



bright SPOTS

Motivation and Inspiration
to Light Your Path in a Changing World



COMPILED BY
CATHY L. DAVIS

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DIANE FINNESTEAD

Imagine the Possibilities

Imagine if you did not know how to read. It is difficult to fathom not having that life skill because you are reading this chapter right now. Maybe you grew up in a household that loved books, with parents with degrees and careers, who read for pleasure or to learn new skills. This was the fabric of my household, passed down for generations. My mother, a speech pathologist and fourth-generation educator, believed that being a reader created leaders and learners.

Every night of my childhood, Mom read to my sister and me. As we snuggled into her, we became transported to new places and adventures. She voiced the imaginary worlds and brought to life the Golden Books, Dr. Suess, Shel Silverstein, and the *Little House on the Prairie* books. She sewed authentic costumes and added artifacts to our home, from butter churns to wagon wheels; the stories' settings became vacation destinations. Pure magic!

These experiences led me to enter the “family business” of education where I joined the fifth generation of educators. Then it snowballed, and I took on the challenge of promoting literacy.

The statistics are staggering and have been so for years. In 1995, researchers reported that, by the age of three, children showed a thirty-million-word gap¹; today, the number may be closer to four million words. In 2002, thirty-two million adults could not read² and fifty percent of adults in the US could not read

1 Betty Hart and Todd R. Risely, “The Early Catastrophe: The 30 Million Word Gap by Age 3,” *American Educator*, v27 n1 p4-9 Spr 2003.

2 Irwin S. Kirsch, Ann Jungeblut, Lynn Jenkins, and Andrew Kolstad, “Adult Literacy in America: A First Look at the Findings of the National Adult Literacy Survey,” *Adult Literacy in America*. US Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, April 2002, <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs93/93275.pdf>.

above the eight-grade level.³ Ten years later, forty-three million US adults still possessed low English literacy skills.⁴ Today, approximately two-thirds of America's children live in poverty with no reading materials of their own.⁵ The disparity between higher socio-economic children and those living in poverty is significant, according to researcher Ruby Payne, PhD⁶.

Bottom line, this is a gigantic divide in reading readiness.

As an educator, I was challenged to close this gap but didn't quite understand the problem until I came face to face with it. However, I was determined.

The first week as an elementary school principal, I rallied my troops and assembled a literacy team. We embarked on many projects to light and fuel the fire for reading.

One day, with the help of our library sponsor, we distributed enough books for every child to receive ten books at their reading level. We held an all-school summer reading contest, which had never been attempted in our school's history. It was the game-changer we had been looking for.

The kick-off was the last day of school. The names of 350-plus students were announced to music and under theatrical lighting in WrestleMania style. "Let's get ready to rumble!" It was fun, wild, free, and organized! To say the kiddos were excited is an understatement! Each student, some of whom had never owned a book before, received a new tote and ten of their chosen books. The buzz of excitement kept growing. When summer arrived, the halls were silent, and I wondered if the excitement would continue—would catch hold.

When the students returned in August, one fifth-grade boy corralled me. He burst out, "Principal Finnestead, I gotta put my total on the contest wall."

"How many books did you read?" I asked.

3 Valerie Strauss, "Hiding in Plain Sight," *The Washington Post*, November 1, 2016.

4 "43 Million American Adults Have 'Low' English Literacy Skills," *Language Magazine*, September 10, 2019, <https://www.languagemagazine.com/2019/09/10/43-million-in-u-s-have-low-literacy-levels/>.

5 Michelle Klampe and David Rothwell, "Nearly Two-Thirds of American Children Live in Asset Poverty, New Study Shows," February 20, 2019, <https://today.oregonstate.edu/news/nearly-two-thirds-american-children-live-asset-poverty-new-study-shows>.

6 Payne, Ruby, *Framework for Understanding Poverty*, 6th ed., 2018.

He smiled and said, “One hundred!” As I congratulated him, I asked how he read one hundred books if he only had ten. Grinning, he explained, “I read every book ten times!”

As it turns out, many students reported the same thing; some would recite excerpts from their books! Other compelling stories flooded in. Families became members of the library for the first time. Lives were transformed. It was no surprise that our school’s reading scores soared after our summer reading contest initiative. This collective effort changed the trajectory for an entire school.

The gift of reading has endless benefits. Imagine the possibilities. Imagine the benefits of increased literacy; imagine better communication, greater understanding amongst all people regardless of class, not to mention the gains in educational opportunities, jobs, careers, relationships, choices, options, freedom, imagination, creativity, confidence, self-reliance, positivity, expression, appreciation; imagine higher employment, safer communities, and leadership, both personally and professionally.

Now, that is receiving the gift of reading!

You do not need a grandiose gesture to make a difference. You just need a gesture, and together we can make the gap decrease, one gesture at a time. Give the gift of reading so you can make a difference in your life, in the lives of those you love, and in your community.

Reading makes it possible and you make a difference.

Now, let’s begin the possibilities.

Bright Spot: Diane Finnestead



Diane Finnestead has been a recognized leader in the field of life, health, and long-term-care insurance for the past twenty years. What sets Diane apart from other brokers is her ability to explain insurance options and communicate solutions with compassion and understanding to people of any age. This is the foundation that has built her award-winning insurance business. Diane is thankful for referrals and humbled to help thousands of Americans find the insurance coverage that is right for them.

Diane credits her ability to help so many due to her background and career in education. She holds a bachelor's degree in music from the University of North Texas, a master's in teaching, and an additional master's degree as an education specialist from Webster University. She also completed post-graduate work in music and education at the University of Memphis and Northwestern University.

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<https://www.facebook.com/dianeinsuranceatl>

Diane Finnestead's literacy resources to imagine the possibilities

Ten awesome book charities that help kids all over the world: www.huffpost.com

Twenty places to donate used books: www.becomingminimalest.com

Where to donate used books; ten places to start: www.moneycrashers.com

Charities that give books and promote literacy: www.whatdowedoallday.com

Book donation programs, seeking book donations: <https://libguides.ala.org/book-donations>

Kids book club, subscription box ages zero to ten: www.bookroo.com

Books for kids/united states/ literacy non-profit: www.booksforkids.org

Where to donate books when you clean out your shelves: www.epicreads.com

Launching young readers: www.readingrockets.org

How to teach kids to read at home, ten simple steps: www.readingeggs.com

www.littlefreelibrary.org

www.scholastic.com

www.booksource.com

www.worldliteracyfoundation.org

www.adoptaclassroom.org

www.literacytrust.org.uk

www.familieslearning.org

www.worldreader.org

www.roomtoread.org

www.barbarabush.org

www.rif.org

www.reachoutandread.org

And many more. You are just a google search away from locating the possibilities in your community!

Bright Spots: Motivation and Inspiration to Light Your Path in a Changing World is a collection of essays, written by authors from around the world, in direct response to the events occurring in the year 2020.

"...in a dark night, the eye begins to see"
— e.e. cummings

We are here. Right now. On purpose. For a reason.

Although it may not feel all that pleasant, we have each been called to this adventure, at this particular time, for our own unique reasons. The future holds the promise of a new beginning, and we have been summoned to make a positive impact as we begin to mold a new earth.

- We are the ones who hold the magic—the magic fairy sparkle dust—that is so desperately needed right now to rebuild.
- We are the ones who are willing to extend a hand, share our treasures, and reach out to others in need.
- We are the ones needed NOW—to not only offer compassion, comfort, and consolation, but to also initiate dialogue and direction.

You, too, are the light—one who can shine and light the way for others. Yours is the light so desperately needed NOW—to rebuild communities, confidence, and broken dreams. It is time for you, too, to shine so that others may draw hope, strength, and courage from YOUR light and learn to let their own light shine.

***It is you. You have chosen to accept
this mission...at this time...on this planet.***

You are a Bright Spot.

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