



# LEADING LITERATE LIVES

Habits and Mindsets  
for Reimagining  
Classroom Practice

Stephanie Affinito

HEINEMANN  
Portsmouth, NH

For more information about this Heinemann resource, visit <http://www.heinemann.com/products/e11832.aspx>

**Heinemann**

361 Hanover Street  
Portsmouth, NH 03801-3912  
www.heinemann.com

*Offices and agents throughout the world*

© 2021 by Stephanie Affinito

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer, who may quote brief passages in a review.

*Heinemann's authors have devoted their entire careers to developing the unique content in their works, and their written expression is protected by copyright law. We respectfully ask that you do not adapt, reuse, or copy anything on third-party (whether for-profit or not-for-profit) lesson-sharing websites.*

—Heinemann Publishers

“Dedicated to Teachers” is a trademark of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.

The author and publisher wish to thank those who have generously given permission to reprint borrowed material:

RAN chart by Anthony Stead. Copyright © 2012 by Anthony Stead. Reprinted with permission from the author.

Numbered list from “5 Steps to Build a Diverse Classroom Library and Encourage Empathy” by Jennifer Williams, as first appeared in *Education Week's* Global Learning on September 6, 2017: [www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/opinion-5-steps-to-build-a-diverse-classroom-library-and-encourage-empathy/2017/09](http://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/opinion-5-steps-to-build-a-diverse-classroom-library-and-encourage-empathy/2017/09). Reprinted with permission from the author.

Figure 3.3 created with Padlet: <https://padlet.com/>. Reprinted with permission from the website.

Numbered list adapted from *Hidden Gems: Naming and Teaching from the Brilliance in Every Student's Writing* by Katherine Bomer. Copyright © 2010 by Katherine Bomer. Published by Heinemann. Reprinted with permission from the publisher.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2021902656  
ISBN: 978-0-325-11832-1

*Editor:* Holly Kim Price  
*Production:* Victoria Merecki  
*Cover design:* Monica Ann Cohen  
*Cover image:* © Irbena / Shutterstock  
*Author photo:* Kemm Wilson  
*Text design:* Monica Ann Cohen and Susan Godel  
*Typesetter:* Shawn Girsberger  
*Manufacturing:* Val Cooper

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper  
1 2 3 4 5 VP 26 25 24 23 22 21  
February 2021 Printing



To my family:

I wouldn't be the kind of reader and writer

I am today without you.

To educators everywhere making reading  
and writing a daily part of their lives:

Thank you for your continued inspiration.



# CONTENTS

Acknowledgments x  
Introduction: Cultivate What Matters Most xii

## **Chapter 1 *Where to Begin?* 1**

### **Return to Our Roots 3**

Draw Readers and/or Writers 4  
Create Reading and/or Writing Timelines 5  
Track Your Texts 6  
Archive Your Writing 7

### **Our Literate Habits, Hearts, and Communities 8**

Our Literate Habits 10  
Our Literate Hearts 10  
Our Literate Communities 11

## **Section 1: Reading 13**

Preface to Section 1 14

## **Chapter 2 *Cultivate Our Reading Habits* 16**

### **Surround Yourself with Books 17**

Build To-Be-Read Stacks 17  
Fill Your Social Media Feeds with Books 20  
Surround Yourself with Books 22

### **Find Just Ten Minutes a Day 24**

Give Habit Stacking a Try 25  
Create a Reading Trip Wire 27  
Use a Habit Tracker 28

### **Explore New Readerly Habits 30**

Learn to Love Audiobooks 31  
Push Play on Podcasts and Playlists 32  
Rely on Bots for What to Read Next 34

## **Chapter 3 *Honor Our Reading Hearts* 37**

### **Embrace Your Reading Identity 39**

- Honor Your Reading Preferences 39
- Read to Explore Your Sense of Self 41
- Inspire Reading with Personal Goals 44

### **Find Passion and Purpose in Reading 46**

- Read with an Open Heart 46
- Make Room to React to Texts 49
- Live Curiously Through Books 53

### **Outgrow Your Reading Life 55**

- Imagine a Bigger Version of Your Reading Self 56
- Create a Reading Staircase 58
- Crowdsource Your Collections 60

## **Chapter 4 *Strengthen Our Reading Communities* 62**

### **Make Your Reading Life Visible 64**

- Go Public with Your Stacks 64
- Connect with Readers on Goodreads 68
- Analyze Your Reading Life 69

### **Broaden Your Reading Circles 72**

- Ask: “What Are You Reading Lately?” 73
- Connect with Reading Partners 74
- Start a Book Relay 77

### **Connect with Authors and Illustrators 79**

- Be Inspired by Author Backstories 79
- Seek Out Author Events 80
- Connect on Social Media 82

## **Section 2: Writing 85**

Preface to Section 2 86

## **Chapter 5 *Cultivate Our Writing Habits* 89**

### **Start a Writer’s Notebook 90**

- Choose Your Notebook 91
- Show Up to the Page 94
- Try the 5 × 5 Method 96

## **Quiet Your Inner Critic 98**

- Declare #WhyIWrite 99
- Convert Challenges to Goals 101
- Start with a Sentence a Day 104

## **Adopt Writerly Practices 105**

- Design Your Studio for Positivity and Success 106
- Write Just Because 109
- Practice the Art of Noticing 111

## **Chapter 6 *Honor Our Writing Hearts* 114**

### **Write to Explore Your Sense of Self 115**

- Honor the Commonplace 115
- Uncover Your Writing Dreams 117
- Write from the Soul 120

### **Write to Explore Your Creativity 123**

- Give Sketchnoting a Try 123
- Layer Your Pages 126
- Write from Social Media Sparks 128

### **Write to Explore Your Craft 130**

- Mine for Writing Gems 130
- Try On Craft Moves for Size 132
- Participate in Writing Workshops 135

## **Chapter 7 *Strengthen Our Writing Communities* 139**

### **Expand Your Personal Writing Network 140**

- Fill Your Writing Feeds 140
- Find Inspiration in Podcasts 143
- Join an Online Writing Community 146

### **Connect with Other Writers 148**

- Pair with a Writing Partner 149
- Start a Writing Group 150
- Enjoy a Writing Retreat 152

### **Broaden Your Writing Boundaries 155**

- Try a Writing Experiment 155
- Participate in a Writing Challenge 158
- Go Public by Blogging 162

References 164



## INTRODUCTION

### Cultivate What Matters Most

I adore stories. As a child, I devoured them, vicariously living through the characters I met in the pages of a book. As a teenager, I wrote them, using writing as a way to work through the turbulence of adolescence. As an adult, I live them and feel the power these lived stories have to shape my identity. And as an educator, I value them and respect the role our unique stories have in shaping teaching and learning.

If I think back on my career as a learner, I can clearly remember the teachers who became part of my story. Some of my experiences with teachers were positive: my first-grade teacher who joyfully came to school each day ready to learn with us; my sixth-grade teacher who reminded me that school was not just about academic learning but also about forging connections with others; my college professor who pushed my thinking and challenged my practices, reminding me that there was always something new to consider. Some of the experiences were negative: my kindergarten teacher who would leave the room because we were not behaving properly, leaving us wondering whether she'd ever return;

my high-school teacher who focused on getting things right over the process of learning; my college professor who would return my papers covered in red pen with a message to find writing help somewhere, but not in class. Each of these stories, along with countless others, have played a role in shaping the kind of person and educator I am today.

As educators, we strive to shape students' stories in positive ways, engaging students' hearts and minds through the work we do. We want students to feel welcomed, valued, and respected. We want them to know they matter and that we believe in their abilities, even those they do not yet know they possess. We want students to feel the power that literacy has to change their view of themselves and their world and then feel confident enough to share their voices and stories with others. But sometimes, we shape students' stories by the decisions we make in the midst of the challenges we face as educators, decisions that have unintended consequences for our students' stories: when we struggle to find space in the curriculum for students' questions, when we frame reading and writing as work, or when we privilege getting things done over learning about ourselves. These practices can quietly seep into our classrooms and, over time, can even become the norm and inadvertently shape students' ideas of what literacy learning is and could be. These unintentional messages hold great power in shaping our students' stories, but it can be incredibly difficult to acknowledge their presence. It is only when we approach our classroom through the lens of a learner that we can truly experience what matters most to the minds and hearts of our students. And, upon reflection, we may find that our classroom practices do not reflect what we would advocate for ourselves.

A while back, I was working with a group of teachers who wanted to explore reading and reading response in their classrooms. A traditional model of professional learning would call for a session to highlight research on best practices, provide examples for what teachers might try in their classrooms, and offer classroom coaching as an additional support. But I didn't do that. Instead, I engaged teachers as readers themselves, readers who came together in a community to respond to texts. We formed a book club, read new and diverse texts, and responded to our reading in multiple ways. I gave book talks on titles the teachers might be interested in reading. We read anchor texts together and had rich conversations about our reading. We chose individual titles and eagerly book-talked our selections. We created reading responses that grew from our



experiences: some participants placed sticky notes on the pages, some jotted their thoughts in a notebook, some went digital, and others shared their thinking in a discussion. In short, we reconnected with our lives as readers and formed a reading community full of joyful reading—and it changed everything.

As we ended our reading of *Refugee* by Alan Gratz, we grappled with our emotions. How could we accurately capture the incredibly personal and emotional responses that we were having as we read this book? How could we capture our shock at the events these children experienced while we were nicely snuggled into our safe corners of town? How were we going to deal with the discomfort of knowing that these experiences are currently happening? Deciding how to respond to the book was a difficult decision; so, rather than respond back to the book, we thought forward. We investigated our family histories and shared our learning. We gathered articles from local newspapers and media sites on related events happening in our hometowns. We shared lists of unanswered questions we felt compelled to investigate.

Most importantly, we questioned our classroom practices as a result: Do we bring powerful books like this into our classrooms to spark deep thinking about the world our students are living in today? Do we give students opportunities to share their reading with others without worrying about right or wrong answers? Do we all allow students choice in how they respond to their reading based on the transaction they had with the author? Do we allow students to think forward, or do we continually require a response back instead? We even dared to ask whether we ever let students simply sit with their thinking and not respond at all. The very practices we gave ourselves the luxury of indulging in were not always evident in our classrooms. And because we lived as readers and experienced these lessons for ourselves, we couldn't help but feel compelled to rethink our classroom practices.

These kinds of lived experiences help us develop a deeper understanding of learning and what it means to be readers and writers. Reconnecting with our literate lives reminded us of what was most important, brought greater intention and joy to our work, and compelled us to reimagine our stories of teaching and learning in our classrooms. And this kind of work has the potential to change students' lives.

What if we imagine a story where we cultivate our lives as readers, writers, and learners together? A story of reading communities that privilege interest over levels and favor transactions over artifacts, and in which our reading identities

hold just as much weight as our reading skills. A story of writing instruction where process is valued over product, creativity comes before uniformity, and the message is more important than the convention. A story of learning where we remain curious as learners and where inquiry leads our learning, choice trumps mandates, and joy permeates the threads of the classroom.

When we reconnect with our lives as readers and writers, we gain a deeper understanding about the messages our practices send to students. Sometimes, our practices are validated as we renew our own commitment to powerful literacy instruction. Sometimes, they are questioned as we uncover a mismatch between what we believe and live as learners and what is evident in our schools and classrooms. Either way, we emerge with a sense of collective responsibility to renew our teaching with authenticity, intention, and joy in order to better impact students' literate stories of themselves. This work begins with us.

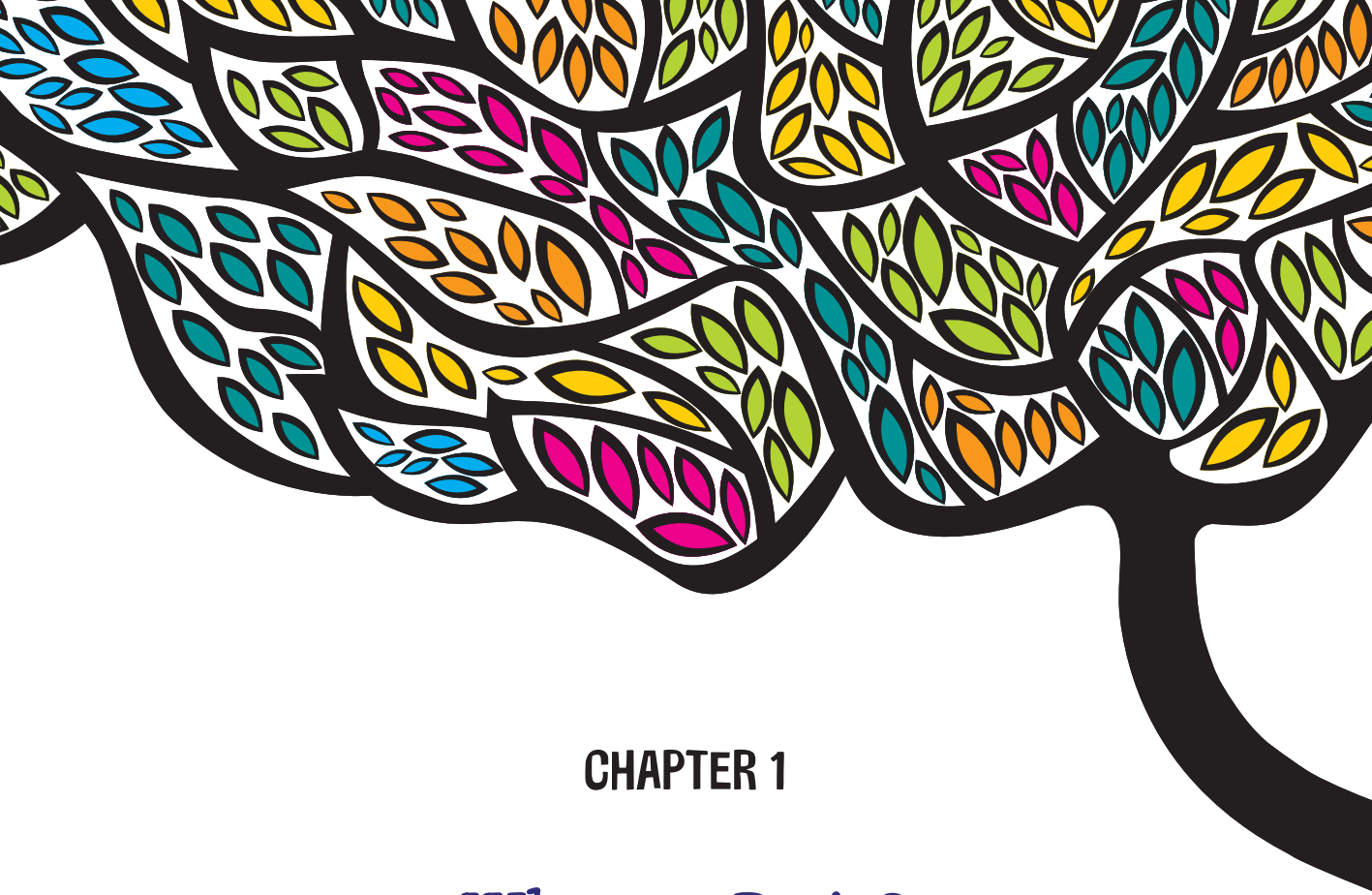
I invite you to honor and indulge your own reading and writing life, to outgrow yourself as a reader and writer, and to imagine new possibilities for your literate life and the literate community in your classroom. This book will walk you through the steps to reclaim *your* reading and writing and to bring a new level of awareness to your classroom. You might encounter familiar practices in which you already engage. You might encounter practices you have heard about but have not yet tried in your own literate life. And, you'll likely find practices to boost your reading and writing life in new ways. While this book could be read cover to cover, revealing carefully stacked practices to reconnect as readers and writers, it was designed for readers to choose their own path based on their unique literacy journey.

We begin by uncovering our histories as learners and reflect on our reading and writing lives. It might be tempting to skip this step of the process or to give it less time than it deserves, but please don't. This reflection is a very necessary part of the process to reconnect with ourselves and gain greater insight into our practices. Then, you'll learn about a framework for tending to your literate identity and explore how to nourish your literate habits, hearts, and communities and sustain them over time. You'll read and write your way to a more fulfilled literate life and bring a newfound energy to your classroom. You'll find concrete ideas to replicate the very invitations that impact your own reading and writing with students and likely be inspired to transform your teaching based on your own experiences as a reader and writer.

You'll also find specific tools and activities to rekindle your relationship with your literate life. There are two main sections to this book: reading and writing. Each section is divided into three chapters: habits, hearts, and communities. Setting your own goals as a reader and writer, you'll read, write, and pay close attention to what you learn about yourself in the process. You'll create authentic examples of your learning to share with students, reflect on your instructional practices, and imagine new possibilities for teaching and learning in your classroom and school. I recommend using a notebook to capture your reading and writing reflections. My own notebook is a simple bound journal with blank pages, but you'll want to choose a journal that works for you.

Each chapter offers specific prompts for reflection: What conditions mattered most to our own learning? Which practices supported our efforts and which hindered them? What lessons did we learn as we lived as learners? How might these ideas manifest in our classroom? This kind of intentional self-reflection can be hard to come by in our busy lives as educators, but it is essential if we are to learn from our own experiences as learners. Then, propelled by the exhilaration we often feel when we uncover important realizations about our practice, we'll begin to imagine new possibilities for our classrooms: changes to daily routines, instructional practices, the materials we privilege, and/or how we bring our students' voices into our learning. You'll find ideas to spark your own thinking as well as clear examples of how teachers reimagined their classroom practices as a result of their own learning. While these invitations have been carefully designed to fuel your own literate life, you'll find that they are perfect to replicate with your students as you build your literate lives together.

As educators, it is our responsibility to live as learners: to read, write, think, and learn alongside our students and to imagine a learning community that is better than it was the day before. And, fueled with the understandings that can only come from being learners ourselves, we can ensure that our teaching cultivates what matters most and brings greater intention and joy to our classrooms.



## CHAPTER 1

### Where to Begin?

**M**erriam-Webster (2020d) defines *reflection* as “a thought, idea, or opinion formed or a remark made as a result of meditation; consideration of some subject matter, idea, or purpose; and the production of an image by or as if by a mirror.” Essentially, reflection is the act of looking inward and taking time to reflect on our thinking and practice as educators. We can trace the role of reflection in education back to Dewey (1933), who believed that reflection was essential for learning from experience. He introduced reflection as a way for teachers to link prior knowledge with current experience to gain a greater understanding of their practices and improve classroom learning. Donald Schön (1987) extended this work through his idea of reflective practice where teachers thoughtfully consider their own experiences in relation to their practices to better understand their unique teaching style and increase their effectiveness.

Why is reflection and reflective practice important to our work as teachers? Here are some important benefits:

- Reflection embodies an inquiry approach to teaching and learning and invites teachers to learn from and about their own practices.
- Reflection helps teachers think deliberately and intentionally about how their teaching decisions impact student learning.
- Regular reflection helps teachers avoid snap, reactive decisions in challenging situations and make thoughtful and intentional decisions instead.
- Reflective teachers model mindsets and practices for students, helping them become reflective learners.
- Reflection can lead to greater insight of our strengths and needs as teachers, leading to better self-care.

There is no single right way to reflect. You might simply be still with yourself at the end of the day and think inwardly. You might capture your daily thinking in a calendar or agenda. You might write or sketch your thoughts in a journal. You might even record your thinking through photographs, audio clips, or video clips. Regardless of the method, reflecting on our practice helps us make instructional decisions that positively impact students.

In my experience, the most common form of reflection parallels the instructional cycle in the classroom: we celebrate what is going well, think critically about the lessons we learned when things didn't, and choose goals for the future. This kind of instructional reflection brings clarity to our thinking, insight to our instruction, and relevance to our goals as teachers. But, sometimes, it can be difficult to see what is right in front of our eyes but outside of our own experiences and assumptions. Therefore, we must approach reflection through a critically reflective lens (Brookfield 1995): by reflecting both on our experiences as learners and through the lens of our students, we can think more clearly about our practices and the messages they may inadvertently send.

## Return to Our Roots

Research shows that our learning histories and teaching philosophies influence both our instructional actions within the classroom (Cole and Knowles 2000) and our expectations of students (Dozier 2006), but these influences aren't always conscious or clear. Take a moment to think about how your history as a learner might impact the teaching decisions you make today:

- What does independent reading look like and sound like in your classroom? Is your classroom quiet, or is there a hum or buzz? Are students at their seats, or can they roam the room? Can they read freely, or are there particular requirements about book choice and reading response?
- What genres of writing do your students gravitate toward? Do they prefer fiction over nonfiction? Do they love or loathe poetry? What does the revision and editing process look like?
- How do students share their learning with others? Do they respond to required assignments, or do they have creative freedom to choose a format that works best for them? Do they rely on paper and pencil, or can they use technology to capture their thinking?
- What opportunities abound for creative making in your classroom? Do students have the freedom to tinker? Can they explore manipulatives to spark creativity or enhance the learning process? Or are they restricted to a set of curricular resources instead?

Some of our responses to these questions might be the result of school structures, required curriculum, and formal assessments that decide what we privilege in the classroom. But some of our responses might be connected to what we have experienced and prefer as learners. Do you prefer a quiet reading environment and thus prefer the same for your classroom? Do you hang onto the belief that students must write paper drafts before heading to the computer because that is how you write now or wrote best as a student? Intentional reflection around our own histories and lived experiences as learners is essential if

we are going to uncover the why behind our practices and acknowledge the role our experiences play in our classrooms. And here are a few ways to do just that. Choose one (or all!) to return to your roots as a learner and explore how your own experiences might impact your current classroom.

### ***Draw Readers and/or Writers***

A drawing activity based on Kaback's (2016) informal "draw-a-reader" assessment provides compelling insight into our identities as readers and writers and is a creative way to represent our thinking. Here's how it works:

Draw a quick sketch of what a reader and/or writer is to you. Think about where, how, and why readers read and/or writers write. Think about the ways readers and/or writers look and feel, and make your drawing as detailed as possible. Supplement your drawing with text, writing words and phrases that come to mind when you think about what it means to be a reader and/or writer. Once you've completed your annotated drawing, reflect on the questions posed in Figure 1.1.

Your drawing is sure to change according to the time of year, the initiatives at your school, your personal life, and more. But right now, what did you learn

Reading	Writing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does your image say about your beliefs about reading?</li> <li>• Does your image of a reader match the kind of readerly life you live?</li> <li>• How does reflecting on your image of a reader make you feel and why?</li> <li>• How can this help you think about what your reading life needs next?</li> <li>• How can this help you think about what your classroom reading community needs next?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does being a writer mean to you?</li> <li>• Do you meet your personal definition of a writer? Why or why not?</li> <li>• How does reflecting on your personal definition of a writer help you think about what your writing life needs next?</li> <li>• What might you need to rethink about how you define writing and what it means to be a writer?</li> <li>• How can this help you think about your own classroom writing instruction and your students' identities as writers?</li> </ul>

**FIGURE 1.1** Reflective questions on what it means to be a reader and writer

about yourself? How does that help you think about what you need in your reading and writing life?

## Create Reading and/or Writing Timelines

Each one of our experiences with reading and writing shapes our literacy beliefs and instruction, and thinking back on our past experiences can give us insight into the kind of readers and writers we are today. Create a timeline of your most memorable reading and/or writing experiences. Start by drawing a timeline grid on a page of your notebook. As you work through the following prompts, add each experience to your timeline, but choose the location based on how it made you feel. Write positive memories above the line and negative memories below it. Or, take a more creative approach, as Lyndsay Buehler did, and create a road map of your reading life instead, with the twists and turns in the road representing the twists and turns in your literate life. You'll find her road map in Figure 1.2.

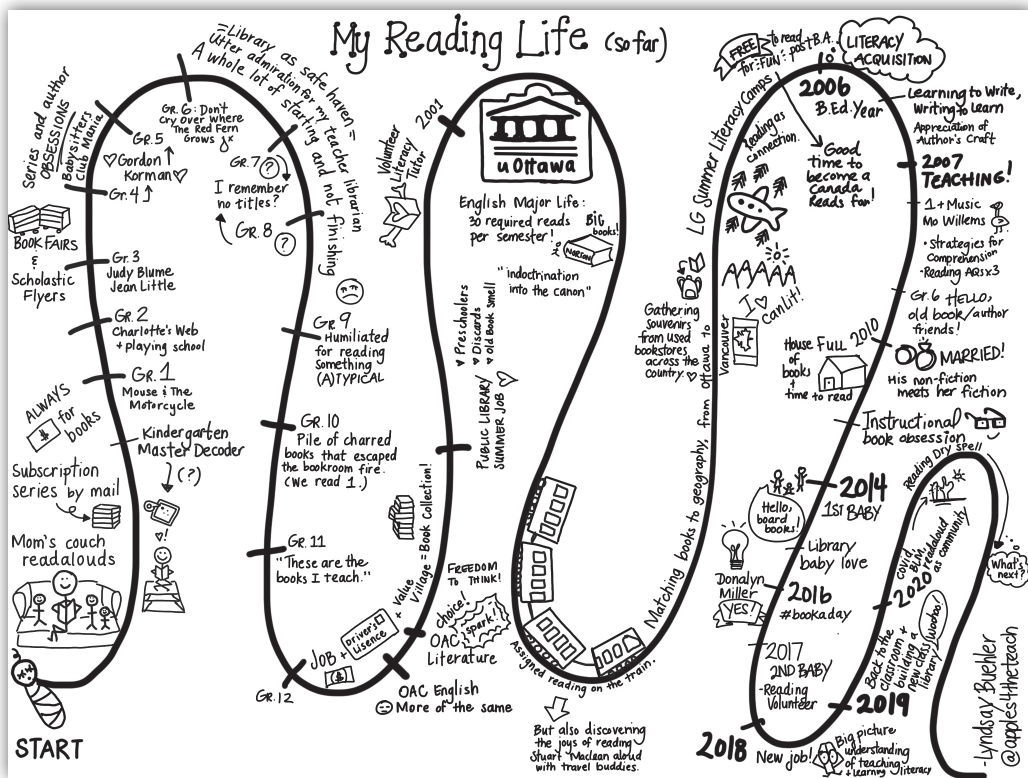


FIGURE 1.2 Lyndsay Buehler's road map of her reading life



1. Think back to the earliest memory you have of reading and/or writing. What was it? How old were you? How did it make you feel toward reading/writing? Reflect on your experiences with reading/writing at home. What were they like? Why did you engage with reading/writing? Who supported you? How did you feel? What did reading/writing mean to you? Add your memories to your timeline.
2. Next, think of your experiences in elementary, middle, and high school. What sticks out in your memory, good or bad? Which teachers do you remember making their mark on your reading/writing identity? How might you define reading/writing at this stage of your life? Add your memories to your timeline.
3. Now, think about your college experience and your teacher education program. How did you experience reading/writing as a college student? How did it compare with the kind of reading/writing instruction you learned was best for students? Add your memories to your timeline.
4. What recent experiences have you had with reading/writing? How does your reading/writing life feel? Add your memories to your timeline.

Now, it is time for a bit of reflection. Take a good, long look at your timeline and connect your experiences together with a line, clearly capturing the varied trajectory of your reading/writing life. What do you notice about your timeline? Are there many experiences to reflect on or are your experiences more limited? Are the majority of your memories above the line or do they fall below it? How did your reading/writing life ebb and flow over time? How might each experience contribute to your current reading/writing identity?

### ***Track Your Texts***

Books hold a special place in my heart, and particular books have made an indelible impression on my life. My very first memory of reading is when Grover invited me into the pages of his book in *There's a Monster at the End of This Book*. Later, Judy Blume's *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* would teach me how the lessons learned through the pages of a book could impact my own life. I devoured Ann M. Martin's *The Baby-Sitters Club* series throughout my

childhood, making clear and lasting connections to the characters and hoping for a tight-knit group of friends for myself. In adulthood, *Gone Girl* and *The Girl on the Train* gave me insight into another side of myself, and *Fifty Shades of Grey*, well, let's say that I was hooked on that series, too. The books we read matter, as each one changes our impression of ourselves and of the world around us.

So, what books matter most to you? Track the texts that have made an impression on you through the years. You might list them on a piece of paper, jot them down in your writer's notebook, or even create a digital collection of book covers. Use the prompts below to help you get started:

- What is the first book you remember being read to you?
- What is the first book you remember reading on your own?
- What books do you remember reading through your childhood? Why were they more memorable over the others?
- Which books helped you work through adolescence? Did any magazines, articles, and media, help you, too?
- What books have you read recently that spoke to your heart? Why do you think so?

It's important not only to think of these titles but also to write them down. You need to *see* them listed to better understand the powerful role they play in your life over time. Now, think about the books you listed. What made them so powerful in your life? Jot those thoughts in your notebook, too.

### ***Archive Your Writing***

If you are anything like me, you like to save things: cards; notes from my childhood; old spelling tests with smiley face stickers; the newspapers I “published” as a child; my poems; my childhood diary; mementos from important occasions, such as ticket stubs and flower petals; you get the idea. My basement is filled with clear plastic containers chronicling the life of my three children: their baby calendars, first jar of baby food, tiny socks, and more. I know I may be taking it a bit overboard, but I love holding these mementos in my hand and feeling the waves of emotion come over me.

If you are able to, gather any writing mementos you have from your childhood. You might sift through your own basement for them or call your family members to see if they have anything saved. Holding, touching, and seeing these

items can be very powerful, but don't worry if you don't have physical access to them. You can gather them in your mind instead. Why are these items important? How do they represent who you are as a writer? How do they make you feel? Which are most important and why do they matter? Now, think about your current writing life. How does it compare with the kind of writing that matters most to you now? Does the writing you engage in fuel your heart or simply get things done? Are there spaces in your day to create writing artifacts that continue to shape your identity?

## Our Literate Habits, Hearts, and Communities

I'll never forget the Friday night I tiptoed into my son's room to give him one last kiss goodnight and could not find him. Instead of seeing him snuggled up in his bed with his blankets, I found him asleep and buried beneath a stack of books with a pack of sticky notes and a marker by his side. As I took a few steps closer, I saw that he had taken the books from his bookshelf, attached each one to a sticky note, and labeled it with a number. As I gently tried to remove the books from his bed, my son woke and shared what he had been doing: he had decided to level his books to see which ones he was allowed to read—and which ones he was not. Now, I knew his teacher was using leveled text during small-group instruction to help students choose good-fit books for independent reading. But the message she inadvertently sent my son about the books he could and could not read had clear implications for his identity as a reader.

These unintentional messages are often the by-product of intentional focus on standards and curriculum. In today's time of heightened standards, mandated curriculum, and the weight of the world bearing down on our classrooms, we might find ourselves focusing on *what* we need to teach rather than the *why* behind the work we do. Understandably, we might focus on skills and standards and create curricular frameworks to ensure we teach them. We might focus on the strategies that our readers and writers must master and create charts and data trails to ensure our students are learning them. We might create lesson guides and protocols to ensure alignment and create pacing guides to support consistency. This work is needed, but it is not enough. We must also focus on the habits that nourish and sustain our reading and writing lives, the practices that set our literate hearts on fire, and the communities we need to learn and

grow together. The importance of this heart work becomes much more evident when teachers lead full, nourishing, and satisfying literate lives themselves.

I find it useful to think of the construction of our identities as literate learners in three broad categories: our habits, our hearts, and our communities. You'll find a visual image of this framework in Figure 1.3.



### **Our Habits:**

**Choices we make to cultivate our reading and writing lives and make them a priority.**

#### **This includes:**

- Surrounding ourselves with books and writing tools
- Making time to read and write daily
- Accessing a wide and diverse selection of texts
- Knowing how we read and write best
- Understanding our personal process for writing and how it matters



### **Our Hearts:**

**Practices and dispositions that readers and writers embody to bring joy to reading and writing and to fuel their practices.**

#### **This includes:**

- Learning from writing mentors
- Choosing books and writing formats
- Responding to reading in meaningful ways
- Stretching ourselves as readers and writers
- Setting personal reading and writing goals
- Exploring our reading and writing creativity



### **Our Communities:**

**The ways we connect with others to celebrate reading and writing**

#### **This includes:**

- Making our reading and writing lives visible
- Sharing our reading and writing with others
- Connecting with fellow readers and writers
- Celebrating our literate lives
- Engaging in new learning experiences

**FIGURE 1.3** *Our literate habits, hearts, and communities framework*

It is important to note that these categories are not linear or sequential and their format does not imply importance. Nor should we tackle one category at the expense of another. However, I have found comfort in the logical nature of this sequence. If our hope is to boost our learning lives, we must first carve out the time and develop the daily habits needed to do so. Once those habits are firmly in place, we can better honor our literate hearts, reading and writing about what matters most to each of us, and ultimately connect with communities of connected readers and writers working to do the same.



### ***Our Literate Habits***

If we want our students to become competent and confident readers and writers, then they consistently need long stretches of time to do what readers and writers do: read, respond to their reading, share books with other readers, gather seed ideas, create lots of false starts, draft, revise and revise again, learn from mentors, connect with reading and writing partners, and, in some cases, publish pieces for particular audiences. But in our busy days of fitting it all in and ensuring students reach the demanding standards of our changing world, we might find ourselves focusing more on the skills needed to read and write rather than on the dispositions needed to sustain those practices. And while this might be effective in the short term, it fails to grow readers and writers who understand the power that literacy can have in their own lives over time. In a nutshell, we must make space in our lives, and in our classrooms, to do what readers and writers do.



### ***Our Literate Hearts***

While reading and writing may be intellectual activities, they are also callings from the heart. When we identify as readers and writers, it is typically not because we know *how* to read and write, but that we love to engage in reading and writing. We thread restorative literacy practices into our lives to bring intention and joy to our daily practices. But these restorative reading and writing practices might not always be evident in our classrooms.

If consistently tasked with reading and writing that feels like work—for example, by reading books of someone else's choosing and responding in artificial ways and by writing with little personal investment, with strict requirements and formats and for no audience other than the teacher—students may equate reading and writing with something to be completed rather than lived. We must offer plenty of opportunities to capture their reading hearts and writing spirits.

And the only way to accomplish that is to truly live as readers and writers ourselves, modeling our own authentic practices and inviting students to find their own joyful literate identities as well.



### ***Our Literate Communities***

Readers seek out other readers. Writers connect with other writers. Sharing our reading and writing lives honors our literate identities and invites us into a larger literate community. But it also does something more: it promotes accountability to our own literate lives. You see, being part of a thriving community where readers and writers regularly share books they are reading or written pieces they are working on often is inspiring. That participation fuels our reading and writing in ways that cannot be accomplished alone, supporting us to outgrow our current reading and writing lives and the way we see the world. Together, we can lift our level of reading and writing as we read and write within more-connected communities.

Our literate lives matter. Carefully tending to our habits and mindsets not only brings a sense of intentional well-being to our own literate lives, it sparks attention to how we are leading the way for our students to do the same.