

I don't usually answer calls from random numbers. But, one Thursday evening, I got a call from a strange number while I was in the other room and my husband answered. As I was shouting, *let it go to voicemail*, I heard my husband's quick "Hello" and then (imagine the annoyed tone reserved for telemarketers), "Uh, may I ask who's speaking?" Walking into the room, my husband handed off the phone with a shrug, "It's someone named Penny Kittle."

My heart flipped. I know that name. After years of stalking her down at NCTE conferences and reading her books, she was calling me! As Penny told me my students would now have a plethora of amazing YA books to choose from in the form of a new classroom library, I half laughed and half cried.

My story of becoming the teacher to get this phone call probably begins at birth. I've always known I'd end up teaching some way or another. Both of my parents were English teachers, my mom still is, and I guess you could say it is the family business. Even though I didn't think I wanted to be an English teacher when I was younger, my love for reading was deep. I remember countless nights of staying up 'til 3, 4 or 5 in the morning reading, hiding my books under my pillow when my parents came to check on me.

I grew up in Kalamazoo, Michigan, and later earned an English degree from the University of Michigan. Before becoming a teacher, I worked in the marketing / public relations field before going back to school for a Master's in Education at Auburn University. I've been teaching 8th grade English for 5 years at Auburn Junior High School where I've been lucky to be a part of a school culture that believes in getting books in the hands of students, allows teachers to experiment with curriculum and classroom practices, and has supported me in my various teaching adventures.

My mom and I started the tradition of attending the NCTE convention each year together while I was still in grad school. I always leave the conference totally inspired to try new things and with the surefire belief that humans *NEED* stories. At these conferences I've also scavenged a library of free books and built plenty of muscle lugging my suitcases of freebies out of the convention center. Having my own classroom library has meant so much to me in the past few years. It means I always have books within reach. Bored student - here's a book. Don't like your book - try another one, and another, and another. This past year is the first year where I truly made reading for pleasure a number one priority. I totally dedicated the first 20 minutes of each class to reading for pleasure. Even though I was out half of the year on maternity leave, I was able to see amazing results.

The words that rocked my world come from student surveys, "I read more often and I'm starting to visualize more in my reading;" and "Now that I read books in Mrs. Browning's class, I enjoy reading outside of the classroom."

I believe that every student deserves to have that kind of experience. The whole, "I'm not a reader / I don't really like reading," thing doesn't really exist to me. When I hear someone say this, I just think, you haven't found *your* book yet.

I'm so thankful for the Book Love grant. Finding each student a book they can identify with and love to read will be so much easier with 500 new books to add to my classroom library. Thank you so much to the Book Love Foundation and to all of you who believe in the power of reading and sharing stories.