

The Incredible Power of Just One Book

By Kathy King-Dickman | Categories: From the Field

In my blog “Literacy at Home: The Joyous Journey of Just One Book,” I share the story of how a particular copy of the book *Love You Forever* by Robert Munsch changed hands numerous times.

In that blog, I introduce Melanie, who returned to me the copy my mother-in-law had gifted to my husband 35 years before, after it had spent more than three decades being cherished by numerous children. I recently heard from Melanie again, and she had more to say about that special book:

“My eldest, now 20 years old, had this little note tattooed on her arm in my handwriting, because it remains something she holds very dear. Recently, a close friend of hers had a baby shower, and my daughter bought her the book *Love You Forever* so that her closest friend can share the story with her baby as well. I know if and when my girls have children of their own, the story and its meaning will continue to live on.” —Melanie Dominguez



Melanie's story led me to consider the power of a good book. I believe that a great story has the potential to give joy, change lives, motivate, take the reader to another place and time, instruct, delight, help humans bond, provide reading practice, and even heal. And yes, I believe that one book can do all of this.

A book even has the power to encourage a toddler into mischief. It took only one reading of *The Barnetts* by Jill Eggleton for my granddaughter to spend the next year trying to balance as many books as she could on top of her own head to the dismay of her grandma who hounds her to take special care of her books. This was one of the antics of the Barnett children in this book. Thanks, Jill Eggleton!

Oftentimes, readers find a turning-point book— a book that can turn a non-reader into an avid one. I am thinking of Savannah: an ELL student who started my sixth grade class at a second-grade reading level and left a year later reading well above her own grade level; reading 48 novels that year helped accomplish more than years of reading instruction. Her fascination with Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight*

series launched a search to read every fantasy YA novel she could find. Providing her with Independent Reading Time each day supported this love.

Elena was another of my students who found a turning-point book. Elena was a fifth grader who had beautiful hair almost to her knees, as does the main character in Sharon Creech's *Walk Two Moons*. Elena read many books that year, but would often reread this one. In fact, I had to make a rule: every time she reread this book, she had to read three or four new titles before returning to it yet again. Years later, in a letter to me, she quoted from this book, saying, "...all I can say is you have taught me to *walk two moons*."

A book can also be used to motivate a student to do work they might find difficult. This last summer, little Mateo struggled to stay engaged during his SIPPIS Beginning lessons. Using the poems from Maurice Sendak's *Chicken Soup With Rice* as an incentive for engaging in each lesson worked wonders.

A book also has the power to become a child's favorite possession. I am thinking of Destiny, a first grade student I taught almost four decades ago in a bush village in Alaska. Destiny was diagnosed with fetal alcohol syndrome and struggled to learn to read. After many months of one-on-one support, she could finally read the first few pages from *Words in Color* by Caleb Gattegno. A few days after accomplishing this task, she put a copy inside of her shirt, keeping it close to her heart for many months. As she would walk the village streets, she would stop anyone who passed by and read aloud a page or two, or as much as they would listen to. Luckily I had the wisdom to never ask her to return this decodable text.

So, dear readers, my reminder to you this year as you work furiously to catch your students up in much needed skills: do not forget to put books in their hands. You never know the power that just one book might hold for each child in your care—power that could continue for decades.

Once again, I would like to extend a very big thank you to Melanie Dominguez, who fully understands the power of just one book.

References

Creech, Sharon. 2009. *Walk Two Moons*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.

Eggleton, Jill. 1996 *The Bernetts*. DeSoto, TX: Wright Group/McGraw-Hill.

Gattegno, Caleb. 1962. *Words in Color*. New York, NY: Educational Solutions.

Munsch, Robert. 1986. *Love You Forever*. Richmond Hill, Ontario: Firefly Books Ltd.

Sendak, Maurice. 1962. *Chicken Soup with Rice: A Book of Months*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.