



STRATEGIES

for Motivating
Reluctant

Readers

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Welcome

Learning to read did not come easily to me. This might seem like a strange thing to admit at the beginning of a book about literacy instruction, but the experience has informed my teaching and of course this book. I know what it means to struggle, and I know what it means to be a student who is trying to learn. I grew up in a house surrounded by books, read to by parents and grandparents, and showered with love and support. I had the best of circumstances. And yet, I struggled.

I spent all of first grade seeing the words on the page and understanding them, but then being unable to explain the text to my teachers. I would read the words out loud and be redirected, but I didn't understand why. Turns out, due to chronic ear infections, I had developed a 50 percent hearing loss and couldn't convey to my teachers what I was reading inside my head. I spent all of first and second grade going to "the reading van" and getting extra help. I hated it. I knew that none of my friends needed this, and I was endlessly frustrated because in my mind, reading made sense.

Finally, in third grade, my teacher pulled me aside to tell me that I was being moved up to the grade-level reading group. I was thrilled. I finally felt seen. As an adult reflecting back on this experience, I have a lot to consider. I now realize that, of course, I deserved to be in a group where I saw myself. I deserved to feel heard by my teachers. I deserved to feel as though I was a reader, not a reluctant reader. I didn't see myself as reluctant, struggling, or at-risk, but I am sure that my teachers saw me that way. Luckily, they never articulated that to me. They kept teaching and encouraging me and eventually I got to where I wanted to be.

The rest of elementary and middle school were relatively uneventful for me. I read. I wrote. I got good grades. But I didn't love what I was doing. I didn't feel the passion I felt the summer after third grade when I first read Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie*, got to page 100, and realized how far I had come. Reading in school had become a task, not a passion, a job without a purpose. I see much of this in the work of my students as well. The joy of school and love of learning gets lost somewhere in middle school along with a mess of hormones and puberty. It wasn't until I was home on college break that I found myself starting to read again for pleasure. Once I was back in the habit of reading, I never stopped. When I realized that reading was learning and

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