

March 1, 2017

Dear Barack and Michelle,

Please forgive me for using your first names when we don't know each other. I met you in 2006 when you came to Kennett High School in North Conway, New Hampshire. My son Cam and I volunteered to help at Barack's speaking event that day, and he took us all outside to meet Michelle and the girls before your bus left. I had never been involved in politics, but because of you two, I had to be.

You came to our new high school in 2007 and I got to shake your hand and give you one of my books about teaching, *The Greatest Catch: A Life in Teaching*. I remember inscribing it to Senator Obama, so hopeful that you might become our President. I hosted an event at my house for you, I let volunteers sleep in my basement, and I went door to door and made phone calls in my small collection of towns. I cried when you walked out on the stage in Chicago as our new President. Thank you for being a President to believe in, and for having the smart sense to marry such a bad ass wonderful woman. Michelle—you brought joy and honor to the role of First Lady. Thank you. I know you both sacrificed a great deal to give our country these last eight years.



That's me in the red jacket. I was too embarrassed to ask you for a photo of just us.

So here's why I am writing...you are both readers. When I read the piece in the *New York Times* this January about your reading life, Barack, I celebrated. We like the same books! (Okay, except Abraham Lincoln—I haven't read anything by him yet.)

My mission in life is to help teenagers find a love of reading. I've taught for 32 years now, and I am relentless. I believe I can turn every kid into a reader—even in high school, even in a world full of distractions, even when they walk into my classroom hating reading. I succeed almost every time. I wrote a book called *Book Love*, and it has helped other teachers share this mission. I still teach every fall in my small town, but because of my writing, I get to reach people all over the world. (I'm writing to you this morning from China.)

I started a foundation four years ago to give away classroom libraries to teachers who have made a commitment to lead students to joy and engagement with books. In many places I visit there are no libraries or librarians, and certainly no classroom libraries which help a teacher personalize reading. This year we have 140 applications from teachers from 31 states and four Canadian provinces. These are wonderful people who are absolutely committed. They lead

hundreds of kids to a love of reading every year. I have raised \$40k so far this year, but it would take \$532,000 to fund all of these requests. I need to get my message out to people who have money. You know some of those people.

Would you be willing to record a video to support what we do? Or let me interview you for the Book Love Foundation podcast? Or read applications and help us pick winners? Okay... I know that's asking a lot, but it would be pretty amazing to have you on my board! However, I know a lot of people want your time. Your support could draw people to our small foundation and help us expand our mission, so I'm hoping you'll consider helping us.



I want a book in the hands of every kid to combat the “danger of the single story” as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie says so brilliantly in her TED talk. Every child needs to find himself—and lose himself—in a book. Becoming a reader changes everything. You know it. I know it. Help me make it happen for more teenagers in this beautiful country of ours.

In gratitude for all you have both given to the world,

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That's Clemson with the stack of books he read in my ninth grade class last year. This year his goal is to read 50.

My writing and teaching friends (L to R: Kelly Gallagher, Mariana Romano, Tom Romano, Bob Probst, and Kylene Beers) and I visited the White House when the National Council of Teachers of English annual convention was in Washington D.C. in 2014.

Alas, you weren't available to meet with us.

Now that you're no longer President and First Lady, perhaps you can squeeze us into your schedule?

