

# 5 Tips for Helping a Student Find the Right Book

By [Rebecca Alber](#)

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When I was a high school English language arts teacher, there was really no greater feeling than helping a kid find the book. When they wrote something that they truly owned and were proud of (an essay, poem, letter), that was a close second.

As teachers, regardless of age of our students, we contribute everyday in helping children fall in love with reading and writing. Those two things enrich our lives academically, yes, but also personally: Reading helps us make sense of the world. Writing gives us a voice in that same world.

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So, you may not be on a quest to help them find that life-changing tome, or you may work with younger kids who are just looking for an entertaining read. In any case for any reason, whether students are seeking a book from the classroom, school, or public library, here's a few things to keep in mind as you support them with their reading choices:

**Tip #1: Get to Know the Student.** The more I know about a student's background, her likes and interests, and what she has already read, the more I can help steer her towards good book choices. Research shows that students want guidance when choosing a book, so, of course always let students choose, but selecting three or four book to offer up for them to peruse and decide from is a suggested approach.

**Tip #2: Experiment.** You can't hate a book until you've tried it. So encourage them to try something first. In the past, he might have read only fantasy but you can suggest he take a look at a biography or a mystery series. Share your own story of genre switching, or even better, a story where a student went outside her usual genre and found something she loved.

**Tip #3: Exposure.** You can expose students by taking them to the school or local public library and creating a scavenger hunt that they can do in pairs, with quests like this: "Find a book by the author Walter Dean Myers. Write down the title."

The public or school library (even just the classroom one) can easily overwhelm a student. So tempting them with five or six different books that you display in the front of your classroom is a great help for those intimidated by those shelves with hundreds of books (and remember, students want suggestions!)

This is where Book Talks come in. Invite a student who has already read one of the displayed classroom books to give a little shout out to the awesomeness of that book. You can also talk about the author, using interesting facts to pique their interest. You can also do a “read and tease,” reading aloud the first paragraph of the book or a part from the middle where there’s some exciting action.

**Tip #4: Permission to Abandon that Book.** We do it as adults so why not invite children to do it as well? I never wanted a student to feel like she was disappointing me because I had suggested a book and it just wasn’t clicking for her. Once students know that they have permission to abandon a book after reading it for an hour or for a week, then they are much more apt to experiment.

**Tip #5: Time to Look.** Again, reflect on how long as adults it takes us to find the right book. We have to give students time to thumb through, read back covers, think about it, and then change their minds and start the search again. I’ve seen way too many classroom libraries that function more as museums -- look but don’t touch. End instruction early, spread out selected reading books (maybe the high-interest ones) or make “genre stacks” on tables and desks and let them go at it.

Providing students also with time to read is so important. During class? I know, in this standards-based instruction era it seems like there is hardly time, but we have to make time. In the words of reading instruction researcher and author Kyleene Beers, the single best way to improve reading interest and reading ability is to read.