

# Anthony Segura



## "BOOKS SUCK!"

That's the funny thing... As much of a book advocate I have been as a teacher, I used to hate reading. Who would want to spend their time staring at a bunch of words on a page? No pictures? Forget about it! These were the thoughts I grew up with as a child and young adult.

In truth, I didn't discover an authentic passion for reading until some time in college. It wasn't until then that I finally came across a teacher that was not only an active reader themselves but also had a desire to create that spark in their students. And it all started with getting to know me and putting the right book in my hands. Perhaps this has worked to my advantage ... being able to reach those kids that have been conditioned to hate reading.

My name is Anthony Segura and I currently have the pleasure of teaching English at Sunnyside High School. All bets were off once obtaining my master's degree in reading and language -- I now use every school year to get to know my students and put books before them that I think they will enjoy as Bishop puts it, as either a mirror, window or sliding glass door.





When I first walked into Mr. Segura's class my sophomore year of high school, I was surprised by the number of books, bookshelves (four!), and book-related quotes there were, even for an English classroom. Getting the first 10 minutes to read a book of my choice every time I walked into class was also shocking. I didn't think it would last, and yet he still does it with his current sophomores two years later. He also still lends out books to any student, even ones not in his class.

Unfortunately, my time in Mr. Segura's class was cut short due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, amid the stay-at-home mandate, during the rest of my sophomore and entire junior year (online), Mr. Segura continued to post on social media books that he was receiving from booksellers and such, encouraging us to reach out if we were interested in reading any. Mr. Segura would then drop off your book at the library where you could pick it up. At the time, I wasn't much of a reader, maybe reading 1 or 2 books a year, both for class. By the end of my junior year, however, I was reading at least 4 books a week every week on my own; no grades involved. I got my hands on a library card, kept a close eye on any new books Mr. Segura was getting, and was very grateful that a measly 3 hours of online school stood between me and my books.

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A couple of months ago, Mr. Segura and I were asked if we could find students to participate in Battle of the Books, a regional book competition in the school district hosted each year. My team and I had six months to read 30 books between the five of us. A couple of days ago, we could finally say we won a championship, and we had all very much fallen in love with some of the books we read.

Many English teachers I've encountered do one of two things: either they have a random jumble of 10 young adult (YA) books at the back of their classroom they never talk about, or they have a not-so-random assortment of books composed of books only they (the teacher) likes, which often times is going to look very different from what a 15-year-old student will enjoy. Rather than just meet a requirement, Mr. Segura takes the time to sit one-on-one with his students and ask them about what books they've enjoyed in the past, sometimes helping them reconnect with childhood favorites like "Percy Jackson" (a series I personally adore). Moreover, Mr. Segura spends hours reading YA (young adult) novels outside of class, so that he can better select books. This is really admirable considering he's far beyond the recommended age group, and like many people not in their teenage years, YA is not their go-to genre. Despite this, Mr. Segura still makes the effort to become familiar with books his students will actually enjoy. As a result, he's able to give us a library that is for us, not anyone else.

From the first day Mr. Segura has been teaching at Sunnyside, he has been advocating for books, and trying to share with us his love for reading. For those past two years, he has made effort after effort, constantly trying to find new ways to get more students to fall in love with reading and support those that have already fallen to its charms (like myself). Getting more people to read and find the joy in it isn't easy, especially considering that generally, when books are mentioned, people think of it like they do about mathematics: difficult and unpleasant, something to avoid, definitely something not to do in your free time. It's slow and requires someone that can try and try again, but it does make a difference to make new, and exciting books available to students. Every time I walk into Mr. Segura's classroom, now a senior, and I see him recommending books to another student, it hits me that that student probably wouldn't read for pleasure at all if it weren't for the teacher they happened to get. I went from reading no books on my own to reading more than 100 a year, so I can verify that having a place I can count on to have plenty of YA novels, ARCs (Advanced Reader Copies), and new releases coming in all the time is a godsend. Every time I see a new box full of books in his classroom, it makes my day, and of course, I excitedly rush to check one out.

**Julissa - Sunnyside Student**