to connect with students in a more personal and meaningful

way. She was able to learn more about her students to not only select appropriate books for them, but to teach them how to find a good fit book for themselves. She hopes they will take these skills into their future endeavors to continue their reading journeys well into adulthood. It was at this point that she began building her classroom library so that it was filled with diverse, unique, and engaging books that reflected the student she taught. She asked for suggestions and requests and started following all kinds of bloggers and influencers to figure out what books she should have in her library.

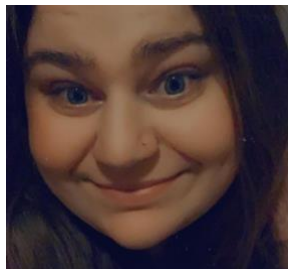
**Lasandra Cobb** is a small-town Southern girl who once felt invisible in the classroom. She struggled to read, to belong, and to find her voice. These challenges were made heavier by early childhood trauma. Raised in the rural deep South, inclusivity was largely absent from her educational experience. Reading was especially difficult; comprehension and fluency were constant battles, and she saw little value in ‘words on a page’ that made no sense to her. That changed when two life-changing forces entered her world: a loving teacher and a single book. Ms. Laramore transformed the trajectory of Lasandra’s life, not through test scores or interventions, but through unwavering love and kindness. She helped Lasandra unlock the power of books, and through them, she discovered emotional wellness, imagination, and the language of possibility. Books became Lasandra’s bridge to understanding the world and herself. Today, her personal journey fuels her passion for education. She strives to be the model of resilience she once needed, guiding students, especially those navigating hardship, through chartered and uncharted paths with empathy, courage, and hope...through the powerful words on the page lived through world changers!



**Katie Crist** is entering her fifteenth year of teaching at Clay High School in Oregon, Ohio and will be pursuing an MA in English at Bowling Green State University in the fall. She has taught a diverse range of courses and grades from 9th Grade Co-Taught English to Advanced Placement Literature and Composition. At every level, she loves sharing stories with her students and reigniting their love of reading. In addition to sparking joy, she hopes that reading fosters a sense of empathy and understanding in each of her students each year. She firmly believes that teaching cannot be stagnant, and she is always looking for the next great new title to incorporate into her classroom, whether through whole-class instruction, book club selection, or independent reading recommendations. She is looking

forward to pushing lots of new books into students’ arms this school year!

**Amy DePasquale** is beginning her 28th year at Tri-County Regional Vocational Technical High School, in Franklin, Massachusetts. Currently, she teaches a variety of college preparatory, honors and advanced placement courses in grades 9, 10 and 12. Additionally she serves as the English Department Facilitator, a SkillsUSA advisor, a Mentoring Program coordinator and the Book Club advisor. Amy's passion for reading was reignited during the pandemic when she recognized the profound social emotional benefits of reading beyond its academic and entertainment value. As a result, Amy set out to share her passion for reading with her students and change how some of her students viewed reading. To achieve this, she worked to create a book culture in her classroom by curating a collection and displaying young adult titles to peak her students' interest. She also began the daily practice of silent sustained reading in her classes in which students have a designated time to read each day. High-interest, diverse titles coupled with time for choice reading fosters a love of reading in her students, as well as affording them time to take a few minutes to take a breath and decompress in an otherwise busy high school day. As advisor to the student book club, Amy and her book club members strive to embrace and promote diverse reading among the student body. Each month, the members of the student book club select a book to read that is reflective of that month's theme. The book club has selected titles for Hispanic Heritage Month, Indigenous Peoples' Month, Black History Month, Arab American Heritage Month, Asian American and Pacific Islander Month, and Pride Month. The book club creates suggested reading posters for the school for each of these months to promote diverse reading and cultural understanding. In addition to reading multicultural, the book club reads a wide variety of genres. In her work as a teacher and advisor, Amy has witnessed the positive impact of regular, intentional, choice reading on her students. She will continue to curate her classroom library so that she can find "that" book for each of her students, the book which she hopes will ignite or sustain their passion for reading.



**Taylor Ferguson** is entering her fourth year of teaching as an 11th-grade and dual-enrollment English teacher. She graduated from the University of Texas at Arlington with a BA in English and is pursuing her MA in English at Southern New Hampshire University. As a lifelong reader, she has always had a passion for books and has inspired a variety of projects to make books and reading more accessible to her students. Over the past year, she has created a robust classroom library and is looking forward to implementing a mobile library and classroom book clubs in the upcoming year. In receiving the Book Love Foundation grant, she will be able to continue to grow a dynamic, diverse, and culturally relevant collection of books that will inspire her students to connect with books.

**Sydney Field** is an early childhood education major at Thomas College finishing up her final semester in student teaching at the James Bean School in Sidney, Maine. During this time, she will be working with 32 different public Pre-K students. Afterwards she hopes to have her own Pre-K or Kindergarten classroom somewhere in Central Maine. She is very excited to expand her classroom library and share her love of reading with her students. As someone who struggled with reading and grew to dislike it as a kid, she wants to help her students grow their love of books and set up a strong foundation for their future years. She also believes that books are a window, mirror or sliding glass door showing you a peek at someone else's life, your own, or allowing you to step into a different life. She thinks that is part of the reason she loves books and reading with her students; it allows them to experience things they may not get to otherwise.



**Tanner Krauth** found his way into teaching after working as an accountant for eight years. He will be starting his fourth year of teaching this fall. Tanner loves being in the classroom and creating a space where students can be themselves, learn and laugh. He teaches 6th thru 8<sup>th</sup> grade at Mountain Phoenix Community School, a public Waldorf school in Wheat Ridge, Colorado. He loops with his students from 6th thru 8th grade and teaches them a variety of subjects including history, science, reading and writing. Tanner implemented reading and writing workshop in his classroom this past year and saw the impact it had on his students. Students were more engaged with reading and writing than he had ever seen them in the past. He believes that reading and writing education should be centered around student choice because when students choose what they read and write about, they are more engaged and learn more. Tanner is an avid reader himself, and he is excited to expand his classroom library and include a more diverse selection of books for his students.

**Kara Frey** is a dedicated educator and literacy advocate whose instructional model centers on cultivating independent reading as a foundation for academic success and personal growth. Serving as an English and Indigenous Studies instructor at Great Plains College in Maple Creek, Saskatchewan, Frey established and continues to expand an almost entirely self-funded classroom library, which provides students access to a rich spectrum of literature, including contemporary and Indigenous titles. Her classroom library is more than a repository of books; it is a conduit for cultural affirmation, emotional resilience, and academic engagement. At the heart of Frey's instructional approach is a daily 15-minute independent reading period dedicated to pleasure-driven exploration. This practice is complemented by genre-based book tastings, daily book talks, and individualized reading conferences, allowing students to discover texts aligned with their interests. The results are compelling: one formerly disengaged reader discovered Neal Shusterman's *Scythe* and went on to read the entire series; another student who had experienced domestic violence completed an entire novel for the first time in years after reading *It Ends With Us* and later read the sequel; a third student reconnected with his Indigenous identity through *The Marrow Thieves* and its sequel, and another began his reading journey with *Making Bombs for Hitler* and transitioned into audiobooks with the help of Frey's Libro.fm initiative. These



anecdotes illustrate the power of responsive, personalized literacy engagement in creating lifelong readers. Frey models reading with authenticity and enthusiasm, making literature a visible and valued part of the classroom experience. She reads alongside her students, shares meaningful recommendations, and celebrates reading as a communal practice. Her space is intentionally designed to feel welcoming and reflective of student identity. In addition to daily literacy routines, she facilitates author visits and community partnerships to enrich students' literary exposure. In an educational setting with high academic stakes, Frey's library and pedagogical approach stand as a testament to what is possible when equity, voice, and literature intersect. Her work highlights the transformative impact of independent reading and the enduring value of creating culturally responsive literary spaces.



**Izzy Gallegos** just completed a full year residency at San Marcos High School in Texas and will be teaching there as a first year English teacher this Fall! Izzy grew up loving to read and write from a young age but didn't discover their love of teaching until a year into pursuing an English Bachelor's degree when they got a job as an online tutor through Austin Community College. Izzy loved helping people who were struggling academically gain confidence in themselves and discover their own potential. The more they dove into teaching, the more they realized it was what they were meant to do with their life. Izzy hopes to inspire self-confidence in their future students not only as readers and writers, but as learners of the world around them!

**Randi Gallerani** is a high school English teacher in Massachusetts. Born and raised on Cape Cod, she is committed to serving her community through education, having worked in educational settings in her community for nearly a decade. As a fifth-year teacher at Barnstable High School, she teaches across grade levels from 8th grade to 12th as well as advises the school's Human Rights Club and Gender and Sexuality Alliance. In her roles, she works to provide students access to diverse, high quality contemporary literature that is seamlessly tied into all curriculum through supplemental reading and independent reading opportunities. Her work matches her mission to ensure all students feel seen as well as to support students becoming lifelong readers. Through the generosity of the Book Love Foundation, the books being purchased will help support this mission by providing high quality graphic novel book club selections in the classroom that are adaptable to all content.







**Simone Hobbs** earliest memories took place in the Oxnard public library, checking out seven books at a time, another when she got in trouble in second grade because she went to the library and her parents thought she was lost; she didn't tell anyone she was going to the library after school, curled up with a book. Still surrounded by books of all kinds, this bibliophile teacher, Simone Hobbs, has been teaching for about 25 years as a K-8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher. She started her career teaching Kindergarten in the Bay Area, and she currently teaches sixth grade in Orland, California at C.K. Price Middle School. She has always loved reading, sharing her love of books, and exploring bookstores. Another childhood memory was series reading, including *the Chronicles of Narnia*. C.S. Lewis wrote "We read to know we are not alone," and this idea

embodies what Simone would like her students to understand. With this grant, Simone will be able to provide more book club books to her students, which will complement the already extensive class library, wide range of book talks, and daily free choice reading selections, allowing everyone to find commonalities, shared experiences, and to celebrate our differences.

**Shana Karnes** is looking forward to diving into her 16th year of teaching this fall. She has worked with readers of a variety of ages but can't wait to read more deeply beside 4th graders in her second year at St. Francis de Sales Central Catholic School in Morgantown, West Virginia. Shana believes that a colorful, inviting classroom library is key to help students fall in love with reading through ready access to books aligned with their interests and wonders. After years of conferring with readers, Shana knows that when a student's literary engagement is a puzzle, book clubs are the missing piece. The social capital peers provide, matched with high-interest, appealing texts, allows even the most reluctant readers to experience Book Love.



**Kaley Kowarick** is entering her eleventh year of teaching. She has had the pleasure of working in Ridgefield Public Schools for her entire career. She currently teaches reading electives and special education courses at both Ridgefield Alternative High School and Ridgefield High School. During the 2025-2025 school year, she will take on an added role as part of a reading intervention team. Kaley sees reading as one of the greatest tools for hope and community-building. She wholeheartedly believes in the words of author Libba Bray, that "there is no greater power on this earth than story." While studying to be a special education teacher, she chose to complete a concentration in English because of her love of reading. In 2015, as a first-year teacher, Kaley had the opportunity to co-

teach American Literature, which reignited her passion for reading and for sharing it with others. One of the greatest adventures in her reading journey began when she had the opportunity to join Ridgefield High School's Reading Department. Created and developed by two incredible teachers (both of whom have been named Ridgefield's Teacher of the Year), the Reading Department seeks to "cultivate a love of reading and to provide students with a welcoming, highly engaging, and personalized learning experience. [The courses] emphasize community learning as the norm and promote close reading through a collaborative process, which results in more reflective readers, critical thinkers, and



empathetic citizens. Most importantly, students will enjoy the gift of reading". The founding teachers have mentored Kaley, and she has been so proud to join their work and carry it forward. Kaley is also proud to teach at the Ridgefield Alternative High School. She currently teaches special education resource classes, co-teaches English III/IV, and has introduced a variety of reading electives to RAHS students (Reading Center, Hero's Journey and the Human Experience, Individual Identity and Social Justice, and Teen Voices in a Changing Society). RAHS is a special place with a wonderful community of learners and educators. While the district is fortunate to have well-funded and resourced programs, the school's location (across town from the "main" high school) means that RAHS students have less direct access to the books in the RHS library and Reading Department classroom spaces. This grant will be used to upgrade the books in the RAHS classroom library so that all students have access to engaging modern texts. Kaley strives to highlight Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop's idea of books being mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. She wants each student at RAHS to be able to find a book that reflects their identity. She also wants them to experience new perspectives and step into unfamiliar worlds. She is deeply grateful that the Book Love Foundation is providing this opportunity for her students.

People often ask others when they knew what they wanted to be when they grew up. Anytime that question was posed to **Christina Kuester**, she always felt a bit uncertain of how to respond because, for her, deciding to become a teacher didn't feel like a decision at all; She simply knew that it was what I wanted to do with my life for as long as she could remember. Being a teacher has brought incredible joy to her life, and she still must pinch herself at times at the realization that she gets paid to do what she loves every day. She earned her teaching degree from the University of Southern Indiana in the spring of 2012, and she received her first teaching job shortly thereafter. Unbelievably, she has been teaching middle school language arts for thirteen years and is about to embark on her fourteenth year in the classroom. Though she has always perceived herself as a lifelong learner, she is currently pursuing her master's degree from the University of Southern Indiana in Curriculum and Instruction. In her classroom, she tries to model the importance of constantly pursuing knowledge and understanding of the world around us. She tells them probably too often that books are mirrors and windows. Books help to expose aspects of ourselves that we were previously unaware of, and they also act as windows into understanding the lives of others. From Christine's perspective, books and reading are tools that can help us become better versions of ourselves. Through books, we can become more empathetic, compassionate, and kind humans, and this, in turn, can help make the world a better place. Because she believes in the power of reading, she has had to put a great deal of energy and effort into cultivating her classroom library over the last three years. She travels to thrift stores, uses book shops and yard sales looking for literary treasures, and additionally, after reading an online blog post written by a teacher who used grant money to purchase books for her classroom, she began pursuing grants to purchase new books for my classroom library. She is eternally grateful for the generosity of programs like Penny Kittle's Book Love Foundation and many others who have allowed her to further develop a classroom library that is inclusive. Christine believe that her classroom library helps to provide students with a sense of belonging and acceptance as well as puts books in their hands that can both foster a love of reading within them and expose them to the lives of those who are different than they are. Students in her classroom read independently every day, and they are encouraged to choose to read the books they want. Most days, while her students are reading, she is curled up in a corner doing the same or sitting with my reader's notebook at a student desk writing notes of her favorite lines or ideas that a book sparks in her mind. During independent reading time, she has read books like Jared Amato's *Just Read It*,



Donalyn Miller's *The Book Whisperer*, Penny Kittle's *Book Love*, and Kylene Beers' *When Kids Can't Read*, and these books have changed her. They have transformed the way she teaches and the way she lives, and she feels so grateful to be able to share and integrate the innovative ideas and ideologies from those texts into her classroom instruction. On the outside of her classroom door, she has a laminated poster with the words of Nelson Mandela, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." In a world that often feels irreparable, Christine's classroom, her students, her kids, give her hope that positive change is possible. She sends thanks to the Book Love Foundation for helping her put transformative books into the hands of her students.



**Kimberly Kutlu** is entering her 11th year of teaching. For the past five years, she has taught English at West Morris Mendham High School in Mendham, New Jersey, where she also serves as the girls' JV tennis coach and advisor to the Music Club. In both her freshman collaborative and senior college preparatory courses, Kim is committed to reaching students who claim to "hate reading" by fostering a classroom where books are embraced, explored, and shared. She attributes her own love of reading to visits to the public library in her New Jersey hometown and cherishes memories of quiet reading time with her mother while growing up. Kim believes all students can

learn to like, if not love, reading when they are encouraged and given access to high-interest, thought-provoking books. A cornerstone of her classroom is ten minutes of daily choice reading, offering her students an escape from the pressures and distractions of everyday teenage life through storytelling. Always on the lookout for young adult titles that resonate with her students, Kim prioritizes building a diverse classroom library and believes every student should see themselves reflected in stories while also building empathy for those with different life experiences. Kim is deeply grateful to the Book Love Foundation for the opportunity to introduce even more meaningful titles to her students.

**Anne-Marie Longpré** is a high school teacher in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. She teaches at Heydon Park Secondary School, a school just for girls (inclusive of Trans and Non-Binary!) with special education needs. For 17 years, Anne-Marie has been working to make reading more accessible (and more fun!) for emerging readers with learning disabilities. She has been building a collection of graphic novels, high-interest non-fiction, and page-turner classics to hook her students into a life of Book Love. She is excited to put this grant to work to refresh her collection for incoming students in September, and to keep introducing kids to the empathy and imagination of books.



**Devon Mullman** is a middle school English Language Arts teacher in Butte, Montana, currently in her fourth year of teaching. She teaches 6th through 8th grade and believes in the power of reading to build identity, empathy, and confidence. Devon works hard to match each student with books that speak to who they are and who they might become. She brings energy and purpose to her classroom, encouraging students to ask big questions, read widely, and find their own voice through writing. She is especially passionate about making history and underrepresented stories come alive through literature.

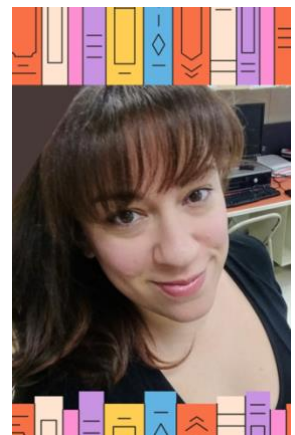
**Yalil Nieves** is the principal of Mary Gage Peterson Elementary School, a CPS neighborhood STEAM school where reading is the foundation for student empowerment and academic success. **She is the first Book Love Foundation Leader's Grant winner**, which provides three years of funding to boost a school's library. As a proud Latina leader and lifelong reader, Yalil believes every student deserves access to books that reflect who they are and expand their understanding of the world. With the support of the Book Love Foundation grant, Yalil is leading a schoolwide effort to increase student voice in literacy: empowering students to take ownership of their reading lives by helping to select the books that fill their classroom libraries. Her goal is to ensure that every child finds joy in reading, sees themselves in the stories they encounter, and builds a strong, confident reading identity that will stay with them for life.



**Sophia Papineau** is from Sudbury, Ontario and is a recent graduate from Laurentian University's Concurrent Education Program. She got her Bachelor of Education in the Junior and Intermediate divisions with an English teachable, and she has recently obtained additional basic qualifications in the Primary and Senior divisions, allowing her to teach all grades. Sophia knew from a very early age that she wanted to be a teacher and would regularly play school with her friends and stuffed animals. That desire to be an educator was further fostered in her various roles working with young children, including camp counsellor, coach, and youth drama teacher. After completing her final placement, Sophia has been working as a supply teacher, where she has gotten to work at elementary schools all across Sudbury. She will be entering her first year of

teaching in the fall, where she will be teaching a grade ½ class at Queen Elizabeth Public School. She is especially excited because she has worked in that school's after-school program for the past 2 years as a lead childcare worker and is looking forward to working with her kids again in a new capacity.

**Karina Perez** a 22-year veteran educator, teaches 7th grade social studies at Hackensack Middle School in an urban, richly diverse community. As co-advisor of the D.I.C.E. Club (Diversity, Inclusion, Culture Empowerment), she has long been a champion for student voice, representation, and equity both in and out of the classroom. With a deep love for books and their power to transport, affirm, and empower, Karina has built a reading culture rooted in student choice, diverse perspectives, and authentic connection. Her classroom is full of books that reflect the identities and experiences of her students, and her free classroom library has become a hub for curious readers—even students outside of her classes stop by to browse, recommend, and request new titles. With the Book Love Grant, Karina plans to implement several initiatives aimed specifically at reluctant and disengaged readers. One initiative is to purchase a full class set of *Choose Your Own Adventure* books—including *Mystery of the Maya*, *Secret of the Ninja*, and *Chinese Dragons*. These interactive narratives allow for reader autonomy, enabling students to actively shape their reading journey. They also align with Karina's social studies curriculum, reinforcing historical thinking through a literary lens. Karina believes books change lives not just by what's on the page—but by how they're introduced, shared, and celebrated. With the support of the





Book Love Grant, she will continue to make reading a joyful, inclusive, and empowering experience for every student who walks through her door.



**Atefa Rastagar** teaches English, and at the heart of what she does is help students build a genuine love for reading. It is not just about meeting curriculum goals—it is about giving them space to find books they connect with and stories they care about. She makes time in class for independent reading because she believes that choosing your own book, settling in, and simply reading is powerful. Her book clubs encourage students to lead the way. She wants them to ask questions, share ideas, challenge each other, and view reading as something social and dynamic. She is always on the hunt for new titles that speak to them—whether that means adding short stories or incorporating diverse voices they may not have encountered before. Her classroom is not just a place to read—it is a place to fall in love with reading. Her aim is to make that happen by building a library that reflects her students, by celebrating their reading milestones, and by creating space for curiosity. Watching her students grow into thoughtful, enthusiastic readers is one of the most rewarding aspects of this work—and it is the reason she continues to do it.

**Patricia Redekop** is currently an English teacher in Brandon, Manitoba at Vincent Massey High School who has always been passionate about reading and writing and helping students find joy in these endeavors. She teaches a diverse student population and there is a strong need to appeal to different genres and forms to meet the interests of students' cultures, socio-economic backgrounds, and reading levels. From teaching elementary students to high school English language learners, to Advanced Placement English classes, she recognizes how often students' lives are over-scheduled. Many students do not have time, or have the privilege to take time at home, for leisure reading. Opportunities for active and pleasurable reading may only occur during class and if engaging and quality books aren't available for them to read, that time is decreased even more. Reading in school is often the only time many students have in their day to read for enjoyment. Patricia is keen to show students how relevant reading is to their lives by showing how daily reading leads to better critical thinking skills, career success, stronger relationships and overall wellness. With the generosity of the Book Love Foundation Grant, she can refresh her classroom library with more current, relatable texts. As a result, the hope is to entice more readers with easy access to texts that they will want to continue reading outside of the classroom walls. Reading is a bridge to other worlds and people. Right now, connection is something the worlds needs more of.



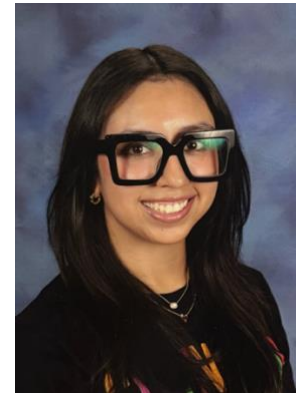
**Angela Regoli** teaches at Olentangy Liberty High School in Powell, Ohio. She holds a master's degree in education from The Ohio State University's College of Teaching and Learning. Throughout 10 years of teaching, helping students find books they love has become the heart and soul of her practice. She believes that fostering a vibrant relationship with reading is the key to many challenges facing our educational landscape. Cultivating joy in Ms. Regoli's classroom often starts with modeling and sharing her own reading life. Her favorite genres are fantasy and science fiction, and she loves engaging in conversation with students about their independent reading through regular "book chats."



**Joslyn Rodriguez** is a first-year 2nd grade teacher! She holds a B.S in Elementary Education from Valparaiso University. She has a heart for early literacy and a deep passion for helping children discover the joy of reading. She believes that books have the power to transform lives—they open doors to new worlds, expand vocabulary and thinking, and help children see themselves and others in powerful ways. In her classroom, she works hard to build a love of reading by creating a print-rich environment filled with diverse, high-interest texts. She believes that every child deserves access to books that reflect who they are, book that will challenge their thinking, and books that inspire their dreams. Whether it's through interactive read-alouds, independent reading time, or small-group instruction, Joslyn prioritizes

literacy every single day. She wants to not just to help students learn to read, but to help them *love* to read. She wants each of her students to see themselves as readers, to feel confident picking up a book, and to carry that confidence with them beyond the classroom. As she begins this exciting journey in education, she is committed to growing alongside her students, creating an equitable and joyful learning space, and using books as a tool to ignite curiosity, build empathy, and inspire lifelong learning.

**Brianda Garcia Sanchez** is a third-year bilingual teacher in the state of Texas. She has had the privilege of teaching fourth grade bilingual students for the last two years and is now stepping into a new role as a fifth grade dual language teacher. Literacy is a tool that she utilizes in and out of the classroom. She emphasizes biliteracy and provides opportunities for children to see themselves and their families reflected in the texts they read. Her goal is to ensure that every child has access to books that reflect their own stories. Brianda is currently pursuing a Masters in Curriculum and Instruction with a Reading Specialist Certification and hopes to utilize this degree to continue finding new ways to make literacy accessible for all children.



**Alana Shivers** is honored to be a part of the Book Love community! She is a second-year teacher at a small school in West Michigan. Being awarded this grant is significant in helping her build a classroom library. Currently, Alana's English department is working hard on establishing a school wide culture of choice reading. They believe that having dedicated classroom time to read personal choice books will help students build a deeper love of reading. To ensure that this goal is met, Alana's students need access to a variety of books. Additionally, she is incredibly passionate about ensuring that her students find books that interest them. She desires stories in her classroom that feature exposure to

diverse cultures and perspectives. Furthermore, she tries to ensure that all students feel connected to a book, whether it is through the setting, characters, or plot. She is specifically excited about this grant because it will allow her to purchase books in the hunting and fishing genre! Throughout the last year, she learned that this is a gap in her current classroom library. Teaching in a rural community that features an immense number of students who are also hunters and fishers made this gap obvious within the first few weeks. Ultimately, she is super excited to be able to provide her students with more books that interest them!



**Caitlin Starmer** is a preservice teacher in Bellingham, Washington. She is a student at Western Washington University, preparing to start student teaching in a first-grade classroom at Northern Heights Elementary in the fall. Although she has wanted to be a teacher for several years, she has taken on a particular interest in early childhood literacy since attending university. In an experience working with first graders on their writing workshop, she saw how reading and writing can be powerful tools for expression, representation, and development in young children. She feels great gratitude for the opportunity to accept this Book Love Foundation grant and is hopeful that these books will start a classroom library that will provide spaces for love, creativity, and representation, for decades to come.

**Jennifer Steil** is a middle school English teacher at Bethlehem Central School District in Delmar, NY, with 28 years of experience in education. She brings a deep passion for literacy to her classroom, where she works hard to inspire students to see themselves as readers and writers. Jennifer is completing a Certificate of Advanced Study in Literacy at the University at Albany, where she also teaches graduate literacy courses and mentors future educators. She is actively involved in literacy leadership, currently serving as Treasurer of the Albany City Area Reading Council, and contributes to professional scholarship, including publishing a book review in *Language and Literacy Spectrum* and a chapter in *Critical Literacy/Critical Teaching* (Dozier, Johnston, & Rogers, 2006). Jennifer believes that creating a reading culture in the classroom isn't just about making books available—it's about building a space where books are shared and enjoyed. She works to develop a literacy-rich environment that offers engaging, relevant titles for all students. Her goal is for students to see their own experiences and identities reflected on the shelves, while also showing them new perspectives. When reading is celebrated as an act of joy rather than a task to complete, students are more likely to want to read. Jennifer also feels strongly about the value of family involvement and runs a book club for the grownups of her students, reading and discussing middle grade books trending in her classroom. The Book Love Foundation grant is supporting Jennifer's ongoing efforts to develop a joyful, inclusive reading culture by expanding her high-interest classroom library and centering equity in her literacy instruction.



**Erin Tabor** wanted to be a teacher since she was about three years old. It must have had something to do with a retired educator who was her caregiver and the Normal Rockwell painting "Happy Birthday Miss Jones" that lived above the couch in her living room. Somehow, her intuition was right, and she feels a life-long vocation to educate children. When people ask me what else she'd do if she didn't teach, she draws a blank. Despite the hardships that public education brings, when she sees students genuinely curious and absorbed in thought or story, she is filled with the joy. She feels grateful that she has a sense of purpose with her career that so many lack. Over the last two years she has devoted a lot of energy developing her independent reading program. It kicked off when she went to the National Council for Teachers of English conference in Columbus and focused her sessions on independent reading strategies. There was



SO much to be inspired by. Since then, she has become skilled at recommending books to students, advertising books to the class, conferencing with students, getting students to talk to each other about what they're reading, and developing creative projects that infuse joy into the process. She can honestly say that all her students leave 9th grade having finished at least two books of their choice, and nearly every one of them would admit (though maybe secretly) that they do like reading. When she hears, "Miss Tabor, this is actually a good book" from a student who told her he hates reading and "Miss Tabor, this book is my life" from a student who adamantly vowed she would never like a book, her English teacher heart grows big. These moments, among many others, are what fuels her commitment to developing a culture of reading my classroom. The Book Love Foundation grant comes at a perfect time in her professional life because the last two years she has been teaching Honors 9th grade, but this coming year her school is transitioning to "open honors" so she will have a wider array of reading levels in her room. She will need a greater variety of books to engage this breadth, so she is thrilled with this gift to her and her students.

**Jay Thompson** is a 10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> grade teacher integrating ELA and Social Studies. They look forward to building a classroom library of fiction and nonfiction that connects literary and social-political themes: power and authority; migration and homemaking; our built and natural environment. In close reading, writing, historical study, and social investigation, they hope students will hone a variety of reading and writing strategies and connect every text and task to a meaningful purpose.



**Ryleigh Watson** is currently in her 6<sup>th</sup> year of teaching. When she was a child, she read the Little House on the Prairie books; Laura Ingalls Wilder and her teaching adventures sparked her dream of becoming a teacher, too. In many other times of her life, books have felt like great friends, and she loves being able to share her passion for reading with students. Ryleigh teaches 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade English at Don Tyson School of Innovation in Springdale, Arkansas. She absolutely loves her school! Her favorite books are *The Outsiders*, *An American Marriage*, and *The Great Alone*.

**Sherrii Weitzel** teaches 10th and 12 graders at Whitmer High School. Starting her 11th year of teaching, she considers herself a reader, writer and lifelong learner. She wants to change the apathy teens feel surrounding reading (and hopefully foster a love of reading) so she shares books that are written for high school students. Books that sound like them. Books that are relatable and accessible to teen readers. By letting them choose their books it gives them the agency to find books they like again, even if they haven't read a book in three years. Students pick books, set a goal for the year and then get started. If they hate a book, they break up with it. If they hate the next one, we keep the process going. For reluctant readers, she does book talks, especially recommending her favorite YA authors, like Jason Reynolds. Sherrii wants her students to see themselves in the books they read but also sees reading as an invitation into other perspectives and experiences different than ours. She believes that giving students time to read in class is essential to get them to read outside of class. She also hopes that by sharing beautiful writers that her students can use their work for inspiration in their own writing. With these books she will continue to diversify her library and work with students to find their new



favorite book, author, or genre. Recommending books is her love language and she cannot wait to have more choices for her students this year.

**Gabriella White** is a recent graduate of Laurentian University and is currently in her first year of teaching in Ontario, Canada. Although her love for reading developed later in life, it has become a driving force in her teaching. She is passionate about fostering a love of literature and language in her students, especially in the early years when the foundations for literacy and lifelong learning are formed. She believes that every student deserves the opportunity to see themselves as readers and storytellers, and she is committed to creating a classroom environment that is engaging, inclusive, and full of curiosity.



**Ashley Young** is a passionate and dedicated educator with over 11 years of experience teaching English Language Arts at the upper elementary and middle school levels. Currently serving as a 5th Grade Reading Language Arts teacher at La Vega Intermediate H.P. Miles campus, Ashley brings energy, insight, and a deep commitment to literacy and student growth into every classroom she enters. Ashley began her educational journey with an Associate of Arts in General Studies from McLennan Community College, followed by a bachelor's degree in English with a minor in Sociology from Texas State University. She later earned her master's degree in education, with an emphasis on Language and Literacy, from Texas Tech University—a reflection of her strong belief in the power of reading and communication to shape young minds. Throughout her career, Ashley has taught in several school districts, including Waco ISD, La Vega ISD, and Midway ISD. During her time at Midway's River Valley Middle School, she served as team lead for three years and mentored new teachers, helping to build a collaborative and supportive school culture. She has been involved in student-focused programs such as the Cool Kids Club and the National Board Certification Cohort, and she is a vocal advocate for academic success and equity in education. Ashley is always looking for ways to grow professionally and personally. She is currently working on learning Spanish to better connect with her students and their families. In her free time, she enjoys reading, traveling, spending time with friends and family, and doting on her beloved cats. Ashley's dedication to her students and her craft is evident in everything she does. She believes that all students deserve a safe, engaging, and challenging learning environment—and she works tirelessly to make that a reality every day.

**Erin Zietz** is entering her 14th year of teaching fourth grade at Washington Elementary School in Minot, North Dakota. (Go Patriots!) She has always had a spark for sharing her love for literacy, but shifting to team teaching 7 years ago set that spark ablaze. Erin is now the sole reading and language arts teacher for all fourth graders at her school, a responsibility she carries with both passion and integrity. Through garnering community and financial support, organizing schoolwide Birthday Books, building a Staff Library, and teaching Summer Book Club, she works to ensure that all students and staff have access to high-quality, diverse texts all year long. Her classroom library is really a schoolwide library, as current and former students, as well as fellow co-workers, know they are welcome to stop in and book shop at any time. Beyond the classroom, Erin enjoys time with her husband and two daughters, reading on her deck, playing softball, and promoting community literacy events with North Central Reading Council. Erin is humbled to be a 2025 Book Love Foundation Classroom Library Grant Recipient, and excited to be only the second winner from North Dakota. She wholeheartedly agrees with Donalyn Miller, who said, "If we value all readers, we must value all reading." This grant will further support her mission of valuing all readers by adding more diverse, engaging texts written from authentic perspectives to her shelves.



Since 2012, the Book **Love** Foundation has raised more than \$1M to provide more than 500 teachers (from 42 states and six Canadian provinces) with grants to build classroom libraries. And we do this with the sweat of incredible volunteers, so we can ensure that **100% of donations** fund classroom libraries.

The Book **Love** Foundation receives generous, ongoing support from hundreds of individual donors and foundations dedicated to literacy, as well as practical support in choosing books and delivering them from the dynamic team at **Bookelicious**.

You can find out more at [booklovefoundation.org](https://booklovefoundation.org) and follow the latest news with our monthly newsletter the [Book Love Buzz](#). The **Book Love Foundation** provides ongoing professional learning opportunities to 2500 educators from 28 countries who gather at the **Book Love Community** for book studies, author interviews, and the contagious, joyful energy teachers need to continue this hard work.

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