

Lauren Deal

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My name is Lauren Deal; I was a runner-up for the Book Love Foundation's grant in 2016 and had the pleasure of presenting with other Book Love Foundation award-winners at the 2017 NCTE convention. I am a North Carolina Teaching Fellows graduate of UNC-Asheville and a National Board certified English teacher in my sixteenth year of teaching. Currently, I teach English 1-3 and Theatre at First Flight High School on the Outer Banks of North Carolina, and was named First Flight's Teacher of the Year in 2019.

Being a runner-up for both the Book Love Foundation's grant as well as the Penguin Random House Teacher Award for Literacy in 2017 made a huge difference in my ability to connect my students with books and create lifelong readers in my English classes. I am a huge believer in Rudine Sims Bishop's concept of books serving as windows, mirrors, and sliding doors, especially as my students and I live in a fairly insular community on an island. Winning these grants not only allowed me to purchase more books to meet my students' needs and match their interests, but also put me in contact with a wonderful community of like-minded educators who share my belief in the importance of independent reading. Through these communities and the Project LIT Book Club, I have built a large, diverse classroom library that has served countless students over the past five years.

During the COVID quarantine in 2020 and 2021, I have experienced a bittersweet surprise at how many students grieved for the loss of our class time set aside for reading every day and their easy access to books. I moved many of my books home and set up a "mini-library" in my garage to check out books to students while we could not be on campus. The past year has been a blur of students stopping by to browse the shelves in my garage, picking up and dropping off bags of books on my doorknob, and making deliveries to students' mailboxes and porches to fulfill book requests. It has presented new challenges but it warms my heart to see that daily in-class reading became more than just an assignment to my students: It is a routine they valued and have learned to replicate on their own time. To me, there is nothing more rewarding than finding the right book to reach each student, even when it's not as easy as walking across my classroom to browse through a bookshelf. As one of my students wrote in a recommendation letter for me, "Anyone who walks out of Ms. Deal's classroom has become a better person, with a book in one hand and a better outlook on life in the other."

You can find me on Twitter as @lpdeal or Instagram as @msdealproblems!