

1st grade classroom, Ms Romero and Ms Sanchez
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The Heart of the Elementary Classroom

Creating a **literacy rich environment** by highlighting classroom libraries has been the coaching focus at Dr. Horton Elementary School in Newark, NJ. Our primary goal is to create cozy, home-like spaces, filled with books reflecting the cultures, needs and interests of the students.

Let's visit Ms Romero and Ms Sanchez's 1st grade class
The Classroom Library.

Ms. Romero and Ms Sanchez are co-teachers in a 1st grade classroom. We spent a great amount of our coaching time together organizing, leveling and getting to know the books in their classroom library. As we worked together in the classroom, the initial transformation sparked the children's excitement about their new library. Before the grand opening of our library, we created some browsing boxes for each classroom table consisting of a variety of books that students could read throughout the day. Immediately, the children began buzzing about books. Soon the piles of books were filed into labeled bins and the library was transformed into an organized space filled with tales of adventure, poetry and informational books.

When our library was ready and Book Shopping day finally arrived, the excitement in the room was palpable. The children spent time perusing the library in small groups and making thoughtful decisions about the books to add to their book baggies. Our reading interviews during our initial conferences provided insight about the readers in this very special classroom. When I called Uriel for his turn to Book Shop, he was apprehensive about choosing books. Uriel said, "I can't read." When we visited *Uriel* for our first conference. I said, "Tell me about the books you chose." He told us he chose a book about pets because he loved pets. We invited him to read to us. He began reading, looking at the pictures and touching the words. He read, " 1 cat, 2 dogs, 3 fish."

I said, " Uriel, you are reading this book!" He smiled a great big smile and said, " I love reading these books. Can I take these home?" as he hugged his book baggie.

As independent reading concluded for the day, Ms. Romero said, "This was my favorite part of the day. The children were so happy, and when they were talking to their friends, they were talking about their books! I want my students to read like this every day!"

The excitement around classroom libraries is growing throughout the building. Teachers have been encouraged to visit classrooms and share "Glows" with colleagues reflecting their experiences with and insights about classroom libraries. The heart of the classroom, our classroom library, is that warm place where our love of reading grows, where children feel safe to learn, and where children continue to build confidence in their abilities as readers.