

Forged by Reading: The Power of a Literate Life

Reading is the doorway to power. To privilege. To building a mind. To cultivating self-determination. To helping each of us come together to create a society steeped in reason and responsibility and held together by hope and humility . . . Reading with purpose and passion, with a curious mind and a skeptical eye is a way to find yourself while crafting yourself: to become independent of manipulation, of control, of a life determined by someone else.



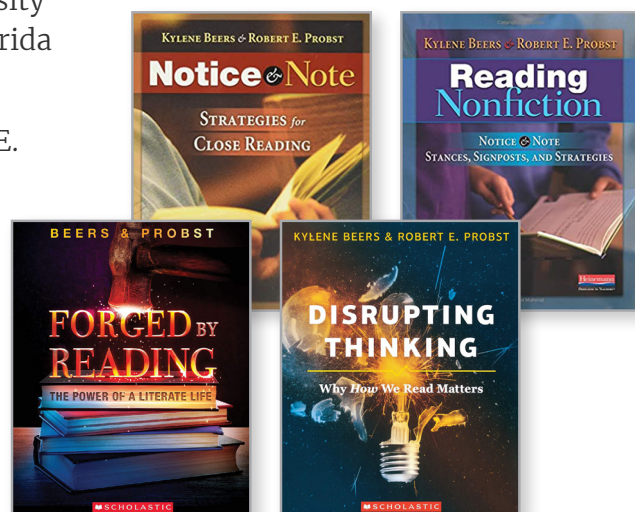
LITERACY CHAMPIONS: KYLEENE BEERS, Ed.D., and ROBERT C. PROBST, Ph.D.

Kylene Beers, award-winning educator, is a past-President of the National Council of Teachers of English. She received an NCTE Leadership Award, held a reading research position in the Comer School Development Program at Yale

University School of Medicine, and has most recently served as the Senior Reading Advisor to the Reading and Writing Project at Teachers College, Columbia University.

Robert E. Probst is an author and consultant to schools nationally and internationally. He speaks to administrators and teachers on literacy improvement, particularly issues surrounding struggling readers and meeting standards. Bob is Professor Emeritus of English Education at Georgia State University and has served as a research fellow for Florida International University.

Kylene Beers (@KyleneBeers) and Robert E. Probst (@BobProbst) are the coauthors of a number of best-selling books, including [*Forged by Reading: The Power of a Literate Life*](#), [*Disrupting Thinking: Why How We Read Matters*](#), [*Notice and Note: Strategies for Close Reading*](#), and [*Reading Nonfiction: Notice & Note Stances, Signposts, and Strategies*](#).



Literacy is the Gateway to Power and Privilege

Forged by Reading explores historic and timely topics through the context of literacy—literacy being the gateway to power and privilege—while serving as nothing short of a call to action. The call is one that reminds educators of their critical hand in empowering readers to think; to seek curiosity and skepticism; to shape themselves and their ideas through evidence and reason, vision, and imagination and; in doing so, to forge themselves and our world through reading.

Kwame Alexander, poet, educator, and *New York Times* bestselling author of *Light for the World to See: A Thousand Words on Race and Hope*, writes:

“This book will open the door to an understanding of literacy like no other. But, it’s not a how-to-use-literature-to-empower-our-kids-book. It’s a why-haven’t-we book. It’s a we-must book. Forged by Reading is filled with hard truths, and the inspiration needed to walk towards a new world—one where relevant reading rules. So, put your walking shoes on, get ready for the hard, necessary work, and let Kylene and Bob show us the way.”

Kylene and Bob help us understand that reading is a transaction between the author and the reader.

Showing Us the Way

Kylene and Bob help us understand that reading is a transaction between the author and the reader (Rosenblatt, 1995). Every time we enter a text, there is always the possibility that we will emerge somewhat changed by the encounter—with new insights, ideas, and understandings. And this is as true of fiction as it is of nonfiction. We want our children to read with open minds and hearts, alert to the possibility of learning something new that might sharpen and deepen their understanding—leading, perhaps, to questions that might, in turn, show the way to additional learning.

What does this look like in the classroom? Kylene and Bob (2021) suggest that the ideal reading environment for our children would reflect the following:

- “A rich diversity of literature that acts as the ‘mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors’ that scholar Rudine Sims Bishop wrote of decades ago.
- A rich diversity of response that promotes questioning more than answering and leads to a sharper understanding of ourselves, our students, and of the text itself.
- The acceptance of the student’s uniqueness, to allow each student to feel welcomed in the classroom, to be more fully present and, perhaps more fully engaged.
- A welcoming of a range of opinion and interpretation, providing an opportunity to learn how to deal with differences and how to bring evidence and reason to bear upon assumptions and beliefs.
- And, perhaps most important, inviting students to see the act of reading as an opportunity to grow and change.”

Ernest Morrell, Coyle Professor of Literacy Education, University of Notre Dame, explains:

“Beers and Probst, who explore the moral imperative of liberatory pedagogy, remind us that those who read and discuss books hone literate minds—the key to transforming their own their lives, as well as our greatest hope for transforming our democracy—bending its arc toward equity and justice for all.”

If that sounds like a lofty goal—it should be. We should always enter our classrooms with the highest intentions in mind. Educator Kate Roberts reminds us, “Literacy is an essential element of freedom.” Too often, traditional, mind-numbing instructional practices diminish the robust power of literacy for our students. Too many children experience reading in the classroom as little more than extracting and recording information from the text, rather than a freeing intellectual exploration—reading as an invigorating and deeply satisfying cognitive and empathy workout that makes possible the joy of new learning.

Forged by Reading is a call to action for educators to embrace the languages, cultures, and unique identities of our students, to recognize the transformational power of reading, and to offer humane, equitable instruction for all that enables our students to forge their own literate lives.

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References

Beers, K. and Probst, R. (2021). *Forged by Reading: The Power of a Literate Life*. New York: Scholastic.

Beers, K. and Probst, R. (2021). What Being an Independent Reader Really Means. In *Literacy Today*. International Literacy Association. May/June 2021.

Rosenblatt, L. (1995). *Literature as Exploration, 5th edition*. New York: Modern Language Association.