

MR. BILLOTTI



BIOGRAPHY

Michael Billotti is a middle school ELA teacher at Merton Williams Middle School in Hilton, NY. He is excited to receive a 2022 Book Love Foundation grant and plans to use it to help build his middle grade and young adult graphic novel collection, which are among the most popular in his classroom library! In his classroom, Mr. Billotti works tirelessly to instill a love of reading in each of his students. Through daily independent reading, shared discussions, book talks, and virtual author visits and videos, Mr. Billotti has built a culture of literacy in his classroom. Most importantly, Mr. Billotti works to help each student feel valued, respected, and seen.

He is also the founder of the Merton Williams Project LIT chapter, which connects students to a nationwide, grassroots literacy-focused network of students and educators. He is active on Instagram (@mrbillotti), engaging with middle grade and young adult authors through his freelance graphic design work.



STUDENT TESTIMONIAL | JULIA, AGE 14

When I was younger I absolutely hated reading. I wouldn't read a book unless I was forced to. I hated reading because I didn't like the kind of books my teachers had me read, and felt forced into liking the same kind of books they liked reading. I used to read 1 independent book in a year. Reading seemed boring because I could never relate to the characters in the book.

I used to avoid reading because I was never interested in mystery, non-fiction, or fantasy books. I could never remember what I was reading sometimes because it was not interesting to me, or it was too complex to understand and keep up with all the time changes, mysteries, and powers. Mostly, the books I read when I was younger were boring. I've never been a kid that enjoyed reading *Captain Underpants*, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, *Humphry the Hamster*, or princessy books. I didn't even know what genre of book I liked. Books were extremely boring because they never made sense and I couldn't remember what I read. Nothing was interesting enough to stick. I didn't know the kind of books that I read now even existed.

I didn't know what I liked to read because I was forced to read, but coming into middle school I was introduced to the genre of realistic fiction and everything changed. I found the book *Dress Coded* from speed dating with books. Speed dating with books is when you read a book for a minute or two and see if you find the book interesting. *Dress Coded* was one of the first books I liked reading. It talked about girls' rights and real-life situations and problems that can occur in our day-to-day lives, such as being made fun of, bullies, relationships, and going to school. The next book I read was *With the Fire on High*. That book was realistic and talked about the struggles of a teen pregnancy. It was interesting to read and be able to get in the head of the characters. After reading *With the Fire on High* by Elizabeth Acevedo I couldn't stop reading books by her because all her books were so good. I think Elizabeth Acevedo is an amazing author.

I read *Maybe He Just Likes You* by Barbara Dee in one day. I loved the book so much I couldn't stop reading it. I literally spent 13 hours reading and didn't want to put the book down. I had to negotiate a new bed time with my mom that night so I could finish it. I loved how the author took a real life problem and wrote about how the characters in the book handled it. The book was about harassment. It developed the characters in a way that made me feel connected to them, like it was happening to a friend. It made me feel empathy and anger. It made me want to be a better friend and stop behavior because it was so inappropriate and wrong. I wanted equality for the main character like she was a real person. I didn't know a book could make you have so many emotions and have real feelings for the characters and topics.

Now, I read 2-3 books in a quarter. My feelings about reading have changed, I now read freely and at my own pace, in my free time, for fun. I have learned so much about myself through reading and feel like I have grown as a person. I love that I can dive into a book and get lost, while learning about myself and the world around me.

