

The Why

From my experience with learning to read, I remember a lot of emotions, most of which were not pleasant. Learning to read was a very difficult experience for me. When I was in first grade, I remember having a lot of trouble learning to read due to a learning disability I have. Because of this disability, my process of learning to read took much longer than most students. Even today, my reading is slower than most people. With this, though, I was often very frustrated when I had to read something and felt anxious at times as well. I dreaded having to read something in class even in my upper elementary school years after majority of my reading skills problems had been overcome.

With all of what I went through in learning to read—the tears, the stress, and sadness—it would have seemed I would never enjoy reading and for a long time I did not. It has not been until this past few years that I have been able to sit down and read something for my own enjoyment. Even with wanting to read now, I am still not a big reader. The thing that was missing for me is a passion for reading. Thankfully, I am finding it now.

However, with so much stressed being placed upon many young students, especially with new legislation in Ohio, the Third Grade Reading Guarantee more specifically, I fear that many students will end up with similar stories to my own. I am not lying when I say that I hated reading for years. The act of reading was, at times, physically painful from the stress that I felt. Yet, despite all of it, I have somehow managed to find a spark of passion for reading within myself and I wonder ‘where did it come from?’ From reflecting on my childhood and my experiences with reading and

books, I have realized I can pinpoint exactly where this passion came from. For as long as I can remember, my father read to me every night. He did this for my two sisters and myself because he wanted to have a strong relationship with each of us by spending quality time reading together. As time passed, my older sister eventually stopped having this reading time with him and eventually my younger sister did as well. I was the only one of my two sisters to continue this reading time with my father—I the one that hated reading was the one that wanted to be read to. Even when I am home now, my father will read to me and I enjoy it just as much now, if not more, than I did growing up.

In thinking about it retrospectively, it was never the stories that I hated, but the act of reading itself and because of that it was very hard for me to want to read on my own. The thing that I loved, though, was the stories. They were magical and beautiful stories that thrilled me. I always looked forward to my father reading to me because it meant spending time with him and that we were sharing in the experience of reading together. Every night was an adventure and we never knew what the next page had in store for us. The experience of my father reading to me every night gave me a passion for stories. In having this passion for stories, I have now been able to find a passion for reading making me want to read now. It has taken quite a bit of time and I still have a long way to go, but I feel that I really had the foundation of a passion for reading in me all along.

With this passion now found, I think about how I wish it had not taken me so many years to get to the point of wanting to read for fun. I wish someone had helped me realize that, while reading was difficult, I did not need to hate it. But what about all the students that are learning to read now? What about all the standards being placed upon

them? Is someone going to tell them that reading can be fun? Is someone going to show them that they too can have a passion for reading? This is what I hope to accomplish. I not only want to help students understand why reading is important, but also that it can be fun and that reading is something everyone can enjoy!

Throughout this program, there are activities, lesson ideas, audio files, videos, and more that center around this idea of helping students understand why reading is important and how it can be fun. Centered around a children's book, each day of this program builds on the central ideas of this program to help jumpstart reading motivation. The activities and resources all work together to not only incorporate all learning styles for the students to have the most impact from this, but connect to their home lives as well with parent letters to help extend the ideas from each day.

Reading takes your mind places that you could never go. For myself, I went to the Land of Oz many times with my father and, while it is fantasy, the journeys we took through Oz are some of my fondest memories from my childhood. With this project, I hope to show others the Land of Oz as well as many other wonderful places that they could not have seen otherwise. The first step, though, is finding the passion that will take us there.

Best of luck readers!

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