

Nichole Folkman

Living in a small farm town, I never knew how fortunate I was to have access to books. Our school library was open each summer and my parents enrolled me in book clubs, even when money was tight. I spent my summers secluded out on our family farm rushing through my housework so that I could spend as much time as possible reading while my brother played outside. But as much as my parents made sure I had access to books, there was always that pull of work to be done. The books would be taken away and I'd have to complete a long list of chores and not get to have my escape. There was no local bookstore and when we would go to a major town (an hour away) I'd make sure I had money saved up so that I could buy the newest books in the Babysitters Club series. I'd devour them in a day.

As an adult in the same community I grew up in, I see even more now the major hurdles that my students are up against when it comes to book acquisition. I've restarted summer library and our very small volunteer-only community library has a great program during their only open hours--once per week. My students now have access to Amazon, but not always to the internet or money to be able to use it. There is still no local bookstore and so I make sure that my students can do plenty of book shopping in my classroom. And yet, my students often have the same pull. They have chores to do, whether it is on the farm or not. They have jobs they must work. And although they were given a lot of time in middle school to read in class, I'm given only half of that time with them each day. So we make sure that reading is a priority. Each day we talk about books. Each day I try to get books into the hands of my high schoolers. To see them come to class the next day and ask for the next in the series or for recommendations when they've hit a slump or just to tell me they actually tried a book again for the first time in a very long time-- it makes my day.

Thanks to the Book Love Foundation, I am able to break down the barrier of access to books for my students. I have been able to involve my students in the process of selecting books, so that hopefully that skill can follow them after graduation. I get to witness the glow in their eyes when they walk into the room with a new box of books. And although some still roll their eyes at me when I suggest that they actually read a book, it's now with a smile, because they know I won't give up and that there HAS to be a book for them somewhere in this amazing classroom library. I am lucky to have my students for four years; Book Love helps me to make them lifelong readers.