



Engaging and Empowering Readers

by KATIE KELLY

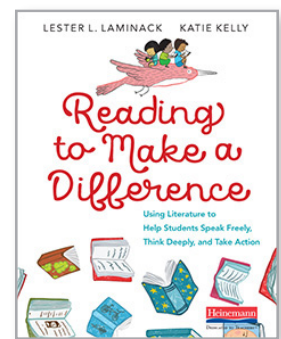
Reading is a generative act that moves beyond recall and regurgitation of information. It involves an active meaning making process where each reader engages with the text in their own unique ways based on their identity, prior knowledge, and lived experiences. Reading engages us as we react emotionally, empathetically, and curiously to text. Engaged reading is an exploration of self, others, and the world. Reading transforms us. It empowers us to question, dig deeper, and take action to make a difference in our lives, in the lives of others, and in the world.



LITERACY CHAMPION: KATIE KELLY

Katie Kelly is an Associate Professor and Coordinator of the Literacy Graduate Program at Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina. As a former teacher and literacy coach, Katie's teaching and research interests include engaging children in authentic meaningful reading and writing experiences and literacy practices to foster social justice. She is

widely published in several peer-reviewed journals, including *The Reading Teacher* and *Voices from the Middle*. She has co-authored three books: *Reading To Make a Difference: Using Literature to Help Students Think Deeply Speak Freely and Take Action* (Heinemann), *From Pencils to Podcasts: Digital Tools to Transform K-12 Literacy Practices* (Solution Tree) and *Smuggling Writing: Strategies that Get Students to Write Every Day, in Every Content Area (3-12)* (Corwin).



One to Know: Reading as Transformation

As humans, whether we are five or fifty-five, we are constantly evolving. Like the clay on a potter's wheel, readers are shaped and reshaped with each turn of the page. They make connections, deepen their understanding, evolve in their thinking, expand their perspectives, and open their minds and hearts.

When readers encounter familiar characters, settings, or situations, they connect with the text and increase their engagement and understanding. They are affirmed when they recognize aspects of themselves in the books they read. This validation is particularly important for those who have been historically marginalized and thus did not see themselves reflected in the pages of books. With an increase in the publication of diverse texts, written by and about diverse people, all lives are honored. This is equally significant for those who have always seen themselves in the pages of books, as they must be cautious to avoid a limited worldview and to work to expand their perspectives and thinking beyond the status quo.

To be truly transformative, readers critically consume text, moving beyond passive acceptance of its meaning. They question the content, the author's (or creator's) motives, and their own assumptions. Reading with a critical stance involves the examination of power and privilege in the text and in the world around us. With open hearts and open minds, readers go beyond the pages of the book to consider ways in which they can take action on their increased awareness and inspiration to foster change.

What to Do: Promote Reading in All of Its Dimensions

Readers of All Ages

To encourage children to be engaged and empowered lifelong readers, it helps if the adults in their lives are also lifelong readers. Thus, the suggestions below are invitations for readers of all ages.

Text Selection/ Finding Books

- Offer a variety of text options to choose from. Choice is an essential factor in overall engagement in reading.
- Curate a collection of books and other texts aligned to the reader's interests. (It helps to know the reader to do this! Are they drawn to mysteries or maybe they want to learn more about horses?)
- Explore various genres, authors, series, topics, and text types. (Graphic novels and audiobooks still count as reading!)
- Include a diverse selection of text, featuring books written by OwnVoice authors.
- Conduct book talks and invite students to also share about recently read books and what inspired them most about the books.

Read!

- Make reading a priority.
- Include time in your daily schedule for independent reading at school and at home.
- If it seems hard to carve out time for reading at home, consider creating habits and routines to read at the same time each day. If you are too sleepy to read at bedtime, you might wake up ten minutes early and read in the morning as you have your coffee, while the world is still quiet. Or maybe you read while you eat your lunch.
- If you are easily distracted, set a timer (e.g., for ten minutes) to focus on your reading during your carved out reading time.

- Listen to audiobooks. This works well during the commute and on road trips as well as when you are out for a walk.
- Encourage children to read (or listen to books) while they are in the car and while they wait for appointments at the doctor's office.
- Read to others (friends, family members, siblings, grandparents, or even stuffed animals).
- Reread favorite books and read books written by the same author.
- Keep a list of finished books and a to-read stack.
- Read books written by OwnVoice authors from different parts of the world to broaden your perspective.

Cultivate a Reading Community

- Connect with others on social media and GoodReads to share about what you've read and to expand your reading repertoires.
- Join a book club (in person or virtually).
- Swap books with your friends and family!
- Leave a sticky note inside the book jacket with a recommendation for the next reader.

Reflect and Take Action!

- In what ways are you changed by what you read?
- What was it about this text that moved you or inspired you?
- How did the text shape your thinking and your understanding about yourself? about others? about the world?
- How did the text open your mind? open your heart?
- Consider whose voices were left out of this book. How might the story change if told from a different perspective?
- Research the author. What was their inspiration for writing this book? How does their identity influence their work?
- Who else might want to read this book?
- What will you read next?
- What will you do now? Has the reading inspired you to want to take action in some way? Perhaps it's action in your own life (e.g., reduce water use in your home), action to make a difference in the lives of others (e.g., advocate for social justice) or in the world (e.g., advocate for climate justice).

More to Know and Do: Explore Resources for Diverse Books

Resources for finding diverse books:

- **Book Buzz** <https://bookbuzz.blog/>
- **We Need Diverse Books** <https://diversebooks.org/>
- **Social Justice Books** www.socialjusticebooks.org
- **The Brown Bookshelf** <https://thebrownbookshelf.com/>
- **Lee & Low Books** <https://www.leeandlow.com/>
- **Equity thru Education Collaborative** <https://www.equitythrued.com/ecel-text-sets>

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