

[00:00:00] Speaker A: I have three picture books that I would love to share. These are picture books that are. They're just beautiful. They're beautiful books inside and out, meeting words and images. They are all fairly new, so hopefully there will be new titles to bring to your classroom. And I feel like even if at the outset it isn't quite obvious why. These are all great books to read when you're starting to build a community, so they're perfect for the beginning of the year. They're perfect when your community needs a little gathering again at any point. And they're just inspiring and fun, too.

[00:00:34] Speaker B: This season we are focused on connection first and the power of connection to nourish healthy regulation.

One way to build connections is through books, so we decided to include a few bookish episodes in our lineup.

Stephanie Affinito, host of the Kidslit Love podcast, offers three thoughtful and unexpected books to start the school year and return to again and again.

This is sticky. Hope.

[00:01:11] Speaker A: So. The first one that I want to share is called Sarong Saves the School by Karina Deroma Hawley.

And this. Oh, this book. This is a book you hug when you're done. It's inspired by a true story about a village in South Korea whose population was dwindling and the school population was dwindling and dwindling and dwindling. And they found out that the school was going to close because there just weren't enough people and there weren't enough funds to keep it in place. And Sarong, the little girl in the story, is just devastated like this. This school is her community. She walks there every day. It's. She can't imagine life without it. And so, you know, the power of a child as a change maker. She hatches this plan inspired by her grandmother, who unfortunately, you know, when she was a girl, was denied the opportunity to go to school. And so she has this plan to invite all the local grandmas to come into the school to get the education that they deserved but they could not have. And I get goosebumps every time it does end up saving the school. And it's this beautiful now intergenerational community that just shows the power of kids to do big things, the power of a school to bring a community together. And I think the reminder that we get to be here together and not everybody does. And so I feel like this is just going to be one that could be treasured in classrooms for all ages. Yeah, typically picture books, we think elementary, but the three of us know that we're still reading picture books today, so that is the first one. That's kind of the one that I would say is the most typical.

No, typical is not right. But the one where you might think, oh, yes, that's a. That's a good back to school one, because it's literally about school. But the second one I want to bring is quickly becoming a favorite of every teacher I share it with. And it's titled Becoming Boba by Joanna Ho. And Becoming Boba is about characters who are boba tea drinks and they live in milk tea town. And it is the most beautiful, whimsical picture book that literally transports you to this milk tea town where everything is pretty traditional, right? The milk tea looks the same. It's the typical flavor, until Mindy. Mindy is the newest little boba that is born. And she's green and she's white and she's red, and she's. She's not following the, you know, the typical boba rules.

And she tries. She decides. I, you know, by golly, I'm going to be traditional. I want to show them that I really love boba, and I want to honor the traditions of boba. And so she reads and she writes and she learns and she researches. And in her research, she actually learns that, you know, boba tea is built on a big tradition, a wide tradition of sourcing things from different places and blending things together.

And she reminds people of that fact, which shows them that the whole essence of traditional. I'm using air quotes. I forget, you can't see me. Traditional boba tea is that it is actually evolving and changing, and it always has. And so it's this beautiful book about what it means to be a community who's welcome, how we welcome people. And it uses those unique differences as beautiful opportunities to show us how we're connected together in a whimsical boba tea illustration.

[00:04:48] Speaker C: I can't wait to pick that one up. I've not seen it, Becca, have you seen it?

[00:04:52] Speaker A: No, I haven't either. Brand new. Yeah.

[00:04:55] Speaker C: I'm curious about your opinion of boba tea. Do you drink it while you read this book? Do you like it?

[00:05:03] Speaker A: You know, I never have had a sip of it, ever.

How about you, Becca? Yes, but not.

[00:05:11] Speaker D: I love boba tea, actually. And I'm not a tea drinker typically, so my family loves boba. They're gonna love this book.

[00:05:19] Speaker A: They're gonna love this book.

[00:05:21] Speaker C: So my best friend growing up, we went to high school together, and then she now lives in la. She owns a dance studio in la.

And when I went to visit her, she's like, you have to have boba tea. And I was like, I don't know. And so anyway, of course we go and get boba tea and I don't know if I really love it or I just love the memory of having boba tea with Jody because she like when you. She is whimsical, she's joyful, she's just a light in the world. And she's like every time you get a boba it comes up this. It's like a party in your mouth.

[00:05:56] Speaker A: And it's just so I think like.

[00:05:59] Speaker C: It just that thing, right? We know that food can connects us and we all have stories. So anyway, I can't wait to see that book. Stephanie and I love that it's a non traditional approach to the beginning of the year read.

[00:06:12] Speaker A: Yes. And sure to just get kids leaning in like wait, what? These are bot characters?

It's wonderful.

So my last one is also fairly new and it's called It Started with a P by Brittany Pomalas. It is a funny, funny book. And in fact she has a whole week in the kid lit space called Kid lit haha. Where she is just trying to bring more funny books and support people with writing funny books. And so this is about a young king and it's his birthday. And for whatever reason on his birthday he decides that everything that starts with the letter P must go.

So those are things like the party, right? His birthday party must go. Any pizza? Pinatas. Right. It's filled with. With P words. But as the story goes, he realizes, oh, that means my pants must go. That means people must go. That means my palace must go. And so it is this very funny

book of the. The young king realizing what he has done by decreeing that everything that starts with a P arbitrarily just must go. And what that did to his world, what that did to his. His palace, what that did to his. His life. And I won't reveal what happens at the end, but it's a book that reminds you of who decides. Who decides suddenly that just everything that starts with a P isn't good enough and shouldn't be here. And who decides what we want in our castle, in our classroom, in our community and can. And it's just fun. The kids will laugh together. They will think about, you know, what. What your classroom will look like and what it will have and what it won't have and what it will feel like and what it might not feel like. And it. I think it's just a Perfect spark to start a conversation on what our classrooms feel like and what they will be like.

And we'll just give you a laugh out loud experience to set the tone of a school year anytime. You just need a little levity break.

It's so much fun.

[00:08:19] Speaker C: Sounds like that would be a great book for teachers to grab and spend some time with first on their own.

You know, as we were talking about our own restorative practices and sometimes it's like, where do I begin? And I can see a lot. I know like for my when I was in the classroom and really learning how to teach writers, I was doing all that writing on my own first. And this I could see teachers reading it and, and thinking before you're asking kids, well, what do I want in my classroom? And who gets to say and what stays and what goes and doing some of that thinking and then six minutes.

[00:08:55] Speaker A: Right? That's right. That's right. That's the beauty of a picture book. One picture book in six minutes. And I will mention Ruth, since you did say spending time with the book before students.

I am lucky enough that I have gotten to speak to all of these authors as part of my Kid Lit Love podcast. It's my most treasured time of the week. And so you could hear all of the authors talking about why I wrote the book, what messages I'm hoping are coming out, how I hope teachers, kids, librarians will feel when they are reading the book. And those conversations are probably part of the reason why I love these books so much too, is just hearing the backstories.

So teachers, of course, could always listen to that and feel an even greater connection to the book before they bring them into their classrooms.

[00:09:42] Speaker C: Definitely. So, Stephanie, we're going to link you and all the places that you are, but I would just love to give you a minute. If our listeners wanted to hear more from you, where would you recommend they go? How would they connect with you?

[00:09:57] Speaker A: The best place is to head to my website, which is alitlife.com and I've worked really hard to link everything up correctly in all the places. So if you are, you know, an adult reader and writer who wants to learn more about these restorative reading and writing practices for yourself. First.

I have a podcast called Get Literate that you can find linked on there. I even have information about what restorative reading is. If you want to join my healing writing circles, there's all sorts of things literally on the left side of the website that are for adults. And then if you slide your eyes to the right it is everything kid lit. And so there's links to, to the podcast I'm up to.

Let's see, I just planned episode 148. So 148 conversations you could binge listen to of your,

your favorite authors. And then also there are places where you could sign up for my weekly newsletter again, one for you as an adult if you want to dive into your own restorative reading and writing. And then one for the kid lit space where there's a weekly update and the podcast episodes, new books and book lists and, and all of the things. But a litlife.com will get you there and hopefully it'll be a little rabbit hole that you can dive into and find something that you love.

[00:11:18] Speaker B: And you are so generous.

[00:11:20] Speaker C: So listeners, if you've not been there, you won't be sad when you go. Thank you, Stephanie. You just. And you're really good at organizing and chronicling things. So we're grateful, we're grateful for your book recommendations.

Three new ones. And I'm wondering, do you have any last words when it comes to restorative literacy, restorative practices as we're heading into.

[00:11:45] Speaker A: The school year, I think especially knowing I'm talking to an educator audience, I would just want to say that.

[00:11:55] Speaker C: Your.

[00:11:56] Speaker A: Wellness and your self care matters.

And reading and writing something that you likely already love could be the tool to help you feel better than you do in the moment and to give yourself that permission slip to just enjoy it and remember the joy of it. And if you need convincing, you know, you can remind yourself that it will make you a better teacher as well. And hopefully that will give you the kick in the pants to, you know, allow this time for, for yourself to take care of you so that you can start that school year taking care of everybody else. Which is, which is what we do. So yeah, I just hope they allow themselves that indulgence and look at it not as a selfish indulgence, but as just a really required part of your own wellness.

[00:12:49] Speaker C: I love that Stephanie just recommended three books that I didn't know. Did you know any of them, Becca?

[00:12:54] Speaker D: I didn't know any of them, but now I need all of them.

[00:12:58] Speaker C: Yes, exactly. I also love that they were kind of these unexpected start of the year books.

[00:13:06] Speaker D: Yeah, and I loved that like first of all, like they wouldn't be your go to or ones that you would like. When you Google back to school books, they're not going to pop up right away.

And so you can use them at the start of the year, but they're also ones you can go back to, like in November when you need to rally everybody and remind them of the community that we are. It's not going to be like this random first day of school book you're trying to reread. It's going to be just as meaningful or meaningful in a different way.

And I thought that was a beautiful way to do it.

[00:13:42] Speaker C: And she loves them, like her energy and her passion, it just comes out. And so the challenge, right, or the invitation, however, whichever one floats your boat. An invitation or a challenge. But what I'm asking of myself, and I think would be really great to see if

others would want to do this too, is to find a book that you've never read out loud to a whole class of students. So a new to you book and try that out. You know, just do that. That experience is so easy to get stuck using the same books over and over.

[00:14:19] Speaker D: It is. And you have favorites, right? Like you have a book that you share with the class and it is just this beautiful experience and your brain is. Is wired to love that book and you just read it and suddenly you've read it on the first day of school for the last decade and you don't stop and think about what other books there could be or what messages you might be sending with that book that like, are now out of date or not the right message for the time. And so to take the time to consider what new to you books there.

[00:14:49] Speaker C: Are.

[00:14:51] Speaker D: Is it's just like a really wise thing to be doing as a teacher. And like, how fun is it that we get to be in this community together where we can share all of our new to us books.

And I'll share some of the books that you and I are, are diving into with classes this year in our different roles. And we hope that you tag us and tag Stephanie in in any your Instagram stories of the read aloud you're doing or any reels or posts. We'd love to see what books you're sharing so that we can try them out too.

[00:15:27] Speaker C: And Stephanie wants to hear too. So if you're not following A Lit Life, her podcast, the Kid Lit Podcast, she they're both fabulous. They're excellent resources and we can trust, like, I just trust Stephanie.

She really is somebody that I know is genuine and authentic and right now, in today's world, if I can, you know, when we find somebody to trust, that's worth a lot. So looking forward to just seeing these new read alouds that we're bringing into classrooms.

[00:16:05] Speaker B: Together we can make a world where all children grow mentally fit and cognitively strong.

But what about the days, and there are many, when we feel completely, totally, and undeniably disheartened? The days that threaten joy and attempt to swipe our hope?

These are the days when we need tools, resources and mostly straightforward conversations to know hope can stick, even in the stickiest situations.