



Going the Extra Mile to Put the Right Book in a Striving Reader's Hands

Leave nothing to chance: When a striving reader is primed to read a particular book, do whatever it takes to get it to him.

WHY

A striving reader's interest in a particular book is a call to action! Whether sparked by a read-aloud, a book-talk, a friend's recommendation, or a rave review, the child's desire signals an immediate but fleeting book-matching opportunity. Going out of your way to track down a copy of the book he wants not only sets the striver up for a successful reading experience; it shows him the depth of your care and commitment.

WHEN

Invest extraordinary effort when a striving reader:

- has read the first book(s) in a series and is eager for the next one.
- advocates for himself; asks for a copy of something he's heard about.
- expresses enthusiasm based on a book review. ("This sounds like something I'd like to read.")
- will soon have ample reading time (e.g., a long weekend, a school vacation).
- has been in a reading slump and demonstrates notable interest.

HOW

The strategies aren't complicated; they simply require time and effort. Assuming you don't have a copy of the desired book in your classroom library, do the following:



- Email your colleagues to see if anyone has a copy (see an example of such an email on page 239). If so, dash to retrieve it.
- Check school and public library collections; put the book on hold and go get it.
- Buy the book yourself. Present it to the child as a gift to keep.

Above all, strike while the iron is hot! Do what it takes to put the book in the child's hands as quickly as possible. Don't rely on other people or interoffice mail; do it yourself, and do it right away.

These extraordinary measures aren't sustainable for an entire class, but they don't have to be. Thriving readers tend to acquire books readily by multiple means, but striving readers need us to go to bat for them.

MILDRED GRADY: EXTREME BOOK-MATCHER

In 1957, Olly Neal was an at-risk high school senior in Arkansas. One of 13 children in a house with no electricity, Olly didn't care much for school and frequently antagonized his teachers. One day, he cut class and strolled into the library where he came upon *The Treasure of Pleasant Valley*, a risqué book written by African American author Frank Yerby. Intrigued but unwilling to be seen checking out a book, Olly stole it. He read the book quickly and smuggled it back to the library, whereupon he was pleased to find another Yerby book in its place on the shelf. He stole that one, too—and ultimately read four pilfered books that semester. "Reading got to be a thing I liked," Olly later commented. He went to college and later to law school, eventually becoming an appellate court judge.

At a high school reunion, Olly met up with Mildred Grady, the librarian. It turned out that she had seen him steal the original book. Rather than reprimand him, she empathized. She resolved to seek out more of Yerby's books for him on the sly. This entailed making a 70-mile drive to Memphis each time because books by black authors were not widely available in 1957. Olly credits Mildred Grady with saving his life by turning him onto books. At her funeral, Grady's son invited Olly Neal to tell the story of his mother's remarkable efforts and their impact. "I credit Mrs. Grady for getting me into the habit of enjoying reading, so that I was able to go to law school and survive," Olly Neal eulogized.

(Read more about Mildred Grady and Olly Neal at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/22/opinion/sunday/kristof-how-mrs-grady-transformed-olly-neal.html> and <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=113357239>.)