

My name is Renae Tice, and I teach grades 9-12 at Texas Challenge Academy-East in Eagle Lake Texas. The Academy is a residential center run by the Texas National Guard and is for boys and girls ages 16-18 who are disenfranchised with school and have either dropped out or are considering doing so. While in our high school, students can make-up credits and go back to their home campuses, earn their diploma here, or earn their GED. In my 24 years of teaching, this has been the most rewarding job, and I am blessed to be a part of the cadets' lives. These students learn that they can succeed and that there are people who truly care about them. We become a family!

One thing that I noticed when I started teaching here was the students did not have access to a library. I had about 450 YA books at the time, but I quickly learned that wouldn't be enough. With no television, smart phones, or other electronics to occupy their minds for 22 weeks, these students discovered the joy that books can bring. Quite honestly, they devoured books and I couldn't keep them on my shelves. In fact, many of the students learned to read with limited light in their barracks and would often stay up after curfew reading a book. In the two cycles that I have been here, I bartered, begged, and purchased over 300 additional books. Because I have to wear a uniform each day, I was able to justify the purchases for a little while!

When I posted on Facebook in September of 2016 that I was looking for ways to get more books into the hands of my cadets, I learned about the Book Love Foundation and was truly blessed to receive a grant! I will forever be grateful. Winning this grant will allow our students to have a wide-variety of reading choices and will help them to have the most perfect escape. They rediscover, or discover for the first time, the joy of reading and will hopefully carry that with them when they leave.

Here is what three of my past students said to me when they learned I had received the grant!

Amazing Mrs Tice!!! You put so much of your own money into our classroom when I was there so for you to get this makes me so happy!! Congrats, much love 💕

Wanted to thank you for all the books you bought for us while I was there. I actually went to a book store last week and thought about you. The next classes are so lucky!

Hooah! Wish I was there when you get those books. Can I come back?

